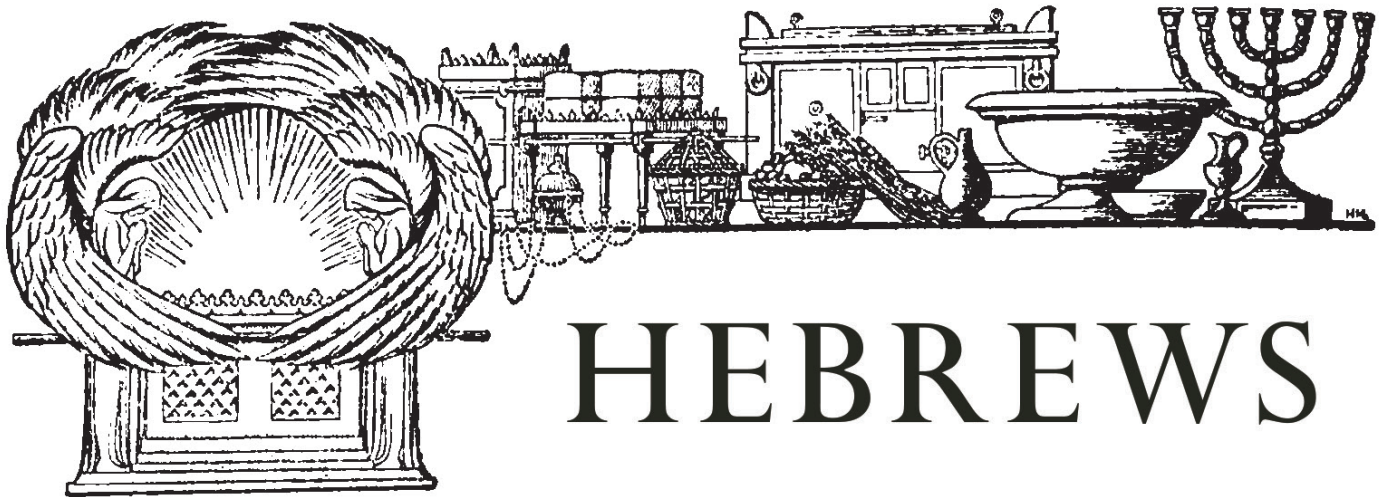


A STUDY ON

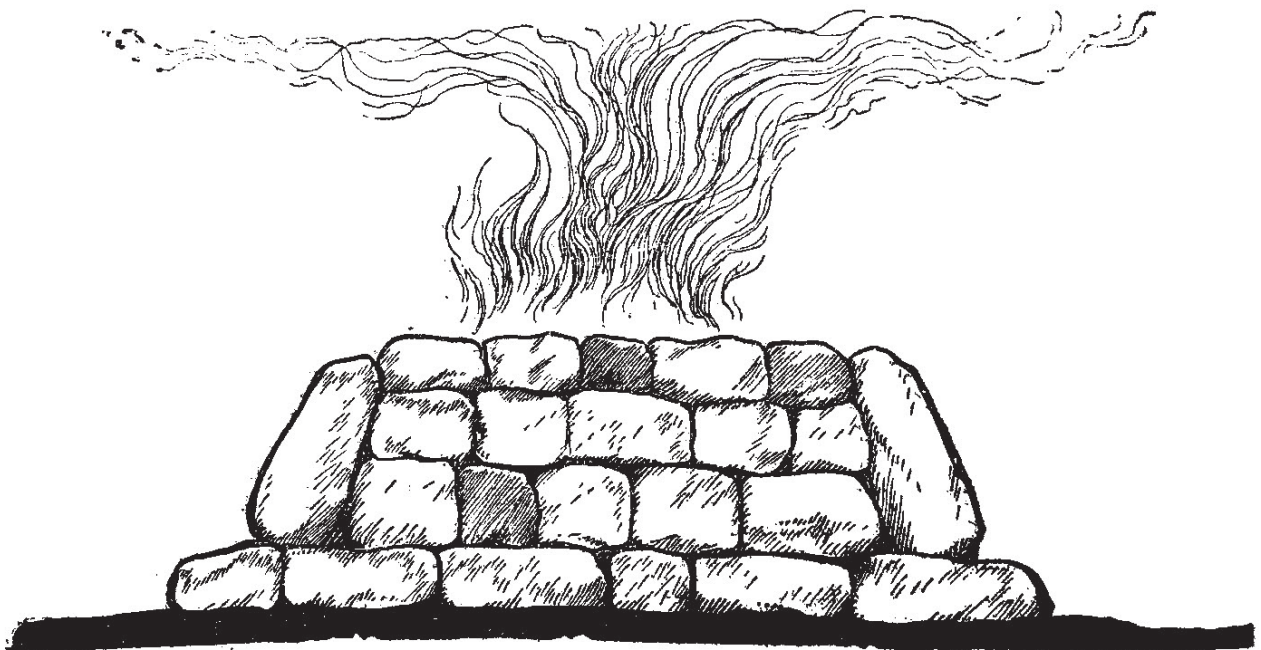


HEBREWS

INTRODUCTION

New Testament letters usually name the author and the recipient right at the start and conclude with personal greetings. However, Hebrews does none of these. The writer plunges straight into the subject, more like a sermon or verbal presentation. (2:5; 6:9, 11:32). It is traditionally believed that Paul was the author of Hebrews, but others believe it was written by Apollos as the Greek used in the text was better than any other New Testament author (Acts 18:24).

The book is called “Hebrews” based on the content of the letter and the emphasis placed on the rituals of Jewish worship. The letter seems to be addressed to second-generation Christians who had not heard the message of salvation from Jesus or from those who had personally met with Him (2:3; 4:2). To escape persecution and social ostracism, they were contemplating a return to Jewish rituals. However, the author exhorts them to persevere in their new faith.



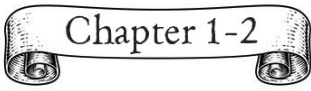
THE BIG IDEA OF HEBREWS

In order to ensure that the hearts of his readers were steadfast, the author of Hebrews makes an effort throughout the book to demonstrate **the absolute supremacy of Jesus Christ**. The author shows that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is superior to other angels or prophets in the past, present, and future. Even the message and the new life that come through Christ are superior. The author goes on to explain at great length that Jesus is a greater high priest than any appointed under the law of Moses. His atoning sacrifice is superior to the sacrifice offered on the holiest day of the Jewish year, the Day of Atonement. He strongly condemns any claim that salvation is possible through observance of the law and insists that salvation comes only by faith in Christ, who is both the perfect sacrifice and the perfect high priest (2:17-18; 4:14-16). Because of the themes it develops, Hebrews is one of the most significant books in the New Testament for understanding the relationship between the old and new covenants.

