**Hebrews Commentary**

**Hebrews Chapter 1**

Heb 1:1

**“having spoken.”** The Greek is an aorist participle (*lalēsas*, λαλήσας) of the common verb *laleō* (#2980 λαλέω), “to speak.” The aorist participle points to the fact that God continued to speak over the years via the prophets, and is contrasted with the coming of Jesus, when God “spoke” (*elalēsen*, ἐλάλησεν), an indicative aorist, by His Son. The shift between the aorist participle and indicative aorist gives an air of authority to the life and words of Jesus, and elevates him above the earlier prophets.

**“to *our* ancestors.”** The Greek text literally reads, “the fathers.” In the Old Testament, the “fathers” often refer to the patriarchs of Israel—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod. 3:15; Acts 7:32; Rom. 9:5) although sometimes, including here in Hebrews 1:1, the word “fathers” is used of “ancestors” in general (Josh. 24:6; Judg. 2:20; 1 Kings 14:22; Prov. 22:28; Luke 1:72; John 4:20; Acts 15:10). God spoke to the people of Israel year after year, century after century, guiding them, informing them, and calling them to Himself.

**“through the prophets.”** The Greek here represents a Hebrew idiom (represented in Greek by the instrumental dative) and means, “through” the prophets.[[1]](#footnote-24774)

**“in many parts.”** The Greek word translated as “in many parts” is *polumerōs* (#4181 πολυμερῶς). The way God revealed truth through the prophets was in many parts, pieces, and portions, or perhaps in simpler terms, “bit by bit.” Many of the lexicons and commentators pick up on this.

One of the things about the Bible that is frustrating to many people and keeps them from having a solid understanding of it is that information on any given subject is scattered throughout the Bible. Studying a subject in the Bible is not like reading an encyclopedia on the subject where all the information is in one place. For example, if one wants to study Christ’s Millennial Kingdom, the information about it is scattered in many places around the Bible, and that is true of most subjects in the Word of God; the information is scattered. No wonder God said that to get knowledge and wisdom one must cry aloud for it and search diligently for it (Prov. 2:1-5).

The fact that Hebrews 1:1 is about the information being given in many parts or portions has been understood and written about by many scholars. For example, Friberg references Hebrews 1:1 and has, “in many parts or portions, bit by bit.”[[2]](#footnote-13157) Louw-Nida has, “pertaining to that which occurs in many parts—fragmentary, in many parts.”[[3]](#footnote-21000) BDAG has, “of prophetic writing, *in various parts*.”[[4]](#footnote-10986) Moulton and Milligan says that *polumerōs* “denotes ‘in many portions’ as distinguished from, πολυτρόπως [*polutropōs*], ‘in many manners.’”[[5]](#footnote-17954) *Brill* says, “constituted from many parts.”[[6]](#footnote-22135) E. W. Bullinger has, “consisting of many parts, manifold, by many fragments.”[[7]](#footnote-20640)

Many commentaries are quite clear on the subject. Meyer has, “*To polumerōs* is that which is divided into many parts… *polumerōs*, therefore, presents the *lalein* [speech] of former ages from the point of view of something which was accomplished in a multiplicity of successive acts….” [Greek has been transliterated].[[8]](#footnote-11690) Spiros Zodhiates writes: “By or in many parts…that God gave the revelation *polumerōs* refers to the incremental and progressive manner in which God disclosed Himself up until the appearance of the Son. It is fragmentary, piece by piece”[[9]](#footnote-30673) The Pulpit Commentary has the translation, “In many portions and in many modes,” and comments that *polumerōs* and *polutropōs* are “not a mere alliterative redundancy…the writer’s usual choice of words forbids this supposition. Nor is the *merōs* of the first adverb to be taken (as in the A.V.) to denote portions of time: this is not the proper meaning of the compound. Nor (for the same reason) does it denote various degrees of prophetic inspiration…It was not one utterance, but many utterances; given, in fact, at divers times, though it is to the diversity of the utterances, and not of the times, that the expression points.”[[10]](#footnote-28459)

What the lexicons and scholars have seen, that the revelation in the Bible is “bit by bit” and “fragmentary,” is borne out when reading the Bible. The student of the Bible has to be a diligent reader with a good memory or file system to begin to categorize the subject they are reading about and gradually build a picture of what the Bible says about any given subject. The very way the Bible was written shows us that although God wants believers to have knowledge, He is just as concerned about their relationship with Him—how much time and energy they are willing to spend in getting to know Him—which demonstrates their love and dedication to him. Also, the slow process of growing in the Word allows the believer to mature in the Faith and get to see firsthand that the journey with God is as important as the goal of knowledge.

Heb 1:2

**“at the end of these days spoken to us by *His* Son.”** After Jesus was born and started his ministry he began to speak the words of God to the world and to believers. Before the Son spoke, God spoke to people through the prophets (Heb. 1:1). It is a blessing to know that God loves us so much that He constantly provides guidance to us as to what we should be doing and what we need to do to please Him.

Christians sometimes say that “the angel of Yahweh” (“the angel of the Lord”) in the Old Testament was the “preincarnate Jesus Christ,” but that cannot be the case if Hebrews 1:1-2 is right and God did not speak to us by His Son until these Last Days.

[For more on the “angel of Yahweh” being an angel and not “the preincarnate Christ,” see commentary on Gen. 16:7. For more on the Holy Spirit not being the Third Person of the Trinity, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

**“ages.”** The Greek word is the plural of *aiōn* (#165 αἰών ) and means “ages.” This verse is referring to the “ages,” not the “world.” *Vine’s* has, “an age, a period of time, marked in the N.T. usage by spiritual or moral characteristics, is sometimes translated ‘world;’ the *R.V.* margin always has ‘age.’”[[11]](#footnote-31737) *Bullinger’s Critical Lexicon* has: “*Aion* [age], from *ao*, *aemi*, to blow, to breathe. *Aion* denoted originally the life which hastes away in the breathing of our breath, life as *transitory*; *then* the course of life, time of life, life in its temporal form. *Then*, the space of a human life, an age, or generation *in respect of duration*. The time lived or to be lived by men, time as moving, historical time as well as eternity. *Aion* always includes a reference to the filling of time.”[[12]](#footnote-24962)

Since most translators are Trinitarian and think that Jesus was the one who made the original heavens and earth, they translate “ages” as “world,” or even “universe” in this verse. There are other Greek words that mean “world,” such as *kosmos* and *oikoumene*, and when the Devil tempted Jesus by showing him all the kingdoms of the “world,” these words are used. In Hebrews 1:2 *aiōn* means “ages,” and should be translated that way.

Trinitarians use Hebrews 1:2 to try to prove that Jesus Christ created the world as we know it, but the context of the verse shows that cannot be the correct interpretation. Heb. 1:1-2 show that God spoke through Jesus “in these last days,” whereas God had spoken “in the past” in various other ways. If indeed it were through Jesus that the physical world was created, then one of the ways that God spoke in the past was through Jesus. But that would contradict the whole point of the verse, which is saying that God spoke in other ways in the past, but “in these last days” is speaking through the Son.

Since Hebrews 1:1-2 say that it was “God” who spoke through prophets and through His Son, it is clear that God is the prime mover and thus different from the Son. These verses show that the Son is subordinate to God and, as a “mouthpiece” for God, is compared to the prophets.

The fact that God appointed the Son to be “heir” shows that God and the Son are not equal. For the Son to be the “heir” means that there was a time when he was not the owner. The word “heir” is a common one and, because death and inheritance are a part of every culture, it occurs in all the biblical languages. Any dictionary will show that an heir is one who inherits, succeeds, or receives an estate, rank, title, or office of another. By definition, you cannot be an heir if you are already the owner. No one in history ever wrote a will that said, “My heir and the inheritor of my estate is…ME!” If Christ is God, then he cannot be “heir.” The only way he can be an heir is by not being the original owner. That Christ is an “heir” is inconsistent with Trinitarian doctrine, which states that Christ is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. If Christ were God, then he was part owner all along and thus is not the “heir” at all. These verses teach that God is the original owner, and will give all things to His heir, Jesus Christ. It is obvious from the wording of these first two verses that the author of Hebrews does not consider Christ to be God.

Since *aiōnas* means “ages” and not “world,” it is fair to ask in what sense God has given form to the ages through Jesus. The Greek word from which “given form” is translated is *poieō*, a word with very many meanings. Alone, and in combination with other words, it is translated more than 100 different ways in the *NIV*. Some of the ways *poieō* is translated are: accomplish, acted, appointed, are, be, bear, began, been, bring, carry out, cause, committed, consider, do, earned, exercise, formed, gain, give, judge, kept, made, obey, performed, preparing, produce, provide, put into practice, reached, spend, stayed, treated, was, win, work, wrote, and yielded. Although most people read *poieō* in Hebrews 1:2 as referring to the original creation, it does not have to mean that at all. The context dictates that the “ages” being referred to are the ages after Christ’s resurrection. In Heb. 1:2, Christ became heir after his resurrection. In Heb. 1:3, he then sat at God’s right hand after his resurrection. Heb. 1:5-6 also refer to the resurrection. The context makes it clear that God was not speaking through His Son in the past, but that He has spoken “in these last days” through His Son, and “given form to” the ages through him.

[For more information see, *One God & One Lord*.][[13]](#footnote-20623)

Heb 1:3

**“reflection of His glory.”** For more information on the image of God, see commentary on Genesis 1:27.

**“is upholding all things by his powerful word .”** This anticipates Jesus Christ, as the representation of God, being the “King of kings” who upheld things by his powerful commands, and the Messiah as king, though not directly stated, is even clearer in Hebrews 1:5-13 than it is here. The Greek text reads “word of his power,” translated as “powerful word.” Putting both “word” and “power” in the sentence as nouns emphasizes them both equally (nouns usually have more emphasis grammatically than adjectives). However, it makes the English translation more difficult to understand. The genitive noun “power” has the effect of an adjective, thus we, and many versions, have “powerful word.”

**“he had accomplished the cleansing for sins.”** This anticipates Jesus being the High Priest, who would preside over the cleansing of sin, especially on the Day of Atonement, when the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies (Lev. 16).

Heb 1:4

**“having become as much better than the angels.”** The entire opening section of Hebrews, usually used to show that Christ is God, actually shows just the opposite. After Christ sat down at the right hand of God, “he **became** as much better than the angels” as his name is better than theirs. “God” has always been superior to the angels. If Christ only *became* better than angels after his resurrection, then he cannot be the eternal God. Furthermore, it is sometimes taught that before his birth, Jesus was an angel or referred to as “the angel of the Lord.” Hebrews 1:4-5, 13 clearly refute this.

[For more on Jesus being the Messiah, a man approved by God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

**“better.”** The Greek is *kreittōn* (#2909 κρείττων), and it means “better,” or in some contexts, “superior.” It is a major theme of Hebrews, occurring 16 times in 13 chapters. The NIV text note on Hebrews says, “Hebrews could be called ‘the book of better things….’”[[14]](#footnote-19297)

The book of Hebrews was addressed to unsaved Jews and/or Jewish Christians who were intimately familiar with the Old Testament. Every chapter is packed with Old Testament references, and there is much discussion about the Law. Hebrews teaches that obeying the Law will not get people saved, but what will is faith in Jesus, the one who died for our sins and is now our living High Priest, elevated even higher than angels. The Jews fiercely held to the Law, which was given by Moses. To persuade them to let it go and move on to something else, God would have to offer something “better,” and that is a major theme in Hebrews.

Hebrews teaches that God has done something in Jesus that is “better” than what He had done in the Law. Jesus is specifically said to be better than angels (Heb. 1:4); he brings a better hope (Heb. 7:19); guarantees and mediates a better covenant that is founded on better promises (Heb. 7:22 and 8:6); is a better sacrifice than those offered under the Law (Heb. 9:23); reminds people of better possessions in the future, including a better future country (Heb. 10:34 and 11:16); offers a better resurrection (Heb. 11:35), brings something better for us than the Old Testament believers had (Heb. 11:40); and his blood speaks better than the blood of Abel’s sacrifice (Heb. 12:24). Hebrews also shows (without specifically using the word “better”) that Jesus was a greater High Priest than Aaron (Heb. 4:14-5:10) and ministers in a better sanctuary (Heb. 9:11-14).

Heb 1:5

Psalm 2:7 is quoted in three places: Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5 and 5:5. See commentary on Acts 13:33.

**“he say.”** In this verse, the “he” refers to God, as we can see when we read the Old Testament from which the quotations were taken. This is different from Hebrews 1:7, 10, where the text is not referring to God speaking.

Heb 1:6

This is not a direct quotation from the Old Testament but is similar to some of the verses about God. Ps. 97:7 is similar to what is said in Deuteronomy 32:43.

**“when he again brings…into the inhabited world.”** This is likely referring to Jesus’ second entrance into the world, i.e., his resurrection from the dead (Cf. NASB, HCSB, NET, Rotherham, YLT).

**“bow down before him.”** For the translation “bow down before him” see commentaries on 1 Chronicles 29:20 and Matthew 2:2. When Jesus Christ came into the world born of Mary he was as human and fallible as Adam, and thus is called “the last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45). After he accomplished living a sinless life and dying for the sins of mankind, Jesus became “much better than the angels” (Heb. 1:4), and God gave him a name that is above every name (Phil. 2:9) and seated him at His right hand above every other created thing and put all things in subjection to him (Eph. 1:20-22). Jesus Christ came into the world a human being like Adam and us, lower than the angels, but now, because of his sinless life and obedient death, is exalted and crowned with glory and honor (Heb. 2:9). Jesus Christ is now the ruler of God’s creation and worthy of all the praise and honor we can give him.

Verses such as Hebrews 1:6, especially when compared with Hebrews 2:7—that when Jesus came the first time he was “a little lower than the angels”—are very good evidence that Jesus is not “God the Son” as the doctrine of the Trinity teaches. It is unthinkable that the angels would be told to give Jesus homage after his resurrection if he was God in the flesh before that time. The reason that God told the angels to pay homage to Jesus after his resurrection was due to all that Jesus accomplished by his life and death and also to the fact that God raised Jesus to His own right hand and put everything in subjection to him. Similarly, the reason angels administered the world before Jesus Christ but Jesus will administer his kingdom on earth, the Millennial Kingdom, directly is that Jesus was not alive to administer the world before he was born.

[For more on Jesus being a fully human being and not God the Son, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

Heb 1:7

This quotation from Ps. 104:4 more closely follows the Septuagint than the Hebrew text.

**“with respect to the angels.”** The Greek preposition *pros* (#4314 πρός) can mean “to or toward,” in the sense of speaking “to” someone or thing, or it can mean “with reference to,” in the sense of speaking “about” or “with respect to” someone or thing.[[15]](#footnote-16643) The following quotation from Psalm 104:4 is not spoken “to” the angels but rather “about” them. Therefore, it is more accurate to see the use of *pros* here as identifying the subject of the quotation being “with reference to” the angels instead of the angels being the recipients of the verbal message itself, which doesn’t really make sense linguistically.

**“it says.”** The Greek verb is *legei* (λέγει), the third-person singular, indicative, active, present tense form of the common verb *legō* (#3004 λέγω), and it can be translated “he says,” “she says,” or “it says,” depending on the context (cf. “he says,” Matt. 8:26; “she says,” John 4:11; “it says,” Matt. 12:44, Eph. 4:8). The REV has “it says,” whereas almost every English version of the Bible has “he says.” The REV has “it says” because Hebrews 1:7 is quoting Psalm 104:4, and it is clear in Psalm 104:4 that God is not speaking, it is the psalmist speaking about God. So, the REV has “it,” the Psalm, says, but if a translation has “he says,” then the “he” refers to the Psalmist, not to God. Hebrews 1:7 is quoting Psalm 104:4; Hebrews 1:8-9 is quoting Psalm 45:6-7; and Hebrews 1:10-12 is quoting Psalm 102:25-27, and God is not the speaker in any of those verses, as simply reading those Psalms makes clear.

A problem with translating the verse as “he says” is that it confuses people as to who the “he” is, and in many cases, people think the “he” is God, which is not correct. Furthermore, if people wrongly assume that the “he” in Hebrews 1:7 is God, then they read that error into Hebrews 1:10 and think “God” is calling Jesus “Lord” and saying that Jesus made the heavens and the earth: “You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands.” But the context (Heb. 1:13 which is God speaking) and the scope of Scripture (cf. Gen. 1:1), give good evidence that it is God who is being referred to and who created the heavens and the earth, not Jesus Christ.