As the readers of the book are wavering in their faith, the author issues grave warnings coupled with encouragement to hold on to their faith in Christ alone. They are called upon to recognize that they are standing spiritually – just as the Israelites had – on the border of a promised land. The author encourages them to persevere in faith a little longer, which would enable them to succeed where the exodus generation had failed.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

SUPERIORITY OF JESUS CHRIST

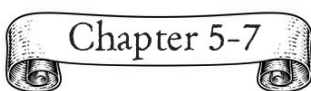


Chapter 1-2

Greater than the Angels

Hebrews 1:4,

“having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.”



Chapter 5-7

Greater than the Priests

Hebrews 7:21-22,

“... ‘You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.’”²² Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant.”

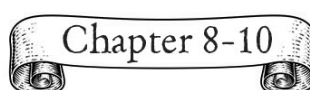


Chapter 3-4

Greater than Moses

Hebrews 3:5-6,

“And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, ⁶ but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.”



Chapter 8-10

Greater than the Temple

Hebrews 9:11,

“But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands”

A SUPERIOR WAY OF LIVING



Chapter 11-13

A new way of living

Hebrews 11:1-2,

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. ² For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.”

HEBREWS 1-2

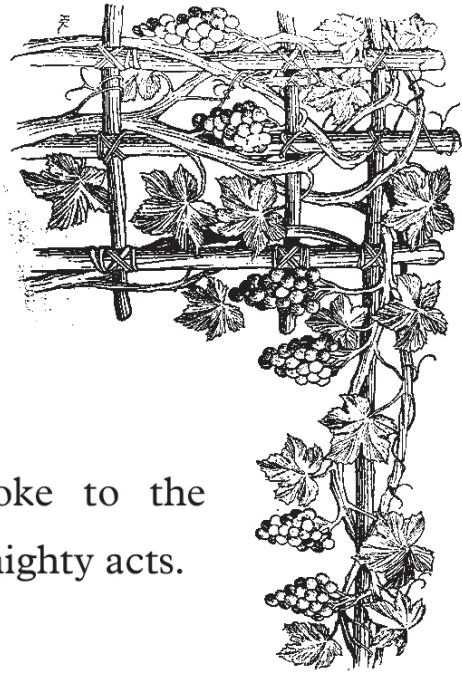
Jesus Greater than Angels

Hebrews 1:1-4, “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ² has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; ³ who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.”