**“angels as winds.”** The point of this verse is to elevate the Son. The angels of God are swift as the wind, strong as a fire, but they pay homage to the son (Heb. 1:6). The “feel” of the verse is that angels are beings whom we should hold in awe, but they are subject to the Son. In the Old Testament, both wind and fire were ways that God revealed Himself, and as well as angels being quick and powerful, they reveal God.

This is the only time in the New Testament when the Greek word *pneuma* (#4151 πνεῦμα) is translated “wind.” *Pneuma* can mean “wind,” and often does so in the Greek writings, but it is not used that way in the New Testament except here. The reason for the translation “wind” is that this verse is a quotation from the Old Testament. The Old Testament uses the word *ruach*, which can mean “spirit,” “breath,” or “wind,” to refer to the wind on many different occasions (cf. Gen. 8:1; Exod. 10:19; 1 Kings 18:45), so it is not at all unusual that it would refer to the wind in Psalm 104. The translation “wind” seems clearly to be the correct one. Psalm 104:3-4 extoll God, and say,

“He lays the beams of his chambers on the waters; he makes the clouds his chariot; he rides on the wings of the wind [Heb. *ruach*]; he makes his messengers winds [Heb. *ruach*], his ministers a flaming fire.

Psalm 104:3-4 are one sentence in the Hebrew text, the Hebrew word *ruach* (“wind, spirit, breath”) occurs twice. The first use clearly refers to the wind. The second use fits well as “wind,” and it would be unlikely that the two uses of *ruach* would refer to different things in this sentence. Since the verse in the Hebrew text refers to wind, not “spirit,” then it would refer to that in the New Testament when it is quoted. Of course, the angels are not wind, nor are they fire, but in what they do they are “as winds” and “as fire.”

**“flaming fire.”** The Greek reads “flame of fire,” but this is the figure of speech antemereia.[[16]](#footnote-17988)

Heb 1:8

**“*it says*.”** The “it says” is missing from Hebrews 1:8, but the ellipsis is supplied from Hebrews 1:7. The “it” is the text of Psalm 45:6, and in Psalm 45, the psalmist is extolling the king, the Lord Jesus Christ. Although many English versions have “he says,” the text does not say that.

[For more on “it says,” see commentary on Heb. 1:7.]

**“Your throne is God.”** Hebrews 1:8 is an almost exact quotation from the Septuagint version of Psalm 45:6, which itself was a very good translation of the Hebrew text of Psalm 45:6, and Hebrews 1:9 is from the Septuagint of Psalm 45:7, which is a good translation of the Hebrew text of Psalm 45:7.

Psalm 45:6 was God’s revelation to the Jews about their king, and here in Hebrews, Psalm 45:6-7 is being used to show that Jesus Christ is indeed God’s Messiah as was foretold in the Old Testament. Furthermore, not only was Jesus foretold to be the exalted king, he is presented in Hebrews as being better than angels (Heb. 1:4). The theme of Hebrews 1 centers around the Father’s rule and elevation of the Son over the rest of creation. God spoke through the prophets, and then through His Son, who He appointed heir of all things and who is now seated at God’s right hand as second in command under God. The Son has become better than the angels, who pay homage to him. The angels are ministers of God, but God Himself is the Son’s authority to rule, and God—the God of the Son—anointed him and set him above his companions, such that the Son now sits on God’s right hand.

Hebrews exalts the Son, and in so doing, exalts the Father. But in contrast to what Trinitarians say, Hebrews 1:8 (and thus Ps. 45:6) does not call Jesus “God,” and does not support the Trinity. To see that fully, one must study Psalm 45. Upon examination, Psalm 45 does not support the Trinity, so when it is quoted in Hebrews 1:8, then that quotation does not support the Trinity either. The Jews read Psalm 45 for centuries and never concluded that the Messiah would be “God in the flesh” or somehow be part of a Triune God. But beyond that, it is clear in Psalm 45 that the person who is the subject of the Psalm is not God, but is a human being (see commentary on Psalm 45:6, where there is an explanation as to why this verse is not calling the king, “God” and why Psalm 45 does not support the Trinity).

Some Biblical Unitarians believe that Psalm 45:6 and Hebrews 1:8 are calling the Messiah “god.” They recognize that this king is not being called “God” with a capital “G,” but they think the Messiah is being called “god,” and they translate both Psalm 45:6 and Hebrews 1:8 as having “god” with a lowercase “g.” It is true that in the biblical languages, including Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin, the word “GOD” had a much broader meaning than it does today (Hebrew and Aramaic have only uppercase letters, and all the ancient Greek manuscripts were in capital letters, so the manuscripts all read “GOD”). In the biblical languages, “GOD” was a descriptive title applied to a range of authorities, including angels and demons, lesser gods, great people, rulers, and people acting with God’s authority. The word “God” in both Hebrew and Greek could refer to a human being, especially a human being acting under God’s authority. Even Jesus Christ said that (John 10:34-35). So with the understanding that the word “GOD” could refer to a human being, a Biblical Unitarian translation of Hebrews 1:8 is, “Your throne, O god, is forever and ever.” But although “Your throne, O god, is forever and ever” is a legitimate translation of Hebrews 1:8, there is evidence that “Your throne is God forever and ever” is actually a better translation (some arguments for that are in commentary on Ps. 45:6).

The renowned Greek scholar and Trinitarian A. T. Robertson noted that the Greek word *theos* (God) could be understood as a vocative, “O God,” or as a nominative, as in the phrase, “God is thy throne” or “Thy throne is God.” He wrote: “Either [translation] makes good sense.”[[17]](#footnote-32204) While it is true that from a strictly translational point of view, either a vocative or nominative translation is acceptable, all translation is informed by context and scope, and the context strongly argues against the translation “Your throne, O God.”

B. F. Wescott (a Trinitarian and most well-known for the Wescott-Hort Greek New Testament) put the translation “God is thy throne” as primary in his commentary.[[18]](#footnote-24543) He did not think that the vocative “O God” (or “O god”) was the best choice given the scope of Scripture. Wescott wrote: “It is scarcely possible that *elohim* in the original [Hebrew text of Ps. 45:6] can be addressed to the king. The presumption, therefore, is against the belief that *ho theos* [God] is a vocative in the LXX [Septuagint]. Thus, on the whole, it seems best to adopt in the first clause the rendering: *God is Thy throne* (or, *Thy throne is God*), that is, ‘Thy kingdom is founded upon God, the immovable Rock…The phrase ‘God is Thy throne’ is not indeed found elsewhere, but it is in no way more strange than Ps. lxxi.3, [Lord] be Thou to me a rock of habitation…Thou art my rock and my fortress” (Italics in the original. Wescott uses an unpointed Hebrew font and Greek font in his commentary).

[For more information on spirit beings who represent God, see commentary on Gen. 1:26 about God’s divine council and commentary on Gen. 16:7 about the custom of a person using an agent to represent them. For more information on the flexible use of the words translated “God,” such as *Elohim* and *Theos*, see commentary on John 20:28. For more information on Jesus not being God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more information on Hebrews 1:8, see, James Broughton and Peter Southgate, *The Trinity: True or False* (The Dawn Book Supply, 1995), pp. 196, 197; Don Snedeker, *Our Heavenly Father Has No Equals* (International Scholars Publication, 1998; pp. 459-463); Patrick Navas, *Divine Truth or Human Tradition* (Authorhouse, 2011), pp. 385-393; Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, *One God & One Lord*, (Christian Educational Services, 3rd edition), p. 504-506.]

Heb 1:9

“**Therefore God, your God.”** This is one of the very strong statements in the Bible showing that Jesus is not “God” as the doctrine of the Trinity teaches. “God” does not have a God. The Bible consistently states that God is God alone and there is no other. At no point in Scripture does Yahweh, God the Father, have a “God.” Yet Jesus has a God. He prayed to his God, obeyed his God, and called God, “my God” both before and after his death, resurrection, and ascension (Matt. 27:46; John 20:17; Rev. 3:2, 12).

[For more information on Jesus not being God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

Heb 1:10

**“And, You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands.”** This verse is quoted from the Septuagint text of the Old Testament (Ps. 102:25), which differs somewhat from the Hebrew text. But even so, Heb. 1:10 is not an exact quote of the Septuagint. In the Old Testament it applied to Yahweh, but the author of Hebrews lifted it from the Psalms and applied it to Jesus Christ. Sometimes God lifts Old Testament verses from their original context and modifies them to fit a new context.

One modification is that the opening, “in the beginning” in the Greek text of the New Testament, is “from of old” in the Hebrew Old Testament. The Hebrew text does not make a reference to a beginning, as the Greek seems to, although the Greek could be translated as something such as “from the first,” instead of “in the beginning.” But Hebrews uses Psalm 102:25 very differently than it is used in the Old Testament.

A good example of God lifting a verse from the Old Testament and using it differently in the New Testament is Psalm 2:7. Psalm 2:7 reads, “I will tell of the decree. Yahweh said to me, You are My son. Today I have become your father” (New European Version). In Psalm 2:7, the Messiah is called the “Son” when he comes into his kingdom, that is, when he takes his full authority in the household of God and takes over the actual rulership of the world. So the Messiah becoming the “Son” is not at his conception or birth, but at a much later (and still future) time. Thus, in Psalm 2:7, the word “Son” is describing the relationship that the Messiah has with the Father as a fully developed Son, participating in ruling the house.

Once we understand that “Son” in Psalm 2:7 is describing a relationship between the Father and Son, we can see why Psalm 2:7 is used the ways it is in the New Testament. Some Western texts of Luke 3:22 quote Psalm 2:7, making Jesus become the “Son” at his baptism when he receives God’s gift of holy spirit, takes on his ministry, and begins a new and very interactive relationship with the Father (however, the original text of Luke 3:22 likely did not quote Psalm 2:7). Then, Acts 13:33 quotes Psalm 2:7 in the context of Jesus’ resurrection, making Jesus become the “Son” when God raised him from the dead and he began a whole new relationship with the Father. Then Hebrews 1:5 quotes Psalm 2:7 in the context of the ascension (cf. Heb. 1:3), making Jesus become the “Son” when he actually sat down at God’s right hand and began still another new relationship with the Father. So we see that Psalm 2:7 is used differently in the New Testament than in the Old Testament, but each time it is quoted, the context makes clear what God is trying to communicate. Other Old Testament verses that are used in the New Testament in a modified way include: Matthew 2:18 (Jer. 31:15); Ephesians 4:8 (Ps. 68:18); and 1 Peter 2:9 (Exod. 23:22; cf. Exod. 19:5-6; Isa. 43:20-21).

Like Psalm 2:7 is modified in the New Testament, Psalm 102:25 is modified when it is quoted in Hebrews 1:10. For one thing, the subject of the verse changes from Yahweh (Old Testament) to Jesus Christ (New Testament). Since the subject of the verse changes, it seems logical that the action being attributed to the subject changes also. Many Old Testament verses testify that God created the original heavens and the earth (cf. Gen. 1:1, *etc.*). However, both the Old Testament and New Testament tell us that there will be a new heavens and earth after this one, that we are currently inhabiting, passes away. In fact, there will be two more. First, the heaven and earth of Jesus’ 1,000-year Millennial Kingdom, which will perish (Isa. 65:17; Rev. 20:1-10), and then the heaven and earth of Revelation 21:1-22:21, which will last forever. The context reveals clearly that Hebrews 1:10 is speaking of these future heavens and earth.

If we simply continue to read Hebrews, remembering that the original text had no chapter breaks, Scripture tells us, “It is not to angels that He has subjected **the world to come, about which we are speaking**” (Heb. 2:5). This verse is very clear. The subject of this section of Hebrews is not the current heavens and earth, which God created, but the future heavens and earth that the Son will oversee. The reader must remember that the word “beginning” does not have to apply to the absolute beginning of time, but rather the beginning of something the author is referring to (see commentary on John 6:64).

Although we believe the above explanation to be the correct one, we must point out that there are theologians who read Hebrews 1:10 and see it as a reference to the Father. Verse 10 starts with the word “and” in the Greek text, so verses 9 and 10 are conjoined. Since verse 9 ends with, “Your God has set you [the Christ] above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy,” these theologians see the reference to “the Lord” in the beginning of verse 10 as a reference back to the God last mentioned, i.e., the Father. Andrews Norton explains this point of view:

Now the God last mentioned was Christ’s God, who had anointed him; and the author [of the book of Hebrews], addressing himself to this God, breaks out into the celebration of his power, and especially his unchangeable duration; which he dwells upon in order to prove the stability of the Son’s kingdom…i.e., thou [God] who hast promised him such a throne, *art he who laid the foundation of the earth.* So it seems to be a declaration of God’s immutability made here, to ascertain the durableness of Christ’s kingdom, before mentioned; and the rather so, because this passage had been used originally for the same purpose in the 102nd Psalm, *viz*. [Author uses KJV] To infer thence this conclusion, “*The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed be established before Thee.* In like manner, it here proves the *Son’s* throne should be established *forever and ever*, by the same argument, *viz.,* by God’s immutability.”[[19]](#footnote-25039)

In the way that it is used in the Old Testament, theologians such as Norton say that the verse shows how the unchanging God can indeed fulfill His promises, and they see it used in exactly the same way in Hebrews. Their conclusion is that since God created the heavens and the earth, and since He will not pass away, He is fit to promise an everlasting kingdom to His Son.

In contrast, authors who believe that the verse refers to the Son include: James Broughton and Peter Southgate, *The Trinity: True or False*; Anthony Buzzard and Charles Hunting, *The Trinity: Christianity’s Self-Inflicted Wound*; Patrick Navas, *Divine Truth or Human Tradition?*; and the *Racovian Catechism* (see Thomas Rees, trans.).

Heb 1:13

**“to which of the angels.”** It is sometimes taught that before his birth, Jesus was an angel or referred to as “the angel of the Lord.” Hebrews 1:4-5 and 1:13 clearly refute this. See commentary on Hebrews 1:4.

**“he said at any time.”** The “he” is God.

Heb 1:14

**“for the sake of.”** The Greek is *dia* with the accusative, meaning for the sake of, on account of. A number of modern versions have translated this verse as, “sent to serve those who will inherit salvation” (NIV), but that is not quite accurate. It is not that angels serve Christians, as if we could tell angels what to do. Angels serve God for the sake of Christians, which the preposition makes clear.

**Hebrews Chapter 2**

Heb 2:2

**“if the word spoken through angels.”** There were times when angels brought the Word of God to people (cf. Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2). Furthermore, sometimes these angels representing God are referred to as “God” (see commentary on Gen. 16:7 and Matt. 8:5). When it came to the Law, the Word came from God, and Moses is referred to as the mediator (Gal. 3:19).

**“legally binding.”** The Greek is *bebaios* (#949 βέβαιος ), and it means reliable or firm; or it can refer to something that is unwavering or persistent over time, and thus abiding; or it can refer to something that is in force or valid over a period of time, which is its primary meaning here. A perfectly fine translation would be: “the Word...was in force,” as long as we knew what “in force” meant. The HCSB reads “was legally binding,” while the NIV reads “was binding,” and these certainly capture the idea that the Word of God, spoken through angels was in fact legally binding, which is why there was a righteous retribution for not obeying it.

Heb 2:3

**“how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation.”** People who serve God diligently will receive a reward, and those who neglect God will suffer for it. Rewards are also mentioned in Hebrews 10:35; 11:6, 26.

Hebrews 2:3 has sometimes been used to support the idea that a Christian can lose their salvation, but the verse does not say that. For one thing, there is nothing in the Bible that even hints that “neglecting salvation” results in the loss of salvation. Loads of “Sunday Christians” “neglect” their salvation, but they still go to church, even if it is not very often. Every Christian will go through the Judgment, but not for salvation, for rewards. Those Christians who neglect their salvation will “not escape” but will suffer consequences for it (see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil”).

**“having at the first been spoken by the Lord.”** Hebrews 2:3 continues the general theme in the early chapters of Hebrews that Jesus was greater than angels. Even though the word of angels was binding (Heb. 2:2), the word of salvation came via Jesus Christ. In a very real sense, New Testament salvation started with the teaching ministry of Jesus. No Old Testament prophet said, “You have to believe in the Messiah to be saved.” But Jesus taught that the work of God was to believe in him (John 6:29), and he told people to believe in him (Mark 1:15; cf. John 1:12; 6:69; 8:24; 9:35-39; 10:38; 11:27; 12:36; 14:1; 17:20-21; 20:31). People who heard and believed in Jesus then confirmed that salvation came through Jesus Christ.

Heb 2:4

**“(God also bearing witness with them…)”** This verse is a parenthesis, expanding on the fact that not only have other people confirmed what was spoken by the Lord (Heb. 2:3), but God himself has also borne witness by signs and wonders to what the Lord said.

**“distributions of holy spirit.”** This is an objective genitive (cf. Meyer; Lenski is not correct) as can be seen from the context and grammar. The distributions “of holy spirit” are the manifestations of the spirit, which are energized by the Lord and show up in the life of a believer and the Church. The phrase is followed by the same basic phrase as 1 Corinthians 12:11, which also is in the context of the manifestations of holy spirit.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

Heb 2:5

**“did not put...in subjection.”** The sentence is confusing because it says that God “did not put,” but the world being discussed is future, so we would normally say that God “will not put.” God will not put the future world (the one being spoken about in the context) under the control of angels. Although the Greek verb is in the aorist tense, usually referring to the past, in this case, it refers to God’s plan (that He made in the past) for His future earth. The future world will not be overseen by angels, but by God’s Messiah. Interestingly, before the Messiah came, God administered the world through angels, but the future world will not be overseen and governed by angels.

The Greek verb is *hupotassō* (#5293 ὑποτάσσω), and it means to arrange under or to subordinate; to subject or be subject, or put in subjection; to obey or submit to one’s control. It is a fairly common word, occurring more than 30 times in the New Testament. This verse confirms what Corinthians says; that the believers will administer the future world, including the angels (1 Cor. 6:1-3; see commentary on 1 Cor. 6:2).

An important thing to notice in this verse is the verb is in the aorist tense, which here refers to the past, which is why the English versions say, “subjected,” or “has...subjected,” or “did...subject,” etc. We would normally expect the future tense: “not to angels will God subject the world to come....” However, this is an occurrence of the prophetic perfect idiom (specifically it is the proleptic aorist) where a future event is put in the past tense so we can be assured of its certainly (see commentary on Eph. 2:6).

**“to angels.”** Before Jesus Christ came, God ruled and administered the world through angels. God often spoke His word through angels and it was legally binding (Heb. 2:2). Jacob wrestled with an angel who changed his name to Israel (Gen. 32:24; Hos. 12:4). An angel appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Acts 7:30). The angel of the Lord led Israel through the wilderness (Exod. 33:2), and there are many more examples such as these. But the future world will be Christ’s kingdom on earth, and it will be ruled directly by Jesus Christ (see commentary on Heb. 1:6).

Heb 2:6

**“son of man.”** The REV did not capitalize “son of man” here in Hebrews 2:6, because the original Psalm did not have the messianic title “Son of Man” in mind, but was about Adam and Eve, and all humankind. The son of man was frequently used, in the Old Testament, as a generic term for humankind (Num. 23:19; Job 16:21). However, in Hebrews 2:6, the author of Hebrews did have Jesus in mind when he quotes Psalm 8:4-6, and likely intended Jesus to be the “son of man” here in this context.

[For more information on this quotation see commentaries on Heb. 2:7 and 2:9.]

Heb 2:7

**“a little lower than the angels.”** The commentary on Hebrews 2:9, explains why this translation of Hebrews 2:7 is to be preferred. However, what is the author meaning by quoting Psalm 8:4-6 here? As further explained in the commentary on Hebrews 2:9, the Psalm is discussing Adam and Eve’s creation, the creation of humankind. Whereas here in Hebrews 2, the subject is Jesus. So, who is the “him” being referred to here in Hebrews 2:6-8? Is it the same “he” as in the Psalm?

Although other commentators see the “him” as referring to humankind here,[[20]](#footnote-14044) there is good reason to believe that the “him” being referred to in Hebrews 2:7 is Jesus. First and foremost, the context concerns Jesus, not Adam and Eve, so to believe that all of a sudden the author of Hebrews brings the creation of Adam and Eve into the picture when discussing Jesus’ superiority to angels would be quite strange. Secondly, and most convincingly, the one being referred to does not change, and the logic flows smoothly from Hebrews 2:8a to Hebrews 2:8b: “**You put all things in subjection under his feet.** Now in putting all things in subjection to him, he left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him” (Heb. 2:8). The author has the same “him” in mind throughout the verse, and it can hardly be said of humankind that all things are subjected to us, even invisible things. However, this could be said of Jesus, who currently sits at the right hand of the Father until all of his enemies are made a footstool for his feet (Heb. 1:13), to whom the world to come is subjected (Heb. 2:5), and to whom God has subjected all things (1 Cor. 15:27). The world to come is subjected to Jesus.

Heb 2:9

**“little.”** A major question about Hebrews 2:9 involves the word “little,” which can refer to time “for a little while,” as per the NASB, and the RSV.[[21]](#footnote-23332) “Little” can also refer adjectivally to “a little lower,” as it does in most translations.

Now, because of the exact parallel with Hebrews 2:7, it would be unwarranted to take the same phrase in both places to mean different things. Thus, perhaps its usage in Hebrews 2:7 helps us decide which way to understand the phrase. Hebrews 2:7 is an exact quote from the Septuagint of Psalm 8:4-6. In the Psalm, David is speaking of the status of humankind in the Genesis narrative. God created humankind (Adam and Eve) a little lower than the angels, and made him (humankind) ruler over the works of his hands (Psa. 8:6). David further elaborates that the things which humankind was set over are sheep, birds, and fish, in other words, humankind was to rule over all other created things in the Genesis creation. There are two points to note here.

First, this means that the Psalm was not originally a prophecy about Jesus. Instead, the author of Hebrews saw that these words also apply well to Jesus’ situation, however, the words refer to someone different in Hebrews than they did in the Psalm. The crowning and glory that Jesus receives is a different level of crowning and glory than humankind in Genesis 1 and 2. Jesus’ crowning and glory is completely unique, he is the great King, and is seated at the right hand of God (Heb. 1:8-9, 13). The whole argument of Hebrews 1 is that Jesus is greater than angels after his resurrection and ascension (Heb. 1:5, 13). We should keep this in mind while reading Hebrews 2:6-10. Therefore, when the author of Hebrews applies Psalm 8:4-6 to Jesus, we should read it in a different light. Whereas David meant that humankind was made lower than angels permanently, the author of Hebrews meant that Jesus was made lower than the angels temporarily, and then he was crowned with glory and honor. It would not make sense to hear the author of Hebrew’s argument from chapter 1 and then to read Hebrews 2:9 and conclude that Jesus is lower than the angels. No! This is counter to his entire argument. After his resurrection and ascension, Jesus is greater than the angels.

The second point regarding the Psalm is that it should not be taken to mean “for a little while” because Adam and Eve were not made lower than angels for a little while, as if at some later date they would be exalted above angels, and since the author of Hebrews quoted the Septuagint exactly, we do not have justification for changing his words. The same words refer to different things here in Hebrews 2:6-9 than they do in Psalm 8:4-6. Therefore, Hebrews 2:9 is also translated as “made a little lower” rather than “made lower for a little while.”

[See commentary on Heb. 2:7 for more information on how the author of Hebrews is using Ps. 8:4-6.]

Does the translation, “made a little lower” mean that Jesus is permanently lower than angels? No. As mentioned above, the entire point of the author is to prove Jesus’ superiority to angels, thus, even though we have translated this as “made a little lower than the angels,” this was before his death, resurrection, and exaltation.

Trinitarians say that Jesus was made “a little lower than angels,” but of course, they imply that as “God in the flesh,” Jesus was still very different from the rest of humankind. That argument is inconsistent, at best. If Jesus was “God in the flesh, fully God and fully human” then he was not “a little lower than the angels,” even if he acted like it by acting fully human. The context in the next 8 verses shows that Jesus was “made like his brothers in every respect” (Heb. 2:17). He was “fully human” in the usual sense of the word. Jesus was fully human, and lower than the angels for the duration of his earthly life; about 30 years.

**“suffered death.”** The Greek text says, “of the suffering of the death,” using a definite article before both “suffering” and before “death.” This is not just saying Jesus “suffered death,” but rather that he went through “the suffering of the death,” that is the death that bought forgiveness of sins for all humankind. We humans can and do “suffer death,” but we are sinners and cannot suffer “the death” that ransoms humankind. Only Jesus could do that. Furthermore, he was not crowned with glory and honor simply because he suffered; he had to die. “The suffering” and “the death” point to the fact that the way Jesus died, fulfilling all the prophecies, was all necessary in order for God to crown him with glory and honor. He could not have “just suffered” without dying, but neither could he “just die” without fulfilling the prophecies of his suffering, right down to the piercing of the hands and feet (Ps. 22:16). Jesus is a good model for us, suffering comes before glory.

**“experience death.”** For more on this phrase, see commentary on Matt. 16:28.

**“on behalf of everyone.”** From the Greek preposition *huper* (#5228 ὑπέρ). Also, see commentary on Romans 5:6, “in place of the ungodly...in place of...in our place.”

Heb 2:10

**“Him.”** This refers to God, not Jesus; God made Jesus perfect (or complete and mature) through suffering.

**“to make…perfect.”** The word “perfect” can also mean “complete” or “mature.” Suffering is very difficult, but it can produce great maturity if one handles it correctly. This is one of the many verses that show that Jesus is not God. God is mature and perfect, but Jesus needed to be made so. Some Trinitarians claim that it was Jesus’ “man part” that had to be made mature, but the Bible never says that, that is an assumption.

**“pioneer.”** The Greek word translated “pioneer” here in Hebrews 2:10 is *archēgos* (#747 ἀρχηγός), and it has several meanings, including, one with the preeminent position and thus “leader, ruler, prince;” or one who begins something and thus is the first in a series, or one who begins or originates something. According to Friberg, it means “strictly [speaking], *one who goes first on the path*; hence *leader, prince, pioneer*.”[[22]](#footnote-13738) The *EDNT* says that in Hebrews 2:10 the proper rendering is “pioneer of their salvation.”[[23]](#footnote-31292)

Jesus pioneered the way to salvation. No one had done it before him, and thus he was the pioneer or leader. Acts 26:23 shows that Jesus was the pioneer of salvation because he was the “first to rise from the dead.” Jesus led the way to salvation and opened the door for God to bring many sons to glory. Many modern versions catch the meaning of this verse and say that Jesus was the “pioneer” of salvation (CEB, NET, NIV, NRSV, RSV); or “leader” (DBY, NAB, NJB, NLT) or “captain” (BBE, KJV) or even “Princely Leader” (Rotherham).

Although there are versions that use the word “author,” that is misleading because an “author” is one who originates or creates a work, and Jesus was not the “creator” of people’s salvation. Jesus was the Son of God who fulfilled God’s plan of salvation and was thus the first one of all the “many sons” of God to be brought to glory. The preeminence of God and the obedience of the Son can be clearly seen in Hebrews 2:10. God was the one who “made” Jesus perfect through suffering and He was the one who brought the many sons to glory. Jesus was the one who fulfilled God’s plan of salvation by being faithful and obedient to God (Heb. 3:2; 5:8). [The misleading word “author” is also used by some versions in Hebrews 5:9. For more on Jesus Christ being God and thus existing forever, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son”].

**“through sufferings.”** The “sufferings” that Jesus went through included his death, and Jesus was “made perfect,” that is, brought to full maturity and the planned goal of God both spiritually and mentally, by his suffering and his death. It is often taught, and we understand, that because Jesus lived a sinless life and suffered death for mankind, God highly exalted him and set him at His own right hand. Much less understood is the maturity that Jesus experienced because of his suffering. The Old Testament predicted over and over that Jesus would suffer. The very first prophecy about him, Genesis 3:15, stated that his heel would be “bruised,” and as anyone who has ever had a bone bruise on their heel knows, it is very painful. Psalm 22 graphically portrays some of the suffering of the Messiah. In fact, Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, and other passages of the OT portray both the physical and the mental suffering of our Lord Jesus.

We are familiar with some of the physical suffering Jesus went through, specifically the beatings before his death. Sadly, however, even much of that has been obscured by tradition. The traditional teaching is that Jesus was arrested Thursday night before Good Friday, was crucified Friday morning, and was dead by late Friday afternoon. Jesus’ actual sufferings were much more horrible than that.

If we look at the chronology in the Bible and lay it out day by day, we can see that Jesus was arrested after the Last Supper, 2 days before his death. He was first taken before Annas (John 18:13), then to Caiaphas (John 18:24), and in both places, he was beaten and assaulted. Then the next morning he was tried before the Sanhedrin in a kangaroo court (Luke 22:66ff). The Sanhedrin then took him to Pilate (Luke 23:1), who sent him to Herod (Luke 23:7). Herod sent him back to Pilate (Luke 23:11; by then it was noon; the “sixth hour;” John 19:14). Pilate tried to release him, but gave in to the crowd who wanted Jesus crucified. So Pilate handed Jesus over to his guard, who tortured him all night by doing things like placing a crown of thorns on his head and hitting it with a stick (this is now the second night in a row he had been up all night being beaten). The guards took Jesus and crucified him at 9 a.m. the next morning (the “third hour;” Mark 15:25; he would have been awake for something like 50 hours at this point). After hanging on the cross for six hours, Jesus died. No one can deny that the physical sufferings of Jesus were horrific.

We should also keep in mind that Jesus suffered mentally as well as physically. He had sorrow, grief, and plenty of opportunities for “stress.” Isaiah 53:3 (ESV) calls him a “man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” Although the Bible does not give us any details, it seems clear that his father Joseph died before he started his ministry (see commentary on John 19:27). His mother and family misunderstood him, and at different points did not believe him (John 7:5), and even thought he had gone insane (Mark 3:21). Jesus was constantly grieved by the hardness of people’s hearts. He had disciples leave him (John 6:66), and intimate friends desert and betray him. No wonder the Bible says that he was “tempted in every way just as *we are*” (Heb. 4:15), and that he “learned obedience by the things that he suffered” (Heb. 5:8).

There are many sources of suffering. They are all rooted in the Devil, but by now there are many secondary sources of suffering. Suffering comes from the Devil, his demons, and people who are influenced by the demonic. It also comes from the fallen nature of the world, and from things such as our own ignorance, pride, and stubbornness. It can also come from our standing against evil and suffering for it. As much as we would like to eliminate suffering, while we are on this earth it helps to recognize that when it comes to suffering, we can “turn a lemon into lemonade.” We can use our suffering to God’s advantage; it can have some benefits. In Jesus’ case, as Scripture says, it helped bring him to full maturity, and he learned obedience from it. Some of the potential benefits of suffering are:

* Suffering destroys our illusion of self-sufficiency and makes us aware of our dependence on God. People tend to forget God when things are going well. There is a military saying, “There are no atheists in foxholes.” When the artillery shells are falling from the sky and people’s comrades in arms are being blown to pieces, everyone realizes that they cannot determine their own fate, and they look to God for help. Sadly, when the war is over, most of those people forget the promises they made and return to their illusion of being in control of life. The suffering we experience, whether it is physical or mental, can help us be more aware of our need for, and dependence on, God. A great challenge is to retain that mindset and be God-centered when the suffering we were experiencing is over.
* Suffering allows us to better understand the suffering of others and makes us more understanding and caring toward others in need. That has to be part of the meaning of Hebrews 2:10, which says Jesus was “made perfect,” through suffering. The Greek word translated “made perfect” has many applications, and can refer to becoming mature or complete, or attaining a desired goal. Although Jesus was truly made perfect (brought to God’s desired goal) by his suffering and death, inherent in the Greek phrase is also that he attained maturity by suffering. It is truly difficult to understand what others are going through if you have not been through something similar. Jesus’ suffering makes him better able to relate to us, and us to him, and our suffering makes us better able to relate to others who are suffering.
* Suffering can give us credibility with others. Many people who are suffering or have needs are suspicious of, or doubting of, people who have never experienced what they are going through. People who minister to others know that often the best person to reach an alcoholic is a former alcoholic, the best person to reach a drug addict is a former drug addict, etc. We are naturally suspicious of the advice we get from someone who has never experienced what we are going through. God shows us that Jesus Christ is better able to be our High Priest because he suffered like we do: “For we do not have a high priest who is not able to empathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way just as *we are, yet* without sin” (Heb. 4:15).
* Suffering can get us to readjust our priorities, both physically and mentally. God commands us to seek Him first, and set our minds on things above. As horrible as it is, suffering helps us be successful at that. Many people who live ungodly lives, or even just lives that do not include God, readjust their priorities when faced with suffering. Often prayer, the hope of a better life, and friends in the Church are the only relief suffering people have.
* Suffering makes the Hope of Christ’s return and a wonderful life on a wonderful earth burn brightly in our soul. Nothing makes the wonderful future earth more appealing than suffering on this earth. People who are happy and healthy in this life, even though they know the next one will be better, never have the burning Hope for the next life that those people who are suffering do. It is when we are in pain that we think like the psalmist: “My soul is in deep anguish. How long, LORD, how long?” (Ps. 6:3).