Christians who came from the Jewish tradition would naturally compare their new-found faith with their Jewish heritage. So, the author wastes no time in getting to grips the issue of Christ superiority. The author shows that Christ does not contradict the great Jewish past, rather brings it to fulfilment. Without Christ the Old Testament is partial and incomplete as God spoke to people at different times through different means (1:1), but in Christ he spoke fully and perfectly (1:2) that all would listen to him, the greatest prophet of all time!

There were no more highly regarded persons in the minds of the Jews than the prophets—not only those we think of as the major and minor prophets, but any person through whom God spoke to the people or through whom He did mighty acts.



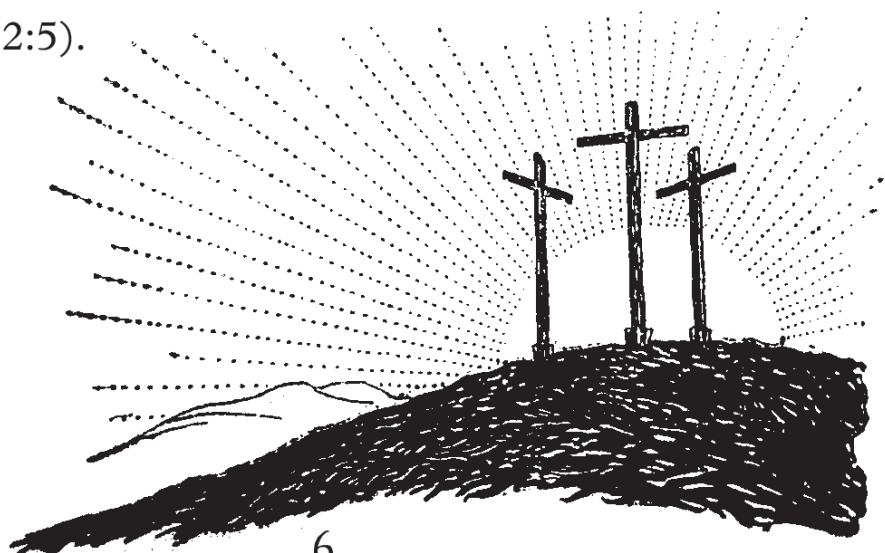
Thus, along with the Isaiahs and the Jeremiahs we include Abraham, Moses, and all others who had spoken on behalf of God. They preached expectantly of the coming Messiah and the divine kingdom of God, wherein the Son is the fulfilment and Messiah-King Himself who will build the kingdom and a new way of living.

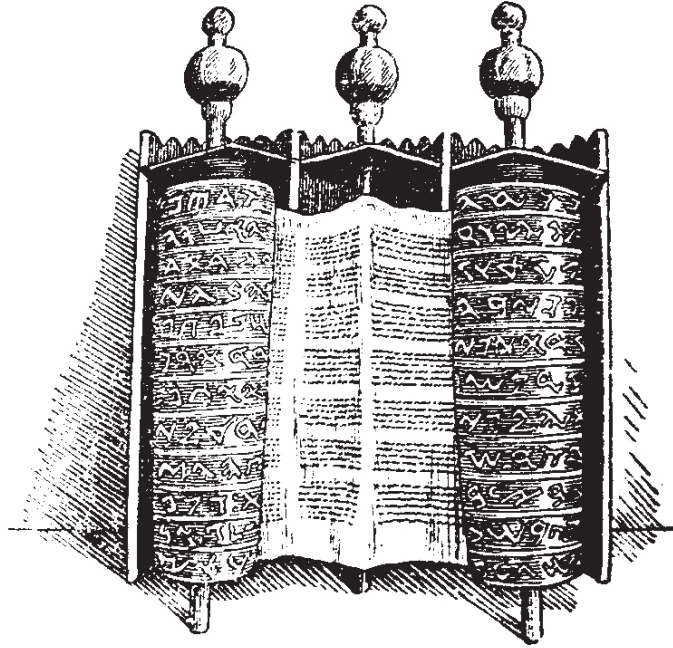
The author emphasizes that God's message through His Son, who is the exact representation of the Father, far surpasses the best of all prophets of earlier times that all may listen to His voice. One cannot ignore, minimize, or despise this complete revelation of God. Christ's message inaugurated a new era and a new way of living. Ezekiel portrayed the glory of God, but Christ reflected it (1:3). Isaiah expounded the nature of God as holy, righteous, and merciful, but Christ manifested it (1:3). Jeremiah described the power of God, but Christ displayed it (1:3).

Jews elevated the angels to a plateau where they were regarded the highest beings under God. Also, they are regarded as important players in God's plan of salvation. So, the author proves the supremacy of Christ over angels through several arguments from verses 5-14. His excellence over the angels is proven in that the name He has received is more excellent than theirs. God never said to any angel, *"You are My Son, today I have begotten You."* Nor has God ever said to any angel, *"I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son."* That the terms Father and Son are not used in connection with angels shows definitely and conclusively Christ's superior relation to the Father.

The Son is destined to rule as the King as He is the Son of God, Messiah and Lord of all created things including the angels, while the angels are only ministering spirits sent to serve those who inherit salvation (1:14).

The author of Hebrews wants desperately for his readers to see that trusting in the angels as mediators of the Old Covenant is futile. He wants them to know for sure *"there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus"* (1 Timothy 2:5).





Warning # 1: Hold fast to Jesus and His Message!

The law was a message from the one true God, sent through the angels (Acts 7:53) but in the message of the gospel the King himself comes to speak to us directly. So, the author warns the hearers to uphold the message of Christ, without which one might drift away from the truth.

Hebrews 2:1-3, “We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. ² For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, ³ how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.”

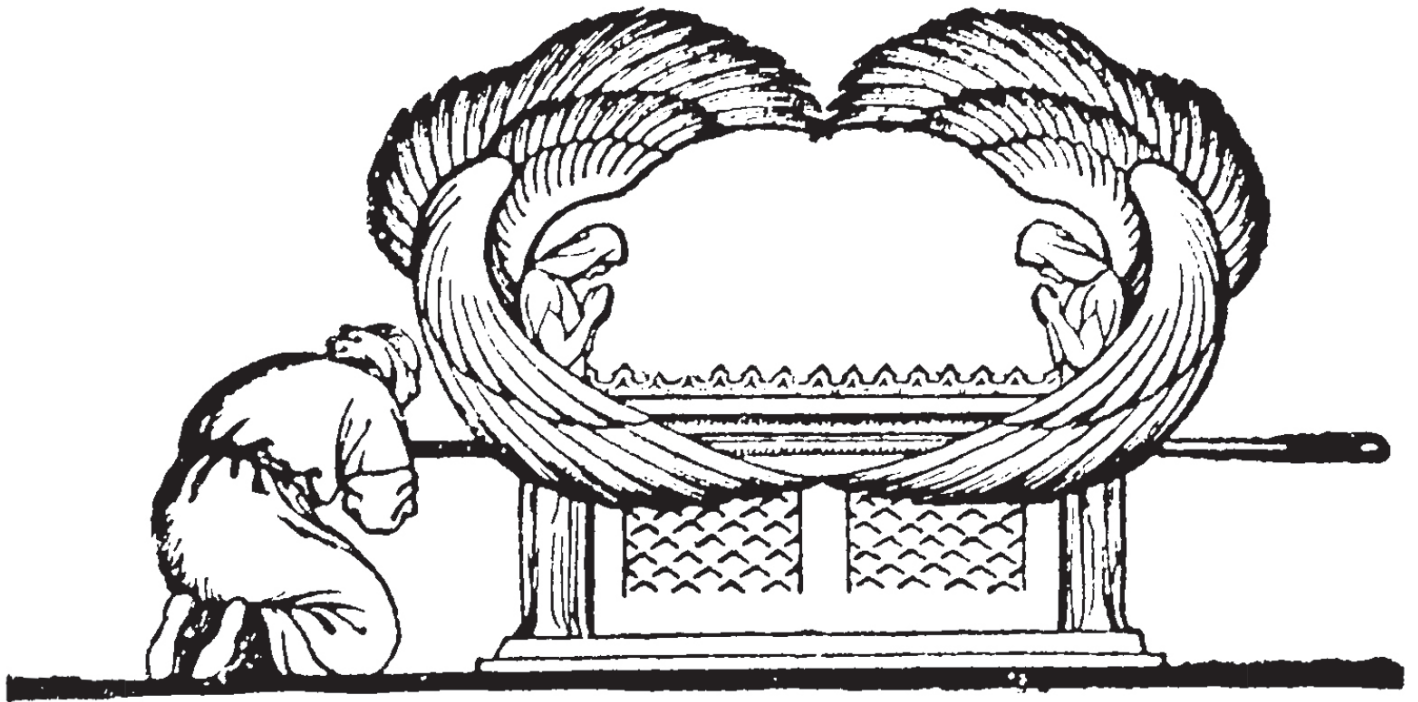
If we are not careful, we too may drift by valuing anything – our careers, our possessions or even our loved ones or heroes in life – more than Christ. The author’s desire is for all to have complete conviction that there is nothing more important nor more real than what the Lord has spoken.