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Heb 2:11

**“one.”** The Greek text reads, “all from one, which is why....” The question is, what is the “one” referring to? Commentators are divided. Some say “one Father,” which is true in one sense but countered by Lenski who asserts that then the angels would be included also, since they too are from the Father. Lenski asserts that the “one” is Adam, from whom the whole human race came, however, Jesus is both from Adam and directly from God, so “Adam” has problems also. Nyland (*The Source New Testament*) says “family,” which might be good, but again, could imply too much. The Greek text is ambiguous. God is inviting us into the conversation to think, pray, and meditate about the “one” from whom we come. In that sense, the word “source” (which is in some versions) seems to be very good because it somewhat completes the thought without filling in the blank and thus giving us a firm answer. This seems to be one of the places where we would like for God to have been more plain, and He certainly could have, so therefore it seems best to follow His lead and leave our translation somewhat ambiguous.

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek text is “brothers,” but that often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

Heb 2:13

**“trust.”** We can and should trust God. Although it is common to hear religious people say, “Just have faith,” meaning, “Just trust,” the fact is that the human mind cannot “just trust.” In order for us to trust, we must believe the object of our trust is trustworthy. There are five basic elements to trust, and all can be expressed starting with a “c,” nicely making “The Five C’s of Trust.” Whether or not we trust someone or something is directly related to the presence of these five elements. If they are present, we will trust, and if they are not, we will instinctively not trust. The five are: Character, Competency, Commitment, Consistency. and Cohesion.

“Character” is the sum total of our moral and ethical qualities. A person of dubious character cannot be trusted because they will, without notice, fail to keep their word or somehow turn against us. The Greco-Roman gods are a good example. They were selfish, capricious, and often just plain evil. They could not be trusted to be loving and helpful.

“Competency” speaks for itself when it comes to trust. If we know a person cannot do for us what we need done because they are simply not capable, then we cannot make ourselves trust them; our minds just will not trust them. We can take a risk and hope, but we cannot “trust.”

“Commitment” is a person’s dedication to something, and especially to do what they say. We do not trust people who we know have no commitment to their work or words. They could change their mind and leave us in a very bad state.

“Consistency” is needed to make competency and commitment trustworthy. A person might be competent and also committed to something, but if we know the person may be inconsistent for some reason, we cannot trust them.

“Cohesion” is the part of trustworthiness that puts people on the same team, or working together. A person might have character and be competent, committed, and consistent, but if he or she works for a rival company, plays for a rival team, or is dedicated to a different or rival cause, then we cannot trust that person.

Once we understand how trust works, we can see that God meets all the requirements of trust, and if we enter into a relationship with Him, we will trust Him more and more over time. In fact, once we understand how trust works, we can see how people get deceived into trusting something they should not trust. A lying salesman might seem to be trustworthy, but in reality not have good character or be consistent. Or he may only feign cohesion but really be after his commission, not a good result for us.

There is one caveat about trusting God. If we have wrong beliefs about God, then we will not trust Him. If, for example, we think that God causes cancer, car wrecks, or hurricanes that kill untold innocent people, then he is acting like the Greek gods, and we will not trust Him. We might try to love Him, but in our hearts, we will not trust Him. Thus, a very important part of our trusting God is having right doctrine.

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“and the children whom God has given to me.”** This quotation is from Isaiah 8:18. These “children” are disciples; “children” is being used in the Semitic sense of being followers of God; this use of “children” falls into the category of being a part of the customs and culture of the Bible. The context of Isaiah 8 is the Syrian and Israelite threat to Judah, and whether the king and people would rely on human efforts or on God (the king relied on human efforts and hired the Assyrians to attack Syria and Israel. As a result, Judah had temporary relief, but it was later devastated, but not completely destroyed, by Assyria). Yahweh warned Isaiah not to follow the way of the people (Isa. 8:11); He told Isaiah to fear God (Isa. 8:13). God told Isaiah He would be a sanctuary for him, but a trap, snare, and stone that crushes the people of Israel (Isa. 8:14-15). In response, Isaiah said, “I will wait for Yahweh...I will put my trust in him. Here I am, and the children [the followers of God] who are with me” (Isa. 8:17-18). By these words, Isaiah shows his dedication to God and his refusal to go along with the ways of the people. This is a good life lesson for us. We are always tempted to do things the world’s way and follow the crowd, but we should always, like Isaiah and the disciples with him, do things God’s way, even though there is often a short-term cost for obeying God.

In Hebrews 2:12-13, the words of Isaiah are combined with the words of David from Psalm 22 (which is a prophecy about the Messiah), and are recorded as being spoken by Jesus Christ. In the context of suffering (which is mentioned several times in the immediate context), Jesus testifies about God, praises God, trusts God, and stands together with others who are also following and trusting God. In the context of Hebrews 2:13, the “children” are the believers who follow Christ and who stand with him.

Heb 2:14

**“children.”** Here “children” means “disciples” or “followers.” The Greek word is *paidion* (#3813 παιδίον), and although the Greek means a young child, in the Semitic culture, the word “child” was often used for a disciple (cf. Matt. 12:27). Isaiah used the word as “follower, disciple,” and that is the way it is used here in Hebrews as well (see commentary on Heb. 2:13).

**“in a similar way.”** The Greek is *paraplēsiōs* (#3898 παραπλησίως), and it has engendered much discussion by scholars. The problem is that it does not mean “likewise” or “in the same way,” but rather it expresses a very close similarity. However, in many cases in the Greek, the purpose of the word is to describe a similarity that is meant to show essential sameness. Thus, Thayer says the word is “used of a similarity which amounts to equality.” Also, the Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament says, “Jesus took on flesh and blood *in the same way* as others...In spite of the ambiguity of the expression, the thought is not simply of a ‘similarity.’” The *EDNT* also references Spicq, who says, “without any difference.”[[24]](#footnote-20225)

Nevertheless, the Greek word *paraplēsiōs* does not mean “likewise,” which means “in the same way,” but rather, “in a similar way.” *The Source New Testament*[[25]](#footnote-31487) translates the phrase, that Jesus “also pretty much shared in their flesh and blood,” and notes that *paraplēsiōs* means “‘coming near,’ ‘nearly resembling,’ ‘just about,’ ‘nearly equal.’ It does not mean “likewise.’” H. Meyer gets the heart of the word when he says that it is “not ‘equality,’ or ‘likewise,’...but: ‘in a manner very closely resembling.’”[[26]](#footnote-25748) Meyer then notes that *paraplēsiōs* expresses the resemblance of Jesus to other humans while still expressing that there is some diversity from them. About the difference between Jesus and everyone else, Meyer continues: “And rightly so...He was distinguished from his human brethren by his sinlessness.” Meyer is correct about Jesus’ sinlessness. Jesus was fully human but without a sin nature, so being sinless was one way that Jesus was different from “the children” (the subject of the verse). He had no sin nature because God was his Father, whereas every other human has a sin nature inherited from Adam.

The point that Hebrews 2:14 is making in using *paraplēsiōs* is that he was equal to other people in that he was fully human, but still had a difference from the rest of humanity. The danger of translating *paraplēsiōs* as “in the same way, or “likewise,” is that we might think that Jesus took flesh and blood “in the same way” that we have, when he was somewhat different than we are: because God was his Father he had sinless blood. On the other hand, when we translate *paraplēsiōs* more accurately as “in a similar way,” we have to guard against not thinking of Jesus as fully human, but only “similar” to us. The Bible expresses in many places that Jesus was a man, a human. One thing that helps us in the translation of Hebrews 2:14 is that if God had wanted to emphasize that Jesus was exactly the same, or in “the same way” as the rest of humanity, He would almost certainly have found a clearer way to say it than by using *paraplēsiōs*. It certainly seems that writing “in a similar” way and then explaining the similarity seems safer than writing “in the same way” and then saying, “well, sort of the same way—he had sinless blood.”

The thing that was only “similar” between Jesus and the rest of mankind is that although Jesus was fully human, just as Adam was (which is why Jesus is called “the Last Adam” in 1 Cor. 15:45), he did not have a sin nature like all of us since the fall of Adam and Eve have. Although some people claim that Jesus had to have a sin nature to be like us, that is not the case. God did not create mankind with a sin nature; it is an addition since Adam’s sin. Adam and Eve were fully human before they sinned, and Jesus was fully human too, but also without sin nature. There is no reason to claim that Jesus was not like us unless he had a sin nature, because the sin nature is not “natural” to humanity.

[For more information on the purpose of the virgin birth, see commentary on Rom. 8:3.]

**“make ineffective.”** The Greek word is *katargeō* (#2673 καταργέω), which has a wide range of meaning and therefore must be translated according to the context. Some of the meanings of *katargeō* are: to cause someone or something to be ineffective or unproductive; to render idle, or inactive, or inoperative; to make ineffective; to deprive of force or influence; to put an end to, do away with (thus the translation in many versions, “destroy”); and to be separated from.

Many versions have the word “destroy,” and read, “destroy him who has the power of death” (cf. ESV, KJV, NIV84). However, R. C. H. Lenski correctly notes in his commentary on Hebrews that “destroy” is an “inexact” translation, because the Devil still exists and murders.[[27]](#footnote-16709) Thus, Jesus did not actually “destroy” the Devil through his death; rather, Jesus’ death made the Devil’s work ineffective. Even if our body is killed, the Devil’s work has been made ineffective because Jesus Christ conquered the power of the grave. F. F. Bruce stated it well and poetically when he wrote: “Jesus broke the Devil’s grip on his people when in death he became the death of death.”[[28]](#footnote-10551)

Of course, we know that Jesus’ death set in motion the events that will lead to the destruction of the Devil, but even so, the destruction of the Devil is not the point of the verse. The point of the verse is that through the death of Christ, the Devil has been made ineffective. He can rant and rage, and even kill, but his power has been broken because Jesus conquered death. Many translators have seen this truth and do not use the word “destroy” in their versions. Some ways *katargeō* has been translated include: “bring to naught” (Cassirer); “annul” (DBY); “dethrone” (Goodspeed); “put out of commission” (Lenski); “render powerless” (NASB); “break the power” (NIV); “abolish the effects” (Nyland) “paralyze” (Rotherham); “put a stop to” (Williams). Thank God that through the death of Jesus Christ, the Devil and all his power has been made ineffective. Every Christian will live forever.

**“through death he could make ineffective the one who holds the power of death.”** Lenski[[29]](#footnote-29687) points out that it is almost ironic that it was through Jesus’ death that the one who holds the power of death is made ineffective, but that is the way God designed the sacrificial death of Christ. In this life, there is a war between Good and Evil, and human death and life are in the balance. The Devil almost always has some influence on when and why people die, and sometimes the Devil can manipulate things and directly cause a person’s death. In contrast, God hates death and does not want people to die, which is why He offers everlasting life to people (John 3:16).

[For more on God not being in control of everything that happens on earth, see commentary on Luke 4:6.]

**“Devil.”** The Greek word is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος), which literally means “Slanderer,” but *diabolos* gets transliterated into English as our more familiar name, “Devil.” Slander is so central to who the Devil is and how he operates that one of his primary names is “the Slanderer.”

[For more information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

Heb 2:15

**“by their fear of death.”** The Devil holds the power of death—he can kill the body. That is fearsome power. Death is feared by almost everyone. However, Jesus died and “made ineffective” the Devil’s power of death. Yes, the Devil may kill, but the righteous will get up. As Jesus himself said, “the gates of the grave” (sometimes misunderstood as “the gates of hell”) will not be able to retain those who have given their lives to Jesus and become saved. They will get up from the grave, and overcome death. If believers clearly understood that Jesus will get them up from the grave—that his promise of everlasting life is sure and steadfast—the anxiety and mental and sometimes physical slavery that comes from the fear of death would vanish.

[For more on the “gates of the grave,” see commentary on Matt. 16:18.]

Heb 2:16

**“Indeed.”** The Greek is *gar* (#1063 γάρ), and is usually translated “for” and understood to communicate a reason for something. However, that use of gar does not fit this verse. Rather, this is what some scholars refer to as the “confirmatory *gar*” which confirms and clarifies what has already been stated. (see commentary on Rom. 9:3).

**“it hardly needs to be said.”** The Greek is *dēpou* (#1222 δήπου, pronounced 'day-poo), and it “is used when something is affirmed in a slightly ironical manner.”[[30]](#footnote-20341) Nyland translates it, “I hardly need to say,”[[31]](#footnote-11036) and Lenski, “it hardly needs to be said.”[[32]](#footnote-14934) There was a lot of emphasis on angels in the Jewish religion, so much so that Colossians 2:18 mentions the worship of angels. But angels are not under the Devil’s power of death, and are not afraid of dying, so Jesus did not die to free them from that power of the Devil. Thus, the verse is appropriate; that in spite of all the attention angels get in the Jewish religion, it hardly needs to be said that Jesus did not come to help (primarily in the context of death and fear of death) angels, but to help people, so “he was obligated to become like his brothers in every respect” and die for them.

Heb 2:17

**“had to.”** The Greek word is *opheilō* (#3784 ὀφείλω), and it means to owe; to owe money, be in debt for. It is used of an obligation, or a moral obligation, and it is often used that way in the NT (cf. Eph. 5:28). However, BDAG says, “to be constrained by circumstances; have to,” and that is its meaning here, which can be seen especially in combination with “be made,” which is in the passive voice.[[33]](#footnote-11428) The circumstances dictated that Jesus had to “be made” (passive; made by God) like his brothers. The only way Jesus could have been a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God was that he “had” to be made like his brothers in every way.

Hebrews 2:17 gives good support to the Biblical Unitarian position that Jesus is not God in the flesh. Many Trinitarians argue that Jesus must be God in order to atone for sins. However, Hebrews 2:17 says quite the opposite, namely, that Jesus needed to be “like his brothers and sisters in every respect…so that he could wipe away the sins of the people.” A god-man is not like the rest of humankind, but a man is. Thus, Jesus needed to be a sinless (1 Pet. 2:22) human to be the true substitute for humankind, and that is exactly what the Scriptures call him (1 Tim. 2:5). Jesus was “made” (passive voice in the Greek) like other humans in every way by God. Jesus did not differ from other people by being some kind of god-man; he was the “last Adam,” the man who conquered sin, and he was a faithful High Priest to God, not a High Priest who was also God.

[For more on Jesus Christ being fully human and not a god-man, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

**“in every respect.”** The Greek is *pas* (#3956 πᾶς), in this case in the plural (*panta*), and it means “all” or “every.” The word “all” is used as “all without exception,” or as “all with some exceptions,” depending on the context. In this case, God is making the point that Jesus was like other priests in that he was tempted and suffered, which helped him be a “merciful and faithful” High Priest. This verse is not making an ontological claim about the nature of Jesus and saying that he was like every other person in every single way, including having a sin nature. We can see the word *pas* being used in the same way as “all with some exceptions” in Hebrews 2:8 when God says He put “all” things under his feet but then says not everything is under his feet yet, and furthermore, we know that God is not included in that “all” (1 Cor. 15:27).

[For more on Jesus not having a sin nature, see commentary on Heb. 2:14.]