HEBREWS 3-4

Jesus Greater than Moses

Hebrews 3:1-6, *“Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, ² who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house. ³ For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. ⁴ For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. ⁵ And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, ⁶ but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.”*

The author here compares Jesus to Moses the greatest of Old Testament Prophets. Jewish folks forever are loyalist to Moses and the law, but the early Christians were under pressure to uphold the law as well as the new way of Jesus. Moses matters, says Hebrews, but Jesus matters even more; Moses was a true servant of God, but Jesus is God's Son. Moses was sent to deliver the Israelites from Egypt into the Promised land, similarly, Jesus was sent by God to deliver the entire world from sin. Both of them, faithfully served the one who appointed them (3:2). Yet Jesus is worthy of greater honour than Moses. The author is clarifying that you do not diminish honouring Moses but the supreme honour belongs to Jesus.



The author, employs the metaphor of a house to explain that both Moses and Jesus were called to build the house of God. Moses is described as the faithful servant in God's house, whereas Jesus is the Son who has been sent by his Father to oversee the running of the house (3:5-6). In this context, "the house" is both the tabernacle where the high priest serves and the world itself. In both these houses, Jesus is superior to Moses as creator, Son, and priest. So, now the author wants his readers to grasp the purpose of God's work through the long years of Israel's history – a journey that began with Moses and the Exodus reached its destination in Jesus. This means that those who belong to Jesus, in the present, are really 'God's holy ones' in the house of God.

Warning # 2: Trust and Obey!

Hebrews 4:1-3, *“Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. ² For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. ³ For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: ‘So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest,’”*

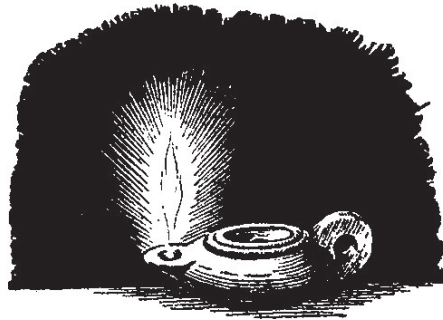
The author does not want his readers to suffer the same fate as the Israelites, where many set out on the journey with the presence of God but failed to enter the Promised Land. Although they set off believing, they soon rebelled and sinned against God. So, the Spirit urges readers not to harden their hearts against the Lord and reminds them of the consequences of disobedience and rebellion during the exodus journey (3:8). This is no casual suggestion!

Each of them must see to it that none of them develops a sinful, unbelieving heart that could take them away from the Lord by deviating from the truth (3:12). Instead, we must encourage one another daily by God’s word as it is powerful, active, and living for transforming us. So, the change can happen as early as ‘today’ for those who respond to the good news of Jesus and live in obedience to His voice. This is the time of God’s favour, a season where God is close to you and interacts with His people daily (3:13) – to ensure that we enter into God’s rest and His rule over our lives forever (4:1).

HEBREWS 5-7

Jesus Greater than Priests

Having reasoned that the revelation that comes through Jesus Christ is far superior to that which comes through the prophets, through angels, or even through Moses, the author now moves to a new point. He wants to speak of **Jesus' role as the merciful high priest**, and so sets out to show that Jesus is a far greater high priest than Aaron or any of his successors.



Hebrews 7:21-28, "... 'You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.' ²² Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant. ²³ Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; ²⁴ but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. ²⁵ Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

²⁶ Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. ²⁸ For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever."



On the Day of Atonement, the Jewish high priest would enter the Most Holy Place of the Tabernacle after offering a sacrifice on behalf of the people.

Jesus the Son of God, however, is even greater than a high priest, for he ascended into heaven and entered the presence of God after *'giving himself as a ransom for all people'* (4:14). Yet this great high priest is able to sympathize with our weaknesses (4:15) because he was made in human likeness. He knows what it is like to be human and understands the magnitude of the temptations we face. **Therefore, this great high priest is merciful and able to help us when we sinful human beings approach God's throne of grace directly in confidence without fear and trembling to find grace to help us in our time of need (4:16).** In contrast to other world religions, which emphasize on structures and rituals for salvation, Christianity focuses on a person – Jesus the Son of God, our great high priest who is unique, greater than and different from all other high priests.

The author compares Jesus' priesthood with "*the order of Melchizedek*" (5:6; 6:20). He sets out to complete his argument by stating that a high priest in this order is greater than any high priest descended from the traditional priestly tribe - the tribe of Levi - to which Moses' brother Aaron belonged. Apart from this passage, Melchizedek is only mentioned twice in Scripture, once in connection with Abraham (**Genesis 14**) and on another occasion in a messianic Psalm where the Messiah is portrayed as "a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek" (**Psalm 110:4**). So, Melchizedek stands as a prototype of Christ - as the king of righteousness and king of peace (Melchizedek means king of righteousness). Furthermore, as the Bible gives no record of the ancestry of Melchizedek, the author suggests that he, like the Son of God, remains a priest forever (7:3). And in Genesis 14, when Abraham met him, he gave one-tenth of his income (tithe) to Melchizedek and he blessed Abraham (7:6) to show that he is superior to Abraham.

Because Christ is a priest forever, he is also the guarantor of a better covenant, signifying a new and better relationship between God and man (7:22).



The former regulations were weak and useless because they could not make people righteous, but Jesus' unique priesthood is able to provide a better hope which enables us to draw near to God (7:25).

Warning # 3: Go on to maturity!

Hebrews 6:11-12, *“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized. ¹² We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.”*

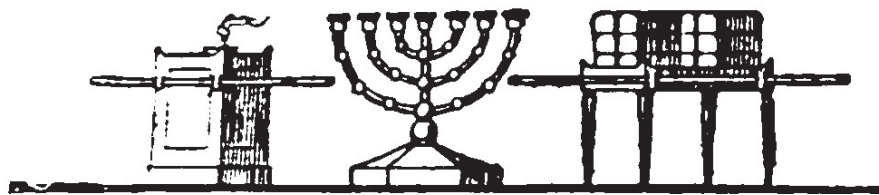
Living as a Christian is never a matter of settling back and *'letting God do it all'*. Yes, there are undoubtedly times when, like the children of Israel standing beside the Red Sea, we need the message that says, *'The Lord will fight for you; all you need to do is to be still'* (Exodus 14. 1-4). But these are exceptional moments, particular situations that arise in times of emergency, when there is nothing we can do but trust that God will do it all for us. However, the normal Christian life is one of energy, enthusiasm, faithful effort, and patient hard work. It is tragic when people are deceived by the notion that God must do it all, which leads them to espouse a lazy attitude, such that they shrug their shoulders and refuse to lift a finger.

The Holy Spirit applies to our lives the promises of God and the completed work of the Messiah. This work goes down into our thoughts, our imaginations and (not least) our wills. That's the mystery - the same mystery, of divine and human action, which we meet at so many points of Christian thinking and living. The important thing, then, is not to wait until you feel like living a holy life, or loving your neighbour, or serving in God's kingdom to which you are called and on which you've made a start. Your feelings are unreliable but what matters is your task of being faithful and patient in the present: *'Until it be thoroughly finished'*.