**“wipe away.”** The Greek word is *hilaskomai* (#2433 ἱλάσκομαι). *Strong’s Lexicon*, and other Greek-English lexicons such as Thayer’s, gives the definition as “to expiate, make propitiation for.” BDAG gives us a little more detail, saying, “to eliminate impediments that alienate the deity, *expiate, wipe out*,” and it points out that is the reading in the Moffatt Bible: “*to expiate the sins of the people*,” (which is also the reading in the *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*). Also, however, BDAG points out that the NRSV translates this as, “make a sacrifice of atonement.” Hendriksen and Kistemaker point out that the purpose of Christ’s being the High Priest was to make atonement for the people, and write: “The term ‘atonement’ is a theological one with profound meaning: it is often explained by other, even more difficult, terms such as “propitiation” and “expiation.”[[34]](#footnote-30671) Difficult indeed! What English speaker uses these words in everyday life, and is the biblical concept so difficult to explain that we need words that we have to look up to understand? And if we can understand them by looking them up, can we not just use those simple definitions in place of the difficult words? What is the verse really saying?

The reason theologians default to difficult theological terms often has to do with the fact that in theological circles, the terms become “loaded,” that is, they are given meanings that come from theology, not from lexical meaning. “Propitiate” means to appease; gain or regain goodwill; and a “propitiation” is something that propitiates, i.e., something that appeases or regains goodwill. “Expiate” simply means to extinguish the guilt incurred by something and also make amends for something.[[35]](#footnote-13706) Also, according to *Merriam-Webster,* at the time the early English Bibles, such as the KJV, were being translated, “atonement” meant “reconciliation,” and that is the meaning that has continued into modern theology.

The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible notes that “atonement” refers to a “harmonious relationship,” or that which brings about such a relationship, i.e., “reconciliation,” and it says “atonement” “is primarily used of the reconciliation between God and man effected by the work of Christ.”[[36]](#footnote-11419) Thus, the translation in some Bibles, “a sacrifice of atonement,” is a “sacrifice that procures reconciliation,” and that is not a bad translation in this verse.

We can see why Friberg’s Lexicon gives the definition of *hilaskomai* as, “*bring about reconciliation, make acceptable to, provide for forgiveness*, with focus on the means of reconciliation.” Given the range of the meaning of *hilaskomai*, that it has to do both with bringing about reconciliation and also forgiveness, Louw-Nida leans toward forgiveness and gives the meaning of *hilaskomai* as “to forgive, with the focus upon the instrumentality or the means by which forgiveness is accomplished...‘so that the people’s sins would be forgiven’ or ‘so that God would forgive the people’s sins.’” The Source NT (A. Nyland) goes in that direction by translating the phrase: “so that he could take away the sins of the people.” The NLT (New Living Testament) also says, “take away,” and the CEB (Common English Bible) says, “wipe away.”

Since the word *hilaskomai* is a verb, and the object is “the sins of the people,” we can see the strength of the translation given by Louw-Nida: “so that the people’s sins would be forgiven.” It is easy to understand, quite lexically sound, and in forgiving the sins of the people, God is obviously reconciled back to the people (if He were not, He would not have forgiven their sin). However, in light of the fact that there are well-accepted words for “forgive,” it seems that “wipe away” was a good translation. Actually, more support for “wipe away” comes from the Septuagint. F. F. Bruce writes: “The NT use of these words follows the precedent of the LXX [Septuagint], where...they are chiefly used as equivalent of the Pi’el conjunction of the Hebrew k-p-r and its derivatives. Whether the etymological force of this Pi’el conjugation is “cover completely” or “wipe out,” its cultic [religious] use denotes the restoration of a relationship between God and mankind which has been broken by man’s sin....”[[37]](#footnote-13949) Thus, there is good evidence for the translation, “wipe away” in this verse, and the wiping away of sins restores our relationship with God.

It is worth noting that *hilaskomai* is in the present tense, and Lenski notes: “the one act of Jesus is viewed in its continuous application to the sins of the people.” In other words, even though Jesus’ death was a one-time act, the forgiveness for sins that his death procured continues day after day.

Hendriksen and Kistemaker get the point of what the verse is trying to say: “the word...[ *hilaskomai*]...means that Jesus as High Priest brought peace between God and man. God’s wrath was directed toward man because of his sin, and man, because of sin, was alienated from God. ...Jesus offered himself so that the shedding of his blood covered our sins. Thus, we might be acquitted, forgiven, and restored. Jesus brought God and man together in inexpressible harmony.”[[38]](#footnote-12072)

In conclusion, what Jesus did as it is expressed in Greek is hard to express easily in English, which accounts for the many different English translations of Hebrews 2:17. But Jesus became the High Priest so that he could wipe away the sins of the people, and in so doing he appeased the wrath of God, removed the guilt of the people, and restored the harmony between God and man. What the Old Testament High Priest and sacrifices could only do in a token way, Jesus Christ actually and fully accomplished in removing the sins of the people.

[For more information, see commentary on Rom. 3:26.]

**Hebrews Chapter 3**

Heb 3:1

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek text is “brothers,” but that often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

Heb 3:2

**“appointed.”** The Greek word is *poieō* (#4160 ποιέω), to make or to do, in this context, God “made” Christ the high priest, so “appoint” is clearer than simply “made.” Lenski has “made him (what he is),” which would be a way to go if you wanted to keep the word “made” and still retain the meaning in the passage.[[39]](#footnote-28023)

**“in all His house.”** Moses was faithful in all of God’s house. In this context, the “His” refers to God, not Jesus.

Heb 3:3

**“Moses.”** Sometimes things that God has in His Word are not immediately apparent to us, even though they would have been immediately apparent to people living in the biblical culture at the time the Scripture was written. This is such a case. We may not know why God compared Moses to the Messiah here in Hebrews, but at the time Hebrews was written, it was not uncommon among the Jews to think of Jesus as a second Moses. This passage makes it clear that the Messiah was not a “second Moses,” but much greater than Moses.

Heb 3:7

**“the Holy Spirit says.”** “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8.

[For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit,” see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

**“if you hear his voice.”** The verb “hear” is in the second-person plural, subjunctive mood. It may be that God will not speak to us and therefore we will not hear His voice. But if He does speak to us, then we should not harden our hearts as the Israelites did in the desert.

Heb 3:9

These quoted verses break differently than the OT.

Heb 3:12

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

Heb 3:13

**“one another.”** The phrase “one another” occurs in the context of the community of believers, and while we are to be good to everyone, in the context of the New Testament Epistles, the commands toward “one another” are specifically to other believers. Christians are to be “especially good to the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). It is very important for the richness of our lives together here on earth, for our personal growth here on earth, and for rewards in the next life, that each Christian needs to be “other-focused,” focused on others and how we can help them. The phrase “one another” occurs many times in the New Testament, stating and reinforcing that truth.

[For more on the “one another” commands, see commentary on Gal. 5:13, “one another.” For more on “love one another,” see commentary on John 13:34.]

Heb 3:16

**“*was it* not all.”** There is a question about whether or not the text should read “*was it* not all” as if all did rebel, or “not all” as if all did not. But the meaning clearly seems to be as we have it.[[40]](#footnote-27052)

**Hebrews Chapter 4**

Heb 4:1

**“lest any of you fails to reach it.”** The Greek text has the word *dokeō* (#1380 δοκέω), which can mean to seem, to think, to suppose, etc. This causes more literal versions such as the KJV to say things such as: “any of you should seem to come short of it.” This is very confusing to the English reader. Do people fall short, or do they just “seem” to fall short? The key to understanding the verse is to realize that the Greeks had a “rhetorical” use of *dokeō*, in which the word was used by way of courtesy to moderate a statement so it would not seem to be so harsh.[[41]](#footnote-16448) The problem is that we do not use “seem” in that way, so if we translate it into our English version it imports a meaning that the Greek text does not have. The verse is saying that people should “fear” (be afraid and therefore careful) that they do not miss the rest God has provided, which is still open to them.

Heb 4:3

**“(for we who have believed enter into that rest).”** The quotation that follows this statement applies to the people in verse 2 who heard the Word but did not trust God. God swore people like that would never enter His rest—the Millennial Kingdom. The Holman Christian Standard Bible also has the parenthesis.

**“enter.”** In Greek the verb translated enter, *eiserchomai* (#1525 εἰσέρχομαι) is in the present tense. The proleptic sense of the verb is clear, for the context shows us that “there still remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.” In that sense, it would not be wrong to consider the verb as a future tense, and translate the phrase, “for we who have believed will enter into that rest.” God uses the present tense on purpose, however. The New Birth guarantees the believer a place on the New Earth when Jesus sets up his kingdom, and because of that guarantee, there is a certain sense of rest that the believer can enjoy. Although the REV uses the present tense, as does the Greek text, we must understand both its present and future implication.

Heb 4:7

**“after such a long time.”** David wrote that the people of God should not “harden their hearts” as they did at Meribah and Massah.

Heb 4:12

**“soul.”** The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is juxtaposed with “spirit,” but it is exceedingly difficult to pin down an exact meaning for either “soul” or “spirit” in this verse. G. W. Buchanan correctly observes that “The point of the author’s affirmation was to show that the Word of God could make divisions and distinctions that are impossible for human beings.”[[42]](#footnote-11771)

The context lets us know that the meanings of “soul” and “spirit” are not just the simple meaning where “spirit” refers to the gift of holy spirit in the believer and “soul” refers to the life of the body. This section of Scripture is about people, specifically Israelites, who did not take advantage of God’s offer to enter into His rest and were defiant (Heb. 4:6), nevertheless, God’s offer of a future rest still remains open (Heb. 4:1, 9). Of the many people who heard the message, some were openly defiant and did not enter into God’s rest (Heb. 4:6), some gave lip service to the offer but did not mix what they heard with genuine faith, and so did not enter in (Heb. 4:2), and others believed and will enter the rest God promised (Heb. 4:10). It is impossible for us to determine who is in which category, but the Word of God, which can divide between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and the considerations and intentions of the heart, can and does make that division and determination.

The context of Hebrews 4:12 is the Israelites of the Old Testament, the vast majority of whom did not have the gift of holy spirit upon them, and how they responded to the offer God made to them of entering into His rest, and how that offer still stands today. From that, we can see that the contrast between “soul” and “spirit” is not as simple as “soul” referring to “the soul life that animates the body” and “spirit” referring to “the gift of holy spirit,” although God can divide between those also. It seems clear that *psuchē*, soul, although used in a very broad manner including physical life, thought life, and emotional life, in this context, it emphasizes the thought and emotional life. In contrast, *pneuma*, “spirit,” here does not primarily mean the gift of holy spirit in the Christian, however, that meaning can be included in the overall interpretation, but rather refers to the seat of the spiritual life and people’s attitudes, as illustrated by the Israelites.

The use of “joints” and “marrow” in the verse adds to the evidence from the context that “soul” and “spirit” have a primary emphasis on our mental and emotional life and also our attitudes. Although God could dissect our physical bodies distinctly enough to divide our joints from our marrow, that does not seem to be the main point of the verse. Meyer points out that classical Greek literature used the word “marrow” to refer figuratively “to denote the innermost, most hidden depth of the rational life of man.”[[43]](#footnote-32302) It makes sense in the context of this chapter, which is about mankind’s response to God’s offer, that “joints” and “marrow” primarily refer figuratively to workings in the mind. Thus, this verse very thoroughly teaches us that all of the mental and emotional life of man is open before God.

Hebrews 4:12 is a verse that should cause each human to wake up and pay attention to his or her life. The God who created the Universe and is ultimately responsible for each of us being alive has made us an offer that we can “enter His rest” and live forever with Him. He holds us accountable for what we do, and, unlike people, He is never fooled by our words, however fine-sounding they are. His Word is both powerful and active, and divides every thought and action in our life, separating those that honor Him from those that are defiant and selfish. He becomes angry with people who ignore or defy Him (Heb. 4:3), and Judgment Day will be a sad day for those people who discover to their horror that while they could have had a wonderful everlasting life with God, they will be annihilated in the Lake of Fire. In contrast, Judgment Day will be a great day for those people who, after suffering through this life, finally get to enter God’s rest.

Another lesson we should learn from this verse is that it is the Word of God that is sharp enough to make judgments about life, not our human opinion. When making judgments and evaluations about this life, we should use “it is written” as our standard, just as our Lord did so often in his life. We must let the Word dwell in us richly, just as Colossians 3:16 tells us.

[For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Word Study: “Psuchē.” For more on “spirit” see Word Study: “Pneuma,” also commentary on Matt. 5:3.]

**“considerations.”** The Greek word translated “considerations” is *enthumēsis* (#1761 ἐνθύμησις), and it refers to “the process of considering something.”[[44]](#footnote-25362) It is not just a “thought,” because thoughts pop in and out of the mind all the time. Although it is good to have holy thoughts, God is not nearly as concerned about thoughts that pop in and out of the mind as He is about what people “think about,” that is, consider, mull over. The mind “considers” and then forms a conclusion.

Heb 4:13

**“to whom we *must give* account.”** This is the usual rendering of the Greek of the last part of Hebrews 4:13, and the majority of scholars favor this reading, or one that is similar. It is certainly true that a large number of other verses say that we must give an account of our lives to God.

We should not miss, however, that the Greek text of verse 13 ends with the phrase *ho logos* (ὁ λόγος), which is the same phrase that is translated “the word” in the opening of Heb. 4:12: “the word of God is living and active….” It is true that *logos* has many meanings, among them “word” and “account,” and so there is no grammatical problem with *logos* in verse 12 meaning “word” and *logos* in verse 13 meaning “account,” which is one reason most scholars favor that translation. Also, Hebrews 13:17 uses the word *logos* in the context of leaders giving an account.

We should take note of the fact, however, that there are some very knowledgeable scholars, among them R. C. H. Lenski and Ann Nyland, who feel that the word *logos* is used of the word of God in both verse 12 and verse 13. That changes the meaning of the verse significantly. Lenski would quite literally translate the phrase as: “to the eyes of him facing whom this Word is for us.”[[45]](#footnote-32667) That literal translation is very stilted and difficult to understand. What is clear, however, is that the Word, which is alive and active, and sharper than any double-edged sword, is “for us,” thus in some way committed to us. Nyland is more colloquial than Lenski, and goes with this translation: “in his [God’s] view the Word is our responsibility.”[[46]](#footnote-14260) That translation could well be the meaning of the verse, or certainly a meaning contained in the verse. There are certainly other verses that say that each believer has the responsibility to both live by, and use, the Word of God in a godly manner.

If we understand the meaning of *logos* in Heb. 4:12 as “word” and the meaning of *logos* in Heb. 4:13 as “account,” then the use of *logos* in verses 12 and 13 (which can be taken as one sentence in the Greek text), is the figure of speech antanaclasis (“word clashing,” the use of two different meanings of the same word in a phrase or sentence.[[47]](#footnote-30061)

[For more on the figure of speech antanaclasis, see commentary on 1 Sam. 1:24.]

[See Word Study: “Antanaclasis.”]

Heb 4:14

**“a great high priest.”** Jesus is our High Priest, and here he is called our “great high priest.” In the biblical context, “great” does not mean “wonderful” like in English vernacular when someone says, “That is great,” i.e., wonderful. In the biblical culture and context, a “great” priest was a priest with great power, authority, and influence. Jesus Christ is more than just a high priest, he is a powerful and influential High Priest with “all authority.”

Heb 4:15

**“empathize.”** The Greek word translated “empathize” is *sumpatheō* (#4834 συμπαθέω, pronounced soom-pa-'thĕ-ō). The translation is sometimes thought to be “sympathize,” following more closely to the spelling of the Greek, and “sympathize” can be a meaning in some contexts, but “empathize” is a more accurate translation in this verse. Empathy is when a person can understand and feel what another person is feeling. In contrast, sympathy is having compassion for the other person, but without necessarily feeling, or being able to feel or identify with, the other person’s feelings. “Sympathy” can be used in a much broader way than “empathy” because sympathy does not necessarily demand that a person be able to identify with the other person’s feelings, but only have a sense of what the person is going through. That is why, for example, we can sympathize with a cause that we support, such as helping the poor, but we cannot empathize with a cause.

Hebrews 4:15 is about empathy because Jesus Christ was tempted in every way, just like we are, and therefore he can feel what we are feeling on a personal, visceral level. It is not just that Jesus “understands” us, he can feel what we feel, and he empathizes with us. The Greek prefix *sum* means “with” or “together with,” and *patheō*, refers to ones passions, feelings, or experiences. Thus, Thayer lists one of the definitions of *sumpatheō* as “to be affected with the same feeling as another,”[[48]](#footnote-19954) Friberg lists one definition as, “showing a disposition to help because of fellow feeling.”[[49]](#footnote-22153) Kittel’s *TDNT* is very clear: “In Heb. 4:15 *sympatheō* does not signify a sympathetic understanding that is ready to condone, but a fellow feeling that derives from full acquaintance with the seriousness of the situation as a result of successfully withstanding temptation.”[[50]](#footnote-13695) Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible translates the phrase: “For we have not a high-priest unable to have fellow-feeling with our weaknesses….”

Christians should take comfort in the fact that Jesus does more than “sympathize” with us, he can feel what we are feeling—the hurt, pain, discouragement, and also the joy, excitement, and love. No wonder we can pour out our heart to him when we pray; he is listening and understanding us.

**“tempted.”** The fact that Jesus was tempted in every way, just like we are, helped him grow and mature, and makes us able to understand and identify with him. See commentary on Hebrews 2:10.

Heb 4:16

**“let us approach the throne of grace.”** The background of “approach the throne of grace” is the Old Testament. Up until the death of Christ, only the Levites who worked in the Tabernacle and then the Temple could approach God (every priest was also a Levite, a descendant of Levi, son of Jacob). Non-Levites could only approach God with a sacrifice or offering (cf. Lev. 1:1-3, 10, 14; 2:1; 3:1, 6, 12; ). If non-Levites approached God without an approach-offering they were to be put to death (Num. 1:51; 3:10, 38). The Tabernacle of Moses was surrounded by a high curtain that the Israelites could not see over, and the Temple was surrounded by a wall that kept the common people away from God. God was considered too holy to be around without one’s life being in danger, and it was only safe to come into His presence with an offering. Now, however, Jesus Christ has paid for the sins of all people by his death on the cross and become the approach-offering so that every person can openly approach God and worship Him intimately. Today we approach God boldly and enter into His presence through the veil by the blood of Christ (Heb. 10:19-23).

**“open and honest *speech*.”** The Greek word is *parrēsia* (#3954 παρρησία)*.* Some translations, including the KJV, say “boldly” or “boldness,” but in this context, which is a person coming before a powerful ruler, the English word “boldness” usually gives the wrong impression. P*arrēsia* was used to describe the complete openness and frankness of speech that the Greeks in the marketplace who were called upon to speak about political issues needed to have to maintain their democracy. It referred to speaking one’s mind without holding anything back, to honestly express how you felt, so perhaps “straightforwardness,” “candor,” “openness,” or “frankness” would be good translations.[[51]](#footnote-18894)

As it can be imagined, being totally open and honest about one’s ideas and feelings to a ruler was quite rare in the ancient world. It could get one in serious trouble (note what happened to John the Baptist when he confronted Herod). The Bible tells us that the common Jew would not speak with *parrēsia* (openness and honesty) about Jesus because they were afraid of the Jewish rulers (John 7:13). Because complete openness of speech required confidence and even boldness, it can be translated that way also, and is in other verses. However, to translate it “boldness” here in Hebrews 4:16 misses the point. The verse is not saying to be “bold” before God, as if we could swagger into His throne room and make demands on Him based upon our “rights.” Rather it is saying that we can be completely honest with Him, and lay our hearts out before Him knowing that we will find mercy and grace to help us. We can share our whole heart with God: our successes and our failures; our joys and our fears; our hopes and our disappointments. It is helpful to know, however, that because in certain contexts speaking openly required great boldness, “boldness” can be a good translation of *parrēsia* in some verses (cf. Acts 4:13).

**Hebrews Chapter 5**

Heb 5:5

Psalm 2:7 is quoted in three places: Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5 and 5:5. See commentary on Acts 13:33.

Heb 5:7

**“having been heard.”** This phrase can be confusing if we take it to only refer to Jesus’ prayer, “Take this cup from me,” because that prayer was not answered the way Jesus would have liked it to have been. Isaiah said that Jesus was a man of sorrow and familiar with grief (Isa. 53:3). Of course his greatest grief came in the last week of his life, and it is surely in light of his death that he became the author of salvation. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that all through his life he prayed fervently, often crying, as many people do when they pray. No one felt a greater connection to mankind, and a greater sorrow at their plight, than did Jesus. And as far as God answering Jesus’ prayers, one only has to read the Gospels to see Jesus pray and God answer over and over again. So we have a great lesson in this verse: Jesus prayed, and he was heard “because of his reverent submission.” The Bible says plainly that “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5). If we want our prayers answered consistently, we must become reverently submissive to the will of God, like Jesus was.

**“because of.”** The Greek preposition *apo* (#575 ἀπό), has a number of possible definitions, but the best fit in this context is to indicate a cause or means.[[52]](#footnote-17448) Why was Jesus heard? It was due to the way he had lived his life in total submission to God. When someone lives in a way that is totally honorable to God, God hears that person. That is why Scripture says God gives grace to the humble but sets His face against the proud (James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5). Some scholars assert that he was not heard “because of” his reverent submission, but “from” it. That would make the verse say that Jesus was praying in a state of reverent submission, and not like the submission with God’s hearing him. That would make the verse the equivalent of, “and he was heard from his posture of godly submission,” but that does not seem to be what the verse is saying. The fact that Jesus had, and always had, a posture of godly submission to the Father is not debated.

**“reverent submission.”** The Greek word is *eulabeia* (#2124 εὐλάβεια), and it is used only twice in the New Testament, both times in Hebrews (cf. Heb. 12:28). There has been much discussion among theologians as to what the word means. Generally in the NT, the Greek word *phobos* (which occurs almost 50 times, and is the origin of the English word “phobia”) is translated “fear,” and thus to use the word “fear” here when it is unnecessary seems to be potentially confusing. Wuest gets the sense of *eulabeia* correct when he says, “The picture in the word [*eulabeia*] is that of a cautious taking hold of and a careful and respectful handling.”[[53]](#footnote-17555) F. F. Bruce notes, “...the consistent meaning is reverence toward God,” and while he notes the translation “godly fear,” he also notes the translation of the NEB, “humble submission.”[[54]](#footnote-25002) “Godly fear” is a fine translation if one realizes the semantic range of “fear” and that in this context it refers to respect and reverence, not “fear” in the modern sense, and it is precisely because of the modern sense, and possible confusion with *phobos*, that we have avoided that translation.

Heb 5:8

**“(although he was a son…)”**This sentence is the figure of speech parembole, a type of parenthesis, which is complete in itself.[[55]](#footnote-24343) The context flows perfectly without the parembole, but it adds to the context.

**“suffered.”** Jesus matured in part due to the things he suffered. See commentary on Hebrews 2:10.

Heb 5:9

**“the source.”** The Greek word translated “source” here in Hebrews 5:9 is *aitios* (#159 αἴτιος) and when it is used in a context like this it means “cause, source”;[[56]](#footnote-15803) “responsible agent, cause”;[[57]](#footnote-29213) “cause, reason, occasion.”[[58]](#footnote-28679) A number of English versions have picked up on this and translate *aitios* as “source” (CJB, HCSB, ESV, NAB, NASB, NET, NIV, NJB, NLT, NRSV). Indeed, Jesus is the source of salvation, because through him everlasting life was made available.

It is vital that people understand that everlasting life comes through belief in Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:9), because belief in Jesus as Lord is the only sure way to have everlasting life. Although there may be some people on earth who have not heard of Jesus and may be saved by their righteous life (Rom. 2:14), no one who hears about Jesus and rejects him will be saved, and in the final analysis, if a person does not have everlasting life then they have nothing at all.

In calling Jesus the “source” of salvation it is understood that Jesus was not the ultimate and first cause, or source, of salvation, God is. Ages ago God designed His plan for our salvation and adoption into His family to be accomplished through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:5), and then Jesus fulfilled God’s plan. For that reason, translating *aitios* as “author,” as many of the older versions do, and saying that Jesus is the “author of salvation,” can be misleading (cf. DBY, RV, KJV, WEB). God was the original author, Jesus was the immediate cause, or source. (The misleading word “author” is also sometimes used in Hebrews 2:10).

Also, we should take note that the Greek text does not read that Jesus was “the source” of salvation, because there is no definite article in the Greek text. This is why Young’s Literal Translation reads that Jesus is “a cause” of salvation, and reads that Jesus “did become to all those obeying him a cause of salvation” (Heb. 5:9 YLT). We could translate the verse that Jesus was “a source” of salvation, with the understanding that Jesus was “the immediate source,” but it is unlikely that the people of the early Church put much emphasis on the technical wording of the text here and whether or not it had the definite article. They understood that God planned salvation and Jesus fulfilled it, and thus Jesus was the immediate source of their salvation, which is the focus of Hebrews 5:9.

[For more on Jesus Christ not being God and thus existing forever, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

**“in the age *to come*.”** This “age” is the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom. The Greek can mean either “everlasting salvation,” “salvation in the age to come,” or both. Here in Hebrews 5:9, the answer is “both,” but the emphasis is on the age to come. Almost everyone would acknowledge that the salvation that Jesus brought to humankind is everlasting. Salvation does not last for a time and then simply end and everyone dies. Salvation is forever. But salvation is fully granted in the age to come, which is why Romans 10:9 says that the person who confesses and believes “will be saved,” and why Romans 13:11 says that “our salvation is nearer now than when we *first* believed.” Christians today have a “guarantee” of salvation, but we are not “saved” yet, which is why believers die.

[For more on the translation, “in the age to come,” see Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

Heb 5:11

**“about this.”** The Greek phrase *peri hou* can be masculine (“about him”) or neuter (“about this,” “about which”). In this case, neuter carries the day because the discussion is about the comparison between Christ and Melchizedek, not only about Melchizedek the person. These Jews, who once were considering a Messiah, had become dull, and so the relation between Melchizedek and Christ would be hard to explain or expound.

Heb 5:12

**“indeed*.*”** *kai*.[[59]](#footnote-32073) The word *kai* (2x) is emphatic, making the same point at both the opening of the verse and in the second sentence. The RSV and NRSV have the sense, but attain it by ignoring the *kai* altogether.

**“obligated.”** The Greek is *opheilō* (#3784 ὀφείλω), and it has two major meanings: to be indebted to someone in a financial sense, or to be under obligation to meet certain social or moral expectations.[[60]](#footnote-19882) Mankind has a moral obligation to God to use their talents to further the kingdom. In this case, the hearers had heard long enough to be teachers of the subject but had stayed so long in disbelief, doubt, and hesitation that they needed someone to teach them again.

The beginning of the sayings of God would be the OT. These Jews needed a proper teaching on the first principles of what God has said, beginning in the OT.

**“words.”** The Greek word is *logion* (#3051 λόγιον, pronounced 'log-ee-on), and it is the diminutive of *logos*, “word” or “message.” Literally, it is “little words.” We can see why the Bible uses the word *logion* for communications from God because the Greeks used *logion* for the divine utterances of the oracles, particularly the Oracle of Delphi. The reason for that was that the messages from the oracles were typically short. Thus, in time, *logion* was used of the communications that came from the gods. We felt the translation “oracle” was too obscure for our English translation, although it occurs in many English Bibles, because the English word “oracle” has many meanings that do not apply. We went with “words” because it accurately represents that it is the words coming from God, and whereas the “word” of God means His entire communication, “words” of God can refer to smaller pieces of His revelation.

**Hebrews Chapter 6**

Heb 6:1

**“fundamentals.”** Technically, “beginnings,” as per Heb. 5:12, but since the beginnings of Christ might seem like his conception and birth instead of the beginning principles, we have gone with “fundamentals.” Why would we leave the fundamentals of Christ? The answer is in the verse, “to press on to maturity.” This is not saying that we forget the fundamentals, or that they are not important. But the Jews were famous for arguing to the point of exhaustion over the most simple of truths. The Rabbis debated for hours over words and the meanings of words that at some point we have to leave behind and press toward maturity in the faith so that we know the things of God, can be warriors in the spiritual battle, and help others master the fundamentals of the faith. Everyone who reads the scholarly commentaries on the Bible knows how sometimes they can miss the most obvious of truths, and then argue about them, all of which keeps people stuck in the fundamentals, not able to move on to maturity.

**“dead works.”** Works that are “dead,” they produce no life. It is not “works that produce death,” although that is true too. If all a person does is “dead works,” eventually he will end up dead, without everlasting life.

**“trust in God.”** The Greek text is more literally “trust on God” or “trust toward God,” but we would express that in English by saying “trust in God” (cf. HCSB, NAB, NET, NIV, NLT).

Heb 6:2

**“the age *to come*.”** This is the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[See commentary on Hebrews 5:9, and also see Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

Heb 6:4

**“holy spirit.”** This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

**“tasted.”** For more on this verb, see commentary on Matt. 16:28.

Heb 6:5

**“tasted.”** For more on this verb, see commentary on Matt. 16:28.

Heb 6:6

**“and *then* have fallen away [it is impossible] to renew them again to repentance.”** This verse reflects the permanence of salvation that is spoken of in so many other places in the Epistles. This verse is not about losing salvation and not being able to regain it, although that is what many people think. If this verse were about losing one’s salvation, then we need to be clear about what it is saying, because it would be saying that if a saved person “falls away” somehow and loses their salvation as a result, that person cannot be forgiven and be saved again because that is “impossible.”

Could this one verse in Hebrews contradict all of the other verses in the Epistles that indicate the New Birth is permanent? A principle of interpretation is that the many clear verses on a subject outweigh what a contradictory verse seems to be saying. Also, can it really be true that the Bible says if a saved person sins and falls away from the faith, it is “impossible” for him to get forgiveness and be saved again? Even in the Old Testament, God implored the people of Israel to forsake evil and return to Him. Could it be that in the Old Testament, a person could turn away from God but be accepted back with open arms if he would just ask God for forgiveness, but in the Christian Church, if a person sins and falls away, it is “impossible” for him to come back? That makes no sense.

A study of the Scripture shows us that people who sinned were welcomed back into the Christian community. For example, in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, the apostle Paul asked the Church to welcome back a person who had sinned. In Galatians 6:1, people who sin are to be “restored.” The Church Epistles are filled with exhortations for Christians to stop sinning and obey God. The invitation of God is always for people to stop sinning and come back to Him. That fact in itself tells us there is a different way to understand Hebrews 6:6 than believing it is saying a saved person cannot repent after sinning.

We also see God’s forgiveness and restoration daily in our churches. Our churches have many people who were strong in the faith at one time, then leave the faith for a while, then repent of their sin and return to church and the Christian lifestyle. Is there anyone who will say that all those people, who are now valuable members of the church, are actually not saved because it was “impossible” to renew them to the faith once they left the faith? We hope not.

If this verse does not mean that it is “impossible” for someone who left the faith to be forgiven and return to God, then what does it mean? It means that it is “impossible” to renew a sinner to repentance because once a Christian repents and gets saved, that salvation is permanent. It is “impossible” for the Christian to lose his salvation, so it is “impossible” for him to repent and get saved again. Every Christian can and does sin, but the sin, even egregious sin, does not cause a person to lose his salvation. Since the person’s salvation was never lost, the person cannot “renew” himself to “repentance.” Everyone can only repent and be saved one time. After that, when we sin, we can repent of our sin and be forgiven, but we do not get saved again because we never lost our salvation in the first place. Salvation is by the New Birth, and it is permanent.

What happens when a Christian sins and asks for forgiveness is clear from 1 John 1:8-9: “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” These verses in 1 John assume that Christians will sin. In fact, 1 John 1:8 says that if we think we do not sin, we are deceiving ourselves. However, neither 1 John nor any other book of the New Testament has a warning such as, “Be careful! We all sin, but if you sin so horribly you fall away, you will not be able to be saved again.” No! Instead are the comforting words that if we confess our sin, God will cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Scholars who have studied this section of Scripture do not know why God addressed the permanence of our salvation by telling us it was impossible to be renewed to repentance. However, there are a couple possibilities we should consider. One is that there are many other places God plainly indicates that it is impossible to lose salvation. He calls it “birth,” and birth is permanent. He says our salvation is “guaranteed” (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14). Furthermore, He says we are already in heaven (Eph. 2:6). Saying it is impossible to renew our repentance would be just one more way that God would tell us that our salvation is permanent.