HEBREWS 8-10

Jesus Greater than the Temple

Hebrews 9:11-15, *“¹¹ But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. ¹² He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. ¹³ The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. ¹⁴ How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! ¹⁵ For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant...”*



Jewish Christians had deemed the Temple in Jerusalem - the focus of devotion, the place of pilgrimage, the very house of God, where priests served as God's representatives for all their time. The author is clarifying here that the Jesus whom they were following was indeed the true high priest, and had indeed entered the true Temple (Heaven) on their behalf.

The tabernacle in which Christ has offered His atoning sacrifice is not one “*made with hands*” but “*greater*” and “*more perfect ... not of this creation.*” The tabernacle of Christ’s atoning ministry is a heavenly one, in the very presence of God. He offers Himself before the eternal mercy seat. No incense is necessary to symbolize God’s majestic presence, for God’s presence is overwhelmingly full. He did not bring the blood of any bull or goat, but “*with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all.*”

And when Christ suffered upon the Cross, the earthly veil was miraculously and suddenly torn by powerful forces so that any heart that is inclined to believe might be forever assured that now absolutely no barrier exists between God and His people. **The old Temple was good; the new heavenly one is better (9:11). The old priests were good; the new Priest is better (9:13). The old covenant was good; the new one is better, established on better promises (9:15).** The old covenant promised temporary material blessings to those who obeyed God’s laws (Deut. 28:14). But Christ’s followers, those who are called into the new covenant, receive a far greater blessing of an eternal inheritance (9:15).

As we reach the climax of the letter, we observe that the whole letter is written in order to say better things have now arrived in Jesus; so, whatever you do, don't go back to the old things. However, good and true they were, they are now consumed by what is newer and better.

Warning # 4: Worship God with Holy Boldness

Hebrews 10:19-23, *“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh,²¹ and having a High Priest over the house of God,²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.”*

The author is challenging the readers to worship God in a new mind set and to live a life worthy of the one they serve. He emphasises four requirements to worship God:

- A new heart
- Full of faith
- A renewed heart without evil
- With baptism showing your allegiance of Christ



HEBREWS 11-13

A New Way of Living

Hebrews 11:1-2, *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. ² For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.”*

Hebrews 11 - 13 urges them to live in a new way i.e., to “live by faith” (10:38). The author provides a definition of faith (the only definition found in the Bible) and gives examples of people who have lived by faith. Faith is explained in relation to hope. Faith is looking at God and trusting him for everything, while hope is looking at the future and trusting God for it. **Hebrews 11:6**, *“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”*

Assurance and conviction were strikingly evident in the people of faith, listed in the rest of the chapter. All of the examples cited in chapter 11 (Abel, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah) involve people who responded in obedience to the call of one they could not see. Some of these heroes and heroines of faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, quenched raging fires, stopped the mouths of lions, escaped the edge of the sword, and became valiant in battle. Others had trials of mocking and scourging, chains and imprisonment; they were stoned, sawed in two, and slain with the sword.

Both of these groups, because of faith, shine as exemplars of endurance, perseverance and courage. The greatest of these is Jesus, and so He is the one on whom we must fix our eyes (12:2).

This whole book has been about Jesus. He is the same 'yesterday, today and forever'. The writer wants us to realize that, if your faith is firmly rooted in him, none of the forces that blow people off track can harm them. If we get our picture of Jesus right, the huge issues will begin to fall into place. The practical life of the Christian community must be ordered in the following (12:14-17):

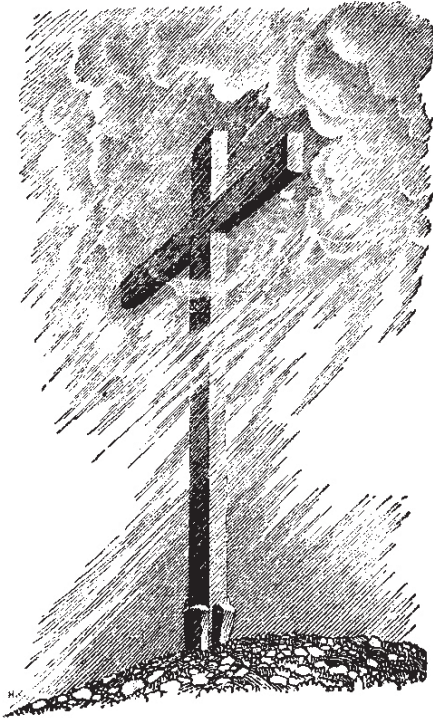
- Make every effort to live in peace with everyone
- Live in Holiness
- No bitter roots grow up to cause trouble
- No sexual immorality
- No ungodliness

This is an interesting tension in the Christian faith. On the one hand, we enjoy that intimacy with God as His children.