It is also possible that given the prevailing Jewish mindset of salvation by works, the idea of a permanent salvation was very upsetting to those determined to cling to their Jewish heritage. Thus, Hebrews, rather than saying anything about someone losing his salvation, states the message in the opposite terms of it being impossible to repent again. If it were possible to renew oneself to repentance, then that would be saying that the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ was not sufficient to cover a person’s sins once and for all, which is not the case. The one-time sacrifice of Christ, and his substitution for the sinner, made that sinner righteous for all time, not just until he sinned the next time.

There is another good reason to believe that Hebrews 6:6 is about the permanence of salvation and not about a person falling away and then it being “impossible” for him to get saved again. There is no instruction in the New Testament about exactly what a Christian would have to do to fall away so completely that it would then be impossible for him to be saved again. Everyone sins, and the Word of the Lord is that to be forgiven, we just confess our sin to God. If there was a sin that was so horrible that it made regaining salvation “impossible,” it surely seems that our loving Father would let us know what that was. Our earthly fathers sternly warn us about dangers, and so it certainly seems that if there were a sin from which we could not repent, our Heavenly Father would certainly warn us of it. But there is no such warning. Nowhere in the Church Epistles is a warning saying, “Do not do such and such, because if you do, it will be impossible for you to regain your salvation.” That fact alone is very good evidence that this verse is not about a person losing his salvation and not being able to regain it. There is the verse about not being forgiven for blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, but this verse in Hebrews does not seem to be about that specific sin. Furthermore, Hebrews is written to people in the Grace Administration, when salvation is permanent, whereas Jesus was talking to people who lived before the Grace Administration started (see commentary on Eph. 3:2).

Having given good evidence that this verse is about the permanence of salvation, there is one more thing that we have to consider as to why God has worded this verse the way He did, which seems very harsh, and that has to do with the overall context of this section. The whole section is written in a harsh way, with serious warnings for people to be faithful. For example, Heb. 6:7-8 speak of land that is blessed if it bears good fruit, but cursed if it does not. Orthodox Christian doctrine about heaven and hell has done a great disservice to Christians in that it has not given clear reasons to excel as a Christian. Many preachers teach about heaven as if “just getting in” is what matters. While it is true that there is no greater blessing anyone can have than having everlasting life, there is a lot more to consider. For one thing, we will not spend eternity in “heaven,” but on earth, and we will be subjects in the Kingdom of Christ on earth. Our “jobs” in the Kingdom will be assigned in relation to how we have lived our lives on earth. If we have not been faithful, we will be there, but as Corinthians says, with nothing, just as someone who has survived a fire (cf. 1 Cor. 3:15; see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10). It is quite possible that a person living in the Kingdom with nothing, as if he had barely escaped a fire, is much worse than Christians generally imagine.

[See Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.”]

[See Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Heb 6:8

**“it is useless and close to being cursed; its end is to be burned.”** The text uses a very powerful and fitting agricultural metaphor here. The farmer plants seeds expecting them to grow and produce a valuable crop. But if the field produces only thorns and thistles, then the farmer will burn them. The timing of the agricultural cycle in the Middle East (the culture of the people to whom the book of Hebrews is addressed) is vital to understanding this verse.

In the Middle East, the agricultural cycle is very consistent: there are basically six months of dry weather followed by six months of rainy weather year after year. The “former rains” start in October/November and soften the ground, which has been baked hard in the sun since sometime in March/April. Farmers plant when the rains start and the ground is soft, and the crops grow through the rainy season, and harvests begin in April and go on through the summer; grain harvests, vegetable harvests, the grape harvest, and the fruit harvest. The fields are dry through that period and stay that way until the rains come back in October/November.

If a farmer plants a crop in November, but it turns out to be just thorns, he cannot burn it in the dry season lest he catches other people’s fields on fire (cf. Exod. 22:6), so he will wait until the rains start in the fall and then burn the field. So the field that grows thorns is “close to being cursed,” that is, the rainy season is close, only a few months away, and then “its end is to be burned.” The rains will start, and the field will be burned.

Thus, Hebrews 6:8 is a very expressive metaphor for the wicked. God gave them life so they could be a good crop, that is, be productive and love and obey Him. But instead, they reject Him and become “bramble people.” At that point God does not burn them up immediately in the Lake of Fire (cf. Rev. 20:14-15) but He waits until the end of the age when the wicked can be safely burned, but we should not be deceived by the time of waiting—in the end the wicked will be burned up, just as Hebrews 6:8 says.

Hebrews 6:8 is very similar to the Parable of the Good and Bad Seed (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43). In that parable, there is wheat (good seed) and darnel (poisonous seed). But the harvesters have to wait until the end of the age to separate the crops and burn the darnel. An important point in both Matthew and Hebrews is that the wicked are not destroyed now, but they will be in the future.

[For more on the wicked being annihilated in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**“its end is to be burned.”** Land that was blessed by God with rain but produces thorns and thistles was burned, so the weeds would have less chance of reproducing. This is a statement of fact, and not a pronouncement that believers who sin will be burned. That is clear from Heb. 6:9, which says, “But, beloved, we are persuaded of better things about you, even things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.” The whole book of Hebrews has a very serious tone to it. This should alert us to the fact that it is very important, much more important than many people take it to be, to first get saved and then obey God so that we are rewarded and not punished (1 Cor. 3:8, 13-17; 1 Thess. 4:6; 1 John 2:28). The literal Greek is confusing when brought into English, “which end is to be burned.”

This verse was also likely in the text because Hebrews is to the “Hebrews.” There is no verse in Hebrews that is the equivalent of Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:1, etc., that says the Epistle to the Hebrews is to those Hebrew people who are saved. While it makes sense that many Hebrews reading Hebrews would be Christians, there is no reason not to believe many of them would be unsaved, and a verse such as Heb. 6:8 would remind them that they had partaken of the goodness of God in the food and blessings He had provided, and if they defied him throughout their life, they would be burned. The “beloved” get better things (Heb. 6:9), but the unsaved need to fear God and His Lake of Fire.

Heb 6:14

Stated idiomatically in the text: “blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.”

Heb 6:15

**“having patiently endured.”** Abraham had to patiently endure before the promise of God, that he would have a “seed,” was fulfilled. We today patiently endure and wait for the coming of Christ and the Rapture. Abraham’s patient endurance did not bring the seed, and our patient endurance does not bring the Rapture. But we know that if God made the promise, He will fulfill it.

Heb 6:16

This is a difficult verse to translate because of the various phrases in the Greek that can be placed in different positions. This accounts for the differences in the English translations, which all seem to say the same thing in slightly different ways. A strictly literal rendition of the Greek is so awkward that it is hard to understand. The point of the verse is that people swear by things greater than themselves, and when an oath is given for confirmation, (such as “I swear by God”) that brings an end to the dispute. The Greek, not in the order of the Greek text, could be structured as follows:

καὶ αὐτοῖς ὁ ὅρκος εἰς βεβαίωσιν πέρας πάσης ἀντιλογίας

and for them the oath [*given*] for confirmation [is] an end of every dispute

Heb 6:17

**“more convincingly.”** The Greek is more literally, “more abundantly,” but in the context of convincing people of His intentions, “more convincingly” is a good translation.[[61]](#footnote-23463)

**“the unchangeableness of his purpose.”** God’s purpose, as stated here in Hebrews 6:17, was to the “heirs of the promise,” that is, the promise to Abraham and his believing heirs that there was a hope coming in the future which they would obtain. God’s purpose, which He was not going to change and so confirmed it by a promise and an oath, is to bring believers into a sure hope in the future.

Simon Kistemaker writes, “Reading Genesis 22:16-17, we received the impression that God gave the promise to Abraham, for he is the one who obtains the blessing. ‘I will surely bless you,’ God says to Abraham. But the writer of the Epistle to Hebrews makes the divine blessing applicable to all believers by calling them heirs of the promise. That means that God’s promise to Abraham transcends the centuries and is in Christ as relevant today as it was in Abraham’s time (Gal. 3:7, 9, 29).”[[62]](#footnote-16141)

God, for His part, has not changed His purpose of blessing believers and giving them a sure hope. Now it is up to people to believe in Christ and accept that wonderful hope. It is now like it was long ago: “Today I call heaven and earth to be witnesses against you, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life, that you may live….” (Deut. 30:19).

**“guaranteed it.”** The Greek word is *mesiteuō* (#3315 μεσιτεύω) and means to act as a mediator, or peacemaker, or to guarantee.[[63]](#footnote-22714)

Heb 6:18

**“two unchangeable things.”** The two unchangeable things are the promise, and the oath that confirmed the promise (see Heb. 6:17). Both the promise and the oath were “unchangeable” in that God could not go back on His word and undo His promise and oath. That God would point out two things here in Hebrews comes from the Old Testament statement that two witnesses are necessary to establish a testimony (cf. Deut. 17:6; 19:15; Matt. 18:16; John 8:17; 2 Cor. 13:1; Heb. 10:28).

This verse has been translated many different ways, in part due to the large number of phrases that can be moved into different positions in the verse. We feel that the way the Greek text has the phrases gives us significant insight into what God is trying to tell us. One of the major differences in the translations revolves around the verb “to flee” (often translated “who have fled”) and how it relates to the phrase about the hope. Compare the ESV, “we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope,” with the NASB, “we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us.” The NASB and similar versions have us fleeing for refuge in the hope, while the ESV has us fleeing for refuge, but leaves open the questions, “Flee from what,” and “What is the refuge?” These questions are answered in the context if the verse is translated in the natural word order of the Greek text, as the NASB and REV have done. We flee for refuge (which can also be translated, “found refuge”) in our hope.[[64]](#footnote-24836)

The chapter has been speaking of the destruction of the wicked, and the hope of the righteous (cf. Heb. 6:8, 11). But the hope with its promises (Heb. 6:12; which is the hope in its fullness, including rewards for the faithful) is not always easy to maintain, especially in the light of the earthly persecution we endure. We must have trust and patience (Heb. 6:12) to firmly hold it. Therefore, it helps to know that the hope is not a “maybe,” but rather a sure thing, so sure, in fact, that God guaranteed it by not just one, but two “unchangeable” things. And why did God swear by those things? “In order that…we may have strong encouragement.” The sad truth is that many who at one time in their life find refuge in our wonderful future hope, lose their confidence in it and abandon it, even sometimes returning to hopelessness. But we have no need to abandon our hope, no matter how difficult our lives are, because it is sure; after all, God guaranteed its coming with two unchangeable, or immutable, things.

Heb 6:19

**“soul.”** The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; and attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here *psuchē* is used broadly. While it could be understood as the person himself (“we have this hope as an anchor for our lives” HCSB), here the word “soul” certainly includes our attitudes, feelings, and emotions. The Hope anchors us mentally and emotionally.

[For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

**“extending.”** The Greek word is *eiserchomai* (#1525 εἰσέρχομαι), which is more properly “entering,” and is usually used with people or animals entering someplace. However, occasionally, as here, it refers to an object entering someplace, and in this case, that “entering” is by virtue of the anchor “extending” all the way to behind the veil of the holy of holies in the Tabernacle or Temple. In the ocean, an anchor is “sure and steadfast” if it firmly grips the bottom, and our anchor and hope are sure and steadfast because they reach into the very Holy of Holies itself, where God dwells.

In Moses’ Tabernacle and in Solomon’s Temple there were two main rooms: the outer room, the “Holy Place,” and the inner room, the “Holy of Holies.” The Holy Place was twice the length of the Holy of Holies, and it had the menorah (in Solomon’s Temple there were ten menorahs; 2 Chron. 4:7), the table of the Bread of the Presence, and the golden altar of incense. At the back of the Holy Place, the west end, there was a curtain (in Solomon’s Temple a door), and behind that curtain was the “Holy of Holies” which only had the “ark of the covenant” with its mercy seat lid and cherubim on top. The “ark” was a box, roughly 45 inches long, 27 inches wide, and 27 inches high (Exod. 25:10). The “mercy seat” was a solid gold lid that was placed over the ark, and there were two cherubim with outstretched wings on top of the mercy seat. God dwelt above the mercy seat and met the Israelites there and spoke to them from there (Exod. 25:22; Num. 7:89; 1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Kings 19:15). So, “behind the curtain” was not only the promise and commitment of God represented by the Ten Commandments, but the very presence of God Himself. So the Hope of the Christian is not just words, or as some doubters say it is, “pie in the sky by and by,” but it is the very promise of God based on God Himself who never lies (Titus 1:2). The Hope of resurrection into a new and wonderful everlasting life allows Christians to free themselves of the fear of death and help them live joyfully and boldly for God and the Lord Jesus.

Heb 6:20

**“after the order of Melchizedek.”** The record of Melchizedek is in Genesis 14:18-20.

**Hebrews Chapter 7**

Heb 7:1

**“Melchizedek.”** The record of Melchizedek is in Genesis 14:18-20. The kings who were slaughtered were the Mesopotamian kings mentioned in Genesis 14.

Heb 7:2

**“the translation *of his name*, king of righteousness.”** “Melchizedek” is perhaps more easily understood if it is spelled as a hyphenated word, “Melchi-zedek” (“My king is righteousness”).

Heb 7:3

**“Without father, without mother.”** Melchizedek has no genealogy in the Old Testament; he is only mentioned in Genesis 14:18-20 and Psalm 110:4. He was human, so he had a mother and father, but they were not the reason he was a priest. Once the Law was given to Moses, the Mosaic priesthood had to come through Aaron, the first High Priest, and then was passed down the bloodline from father to son. But the Messiah, Jesus Christ, was not part of the Mosaic priesthood and did not come from Aaron of the tribe of Levi, Jesus came from the tribe of Judah. Jesus is not a priest “after the order of Aaron,” but “after the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 7:17). The point of bringing Melchizedek up in this chapter is to show that God can choose a priest who is not from Aaron.

It is often taught that Melchizedek in the Old Testament was Jesus Christ. That is not correct. For one thing, Jesus could not be a priest “after the order of Melchizedek” if he was Melchizedek. Furthermore, the whole example of Melchizedek is to show that a person who has no previous priestly genealogy can be a priest of God simply by being chosen by God. But if Melchizedek is Jesus Christ, then he cannot be an example proving that Jesus Christ can be a priest “like Melchizedek” (Heb. 7:15) because he would have been Melchizedek. But the fact is that Jesus was not alive in the Old Testament, he was in the mind and plan of God.

[For more on Jesus Christ not being alive in the Old Testament, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

**“for all time.”** The Greek is *diēnekēs* (#1336 διηνεκής), meaning “uninterrupted,” “continually.” The word occurs four times, only in Hebrews (Heb. 7:3; 10:1, 12, 14).

Heb 7:6

**“promises.”** Abraham was blessed by God, and given many promises. Certainly, the greatest was that from his seed would come the Christ (Gen. 12:3), but he was also promised the land of Israel, hence the name, “the Promised Land” (Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 15:18-21; 17:8), and that he would be a great nation (Gen. 12:2), and would have a great name (Gen. 12:2), and be blessed by God (Gen. 12:2).

Heb 7:8

**“in the one case…in the other case”** The Greek *hōde* (#5602 ὧδε) is an adverb, which usually means “here”: “a position or point that is relatively near, *here*;” and also, “a reference to a present event, object, or circumstance; in this case, at this point, on this occasion, under these circumstances.”[[65]](#footnote-23834)

Heb 7:15

**“like Melchizedek.”** This seems clearly to be the meaning of the Greek in this verse.[[66]](#footnote-17306) “Likeness” is more literal, but misses the point here. Jesus’ priesthood was conferred by God “like” or “in the same way as” Melchizedek’s was.

Heb 7:20

**“*it was* done with the taking of an oath.”** The actual Greek of this phrase is a double negative: “Since *it was* not done without the taking of an oath.” For the sake of clarity, this double negative has been translated in a positive way.

Heb 7:21

**“change his mind.”** God does on occasion change His mind in response to what people do, but not about some things, and that the Messiah would also be a priest is one of those things.

[For more on God changing His mind, see commentary on Jer. 18:8.]