On the other hand,
we always live in deep
respect of the moral
order God has created
and, in the design,
He has for each of our
lives (12:29). We do
not treat that design
lightly, but constantly
search for it, ask for it,
and pursue it.



Warning # 5: Fix your eyes on Jesus



Hebrews 12:1-3, *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

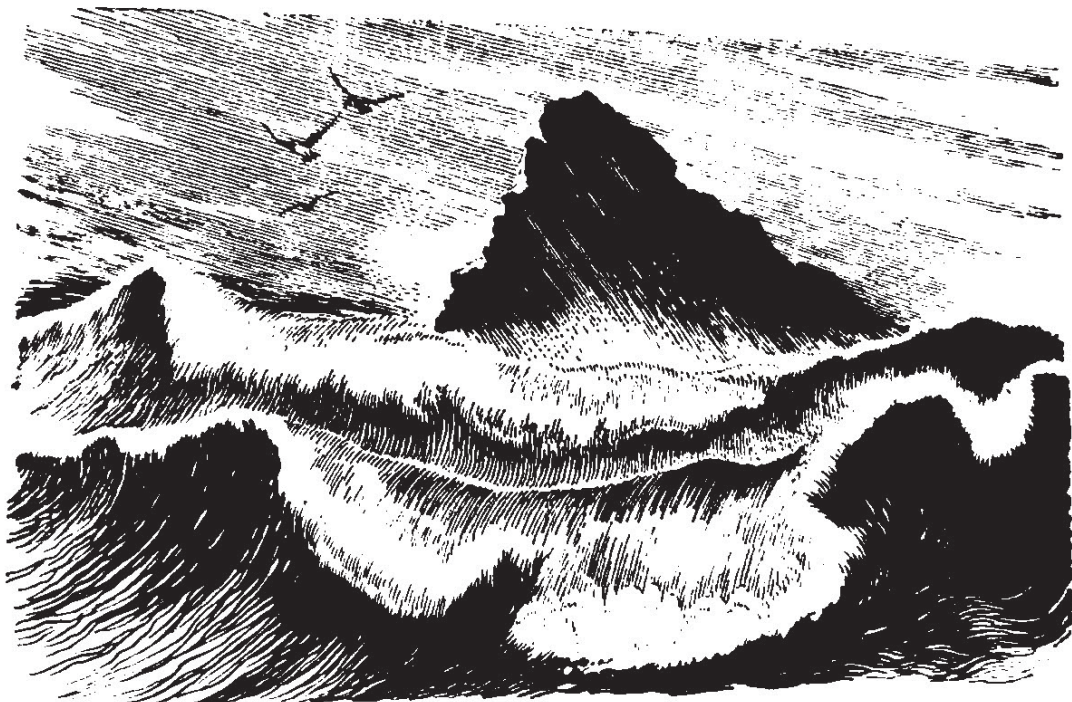
Spiritual journey is like a marathon, fixing our eyes on Jesus who is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. Hebrews is keenly aware that the readers are in danger of being weary with all that they are facing, day after day, in terms of threats, persecution, intimidation and mockery from their contemporaries. Jesus, himself, journeyed ahead of us on the same path so that we can follow Him.

What must we do to run the race with efficiency and success?

The author brings in the imagery of an athlete to suggest three things in particular. Firstly, we must get rid of any heavy weights that are slowing us down. Heavy weights like anxiety, greed, lust, wrong attitudes etc slows us down. Secondly, to get rid of sin which can obstruct our race. Thirdly, we need to run with perseverance.

CONCLUSION

The book of Hebrews is an exclusive letter to show that Christianity and Christ are unique and that no one should forfeit the offer of salvation available through Christ by grace. We should put our faith in the Lord Jesus alone as He is the one who pioneered the new way, who makes it possible for us to enter even now into God's very presence, and who waits to welcome us to the heavenly city that is to come. He is also the one through whom, because of his death, resurrection, and ascension, and because of the gift of his own spirit to us, we are enabled to do and to be what we are called to do and to be, and to face consequences with joy. All this and more is summed up in the closing greeting: Grace be with you!



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