Heb 7:22

**“covenant.”** The Greek word is *diathēkē* (#1242 διαθήκη). This word was used in the Septuagint over 250 times as the translation of the Hebrew word *berith*, covenant. A covenant was usually an agreement between two or more parties, and the Greek word can have that meaning.[[67]](#footnote-15950) There are theologians who say that a covenant with God was one-sided, and that is why *diathēkē*, which was most often understood to be the will of one person (such as a last will and testament) was used to translate *berith*. However, although there are one-sided covenants, that was the exception, not the rule. In fact, the “Old Covenant” was clearly an agreement between God and the people (Exod. 24:5-8), with the people agreeing to obey God and follow His commands. The Greek word *diathēkē* was translated as *testamentum* in the Latin Versions, and the English word “testament” comes from that Latin root.

Heb 7:25

**“for all time he is able to save.”** The versions are split over the translation of the word *pantelēs* (#3838 παντελής), whether it means here save “completely,” “to the uttermost” (cf. ESV, NIV, NET, KJV, ASV) or save “for all time,” “always” (cf. NASB, NRSV, HCSB, NAB). As usual, the context should be our guide, and in this case, the context favors the understanding that Christ is able to save *for all time*. Heb. 7:23-24 lay out the problem with the old priesthood; namely, that the former priests were prevented from continuing in their office because they died. This is contrasted with Christ who holds his office permanently, and so he, unlike the former priests, can save us for all time.

Heb 7:26

**“appropriate.”** We needed Christ to be our High Priest, but that is not the point that God is making here. He is making the point that Christ needed to have certain qualities as our High Priest in order to be able to fulfill what was needed to accomplish our redemption. Christ was not like the Levitical priests who were not undefiled, separate from sinners, etc.

**“devout.”** The Greek word is *hosios* (#3741 ὅσιος), not *hagios* (#40 ἅγιος), which is the usual word for “holy” (and occurs over 230 times in the New Testament). *Hosios* occurs 8 times in the New Testament and means “devout, pure, dedicated, holy.” When used of people, it is used of those who observe their duty to God and fulfill their obligations to Him. *Hosios* has a range of meanings and can also refer to things that are generally used in worship to God and are “pure” (“pure hands” 1 Tim. 2:8), or “sacred” (Acts 13:34, “sacred promises”). *Hosios* also sometimes refers to the outward standard of that which constitutes holiness, and in those cases, because English does not have a good equivalent for *hosios*, “holy” may be the best translation even though an English reader cannot tell it from *hagios*.[[68]](#footnote-17829) *Hosios* is also used to refer to the inner nature of God and Christ, which is pure and devout. A priest must not only be “holy” in character on the inside, he must be “devout and dedicated” on the outside.

[For more on *hosios* and how it differs from *hagios*, “holy,” see commentary on Titus 1:8.]

**Hebrews Chapter 8**

Heb 8:2

**“the holy places.”** The Greek is *tōn hagiōn*, more literally, “of the holy” (neuter plural) which can refer to the “holy places” or “the holy things.” However, as F. F. Bruce points out, in Hebrews the neuter plural regularly refers to the holy places, or as a whole, the heavenly Tabernacle or Temple.[[69]](#footnote-20965) If Jesus is the High Priest ministering in the holy places, then he is also attending to the holy things.

**“true Tabernacle.”** Hebrews 7 showed the weakness of the Aaronic priesthood and how much better Jesus Christ was as the new High Priest. Hebrews 8 continues that theme and shows that Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, where he now ministers as High Priest, not in an earthly “Tabernacle” (the Greek word is actually “tent,” we get Tabernacle from the context and scope), but in a Tabernacle in heaven. There is some evidence that God has a Tabernacle, or more likely, a Temple in heaven. In that case, it is quite possible that the earthly Tent of Meeting (“Tabernacle”) set up by Moses was a sort of copy similar to the one in heaven, and so God gave Moses the pattern for how the earthly Tent of Meeting was to look (Exod. 25:9, 40; Num. 8:4; Heb. 8:5; Rev. 11:19; 14:15, 17; 15:5, 6, 8; 16:1, 17).

The old is replaced by the new in Jesus Christ. The old Tent of Meeting and Temple on earth are replaced by the heavenly ones, the Aaronic High Priests are replaced by Jesus Christ, a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, and the old animal sacrifices are replaced by the blood of Christ.

Heb 8:5

**“This is why.”** The Greek is *kathōs* (#2531 καθώς), here relating the cause, which is why many modern versions use “for” or “this is why.”[[70]](#footnote-24467)

**“warned *by God*.”** From *chrēmatizō* (#5537 χρηματίζω). The word has the connotations of *divine instruction* and/or *warning*. The context makes it clear that here warning is the stronger meaning—and, interestingly, in all other instances of the word in the book of Hebrews (Heb. 11:7, 12:25). For more on this word, see commentary on Matthew 2:12, “instructed *by God*”.

Heb 8:8

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Heb 8:10

**“So this.”** The *hoti* at the start of the phrase is a “consecutive *hoti*,” giving the result of what had gone on before. In this case, it does not mean “because.”[[71]](#footnote-16002)

**Hebrews Chapter 9**

Heb 9:4

**“having a golden altar of incense.”** At first reading this seems clearly to be an error, because the golden altar of incense was in the Holy Place, not the Holy of Holies (cf. Exod. 30:6). However, it is clear from reading the book of Hebrews that the author is very familiar with the Old Testament and Jewish history, and would not have made such a mistake. To understand this verse we must be “sympathetic listeners,” people who are looking for the lesson in what is being said.

The word “having” is *echō*, which is the common Greek word that means “to have.” But “have” has lots of meanings and a wide semantic range, and those meanings include “having to do with,” or as we would say, “having something to do with.”[[72]](#footnote-29831) All one has to do is read the Old Testament about the golden altar of incense to see that, although it is physically in the Holy Place, its function was tied to the Holy of Holies. When it is first described in Exodus, it is not associated with the Holy Place and the menorah and table of the Bread of the Presence, but is associated with the ark of the testimony (Exod. 30:6). Then, when it was described in 1 Kings when Solomon built the Temple, it was said to “belong” to the Holy of Holies: “So he overlaid the whole interior with gold. He also overlaid with gold the altar that belonged to the inner sanctuary” (1 Kings 6:22 NIV84).

Although the altar of incense was to be burning every day, it was the burning incense from the altar of incense that the High Priest was to take with him into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. The smoke from the incense would conceal the mercy seat of the ark, which had the cherubim on top (Lev. 16:12, 13). Thus, the golden altar of incense was intimately connected with the Holy of Holies (see commentary on Exod. 40:5).

Heb 9:5

**“cherubim of glory.”** This does not mean “glorious cherubim,” but rather is a genitive of possession or relation: the cherubim that are related to, and belong to, the glory of God that was his presence that lived between the cherubim (Num. 7:89; Exod. 25:22; 40:38).

**“atonement-cover.”** Traditionally called the “mercy seat” (for more information on it, see the commentary on Exod. 25:17).

Heb 9:7

**“once a year.”** The High Priest entered the Holy of Holies only one day a year, the Day of Atonement. On that day he entered two times, both with blood, the first time for his own sin and then a second time for the sin of the people of Israel (Lev. 16:1-17).

Heb 9:8

**“the Holy Spirit,”** literally, “the Spirit, the Holy *one*….” This refers to God, who was the one who established the Tabernacle and its rituals.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

**“the way into the Holy *of Holies*.”** Literally, “the way [road] of the Holy,” a genitive of relation. The High Priest would take a path (not a literal specific path, but simply the path or way he would walk through the Tabernacle court, then enter through the first Tabernacle curtain into the Holy Place, walk through the Holy Place and enter through the second curtain and into the Holy of Holies (or Most Holy Place; Exod. 26:33-34) where the ark of the covenant was kept. The “road of the Holy of Holies” was not revealed to those standing outside the Tabernacle. What went on behind the curtain was not clear to them.

**“revealed.”** The Greek is *phaneroō* (#5319 φανερόω), which means to make manifest, to make known, to be revealed or disclosed. The people were not allowed into the Holy Place or the Holy of Holies, and they could not even see inside it.

Heb 9:11

**“good things to come.”** There is a variant reading that is very well attested that reads, “good things that have already come” (thus the ESV, HCSB, NIV, etc.), but the reading in the REV, NASB, NET, etc., is well attested also.

Several things militate against the reading “have already come.” The context of the chapter is the new covenant and the heavenly sanctuary, which, although they have been ratified spiritually, are not as yet a reality for those of us on earth, so, since we are not currently enjoying the New Covenant promises, it is hard to see how they can be said to be already here. Secondly, Hebrews 10:1, which continues the subject, is not in dispute and it refers to the things that are to come, not to what is here now.

Heb 9:12

**“everlasting redemption.”** The Greek can mean either “everlasting redemption,” “redemption of the age to come,” or both. Here in Hebrews 9:12, the answer is “both,” but the emphasis seems to be on the everlasting redemption in contrast to offerings for sin that had to be offered over and over. Nevertheless, our redemption is fully granted in the age to come, so there is an undertone of redemption in the age to come in the verse. For an emphasis on the age to come with an undertone of “everlasting,” see commentary on Hebrews 5:9.

Heb 9:13

**“and the ashes of a heifer.”** This is referring to the Red Heifer (Num. 19). A red heifer was burned to ashes, then those ashes were mixed with living water and that mixture was sprinkled on unclean people so that they would become clean, as described in Numbers chapter 19.

Heb 9:14

**“through the everlasting spirit.”** This is a reference to God’s gift of holy spirit, which has been helping people since Genesis, age after age. The “the” is latent in the preposition *dia* “by,” (see commentary on Matt. 1:18). The gift of holy spirit that Yahweh put upon people in the Old Testament helped people from Genesis to Pentecost (at which time a different quality gift of holy spirit was poured out; see *The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be Like Christ*, by Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit). That holy spirit helped Moses and the leaders of Israel (Num. 11:17). It helped the Judges of Israel walk with God in power (Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29); it helped David rule (1 Sam. 16:13). Jesus told the apostles that the spirit would guide them (John 16:13). Jesus himself needed the spirit of God, and received it at his baptism when it came in the form of a dove. He walked in the guidance and power of that spirit, and so it was that by that spirit he was able to offer himself as a lamb without blemish.

**“without blemish.”** See commentary on Ephesians 1:4.

**“cleanse our conscience.”** The work of Christ does not just cleanse us spiritually before God, it also has the power to cleanse the conscience. This is important because the sin nature in people works in such a way that everyone sins. Despite our best efforts, our fallen nature works against us and we sin. Paul wrote about this in Romans 7, concluding with “O wretched man that I am” (Rom. 7:24). Because we sin even when we don’t want to, and/or seem to have no control over some of the sinful things in our lives, it is common for people to have a guilty conscience about certain things in their life—things that are therefore difficult or impossible to discuss; things that we hide from others and often try to hide from ourselves. But the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin—all sin—including the sin we can’t seem to stop committing, the sin that makes us feel guilty before God. The difficult task of the believer is to give the Lord the credit for that cleansing and be mentally strong to challenge and defeat any guilty conscience we might have when we sin when we do not want to. That is because we can be forgiven but not “feel” forgiven. We have to take charge of our feelings and confess what the Word says until our feelings change. If we are cleansed from sin, then we are cleansed from sin.

The REV reads “our” but the Greek manuscripts are divided and so are the English versions, with many reading “our” and many reading “your.” The text note in the NET Bible is a good brief description of the problem: “The diversity of [manuscript] evidence makes this a difficult case to decide from external evidence alone. The first and second-person pronouns differ by only one letter in Greek, as in English, also making this problem difficult to decide based on internal evidence and transcriptional probability. In the context, the author’s description of sacrificial activities seems to invite the reader to compare his own possible participation in OT liturgy as over against the completed work of Christ, so the second person pronoun ‘your’ might make more sense. On the other hand, *TCGNT* 599 argues that ‘our’ is preferable because the author of Hebrews uses direct address (i.e., the second person) only in the hortatory sections. What is more, the author seems to prefer the first person in explanatory remarks or when giving the logical grounds for an assertion (cf. Heb. 4:15; 7:14). It is hard to reach a definitive conclusion in this case, but the data lean slightly in favor of the first person pronoun [i.e., “our].” Another reason for thinking that “our” was the original reading is that the author clearly thought of himself (or herself) as one who had been cleansed by Christ, and therefore would have most likely included himself by using “our.”

**“dead works.”** See commentary on Hebrews 6:1.

Heb 9:15

**“the promise of the inheritance in the age *to come*.”** “The inheritance” in the age to come is everlasting life in the Kingdom of God (see commentary on Gal. 5:21).

**“in the age *to come*.”** This is the new Messianic Age, the Millennial Kingdom.

[See Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.”]

Heb 9:19

**“of the law.”** The Greek has the preposition *kata* (#2596 κατά), which in this case receives the action of what was spoken. In this context it is not “according to the Law,” for that would mean that the Law told Moses to speak, which it did not. Moses spoke the Law, not “according to the Law.”

**“the Book.”** Exodus 24 never mentions that the Book of the Law was itself sprinkled with blood, but it must have been. Even though the words were the Word of God, the book was made by man, and as such needed to be cleansed with blood.

Heb 9:21

**“he sprinkled the tent and all the articles of the ministry with the blood.”** That Moses did this is not specifically mentioned in the Old Testament, but there is good evidence that it happened. For example, Josephus says the Tabernacle was anointed with blood and oil (Antiquities 3.8.6). This sprinkling did not happen at the time the Old Covenant was made with Israel on Mount Sinai (Exod. 24) because the Tabernacle had not been built yet. Therefore, it had to be sprinkled with blood at a later time, perhaps when it was set up, although Exodus 40 only mentions it being anointed with oil. Some scholars believe that this happened annually on the Day of Atonement, and that is likely true. Leviticus 16:11-19 says that on the Day of Atonement the High Priest sprinkles blood on the mercy seat above the ark of the covenant, and also on the altar, and that he atones for “the Holy Place, the Tent of Meeting and the altar” (Lev. 16:20). That the earthly Tabernacle had to be sprinkled with blood was due to the sins of the people: “and he [the High Priest] will make atonement for the Holy Place because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel and because of their transgressions, even all their sins; and so he will do for the Tent of Meeting that dwells with them in the midst of their uncleanness” (Lev. 16:16). The “atonement” that the High Priest made for the Holy Place, the Tabernacle itself, and the altar, was made with blood, and was a type of the sacrifice of Christ, whose blood would atone for human sin once and for all.

Heb 9:23

**“heavenly *people*.”** Hebrews 9:23 says, “it was necessary for the copies of the things in heaven to be cleansed with these *sacrifices*, but the heavenly *people* themselves with better sacrifices than these.” The last phrase in the Greek text of Hebrews 9:23 simply has the adjective “heavenly,” but does not supply a noun object to the adjective, so the phrase literally reads, “the heavenly themselves.” To fully understand what the text is saying, the adjective “heavenly” needs to have a noun object associated with it. Almost all English translations supply the noun “things,” so the Bible reads “heavenly things.” But is that translation correct? What “heavenly things” need to be cleansed by sacrifices, and what sacrifices in the Bible have atoned for heavenly things? Furthermore, we should ask why the writer of Hebrews did not supply a noun object to the adjective “heavenly” so readers would understand the point he or she was making.

Historically, scholars have set forth three main possibilities for the object of “heavenly.” These are, first, “heavenly things,” that is, objects in heaven such as the Temple of God and its vessels that exist in heaven;[[73]](#footnote-28714) second, heavenly things marred by the sin of Satan and perhaps even angels;[[74]](#footnote-24610) and third, “heavenly ones,” believers on earth, perfecting their conscience in the process (Heb. 9:9).[[75]](#footnote-16613) All of these options are grammatically possible, but we will see that the context and scope of Scripture point to the fact that it is human beings that need to be cleansed from sin.

Contextually, Hebrews 9 makes it clear that the sacrifice which cleanses these heavenly “whatevers” is Jesus’ sacrificial death. In Hebrews 9:12, 14, 15, 24, 26, and 9:28 the author is discussing the new covenant through Christ’s blood. All around the passage in question is the atonement of Jesus and its superiority to the old covenant sacrifices. We do not have to guess as to which “sacrifice” was better; it is stated throughout the context and refers to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Knowing that the better sacrifice being referred to in Hebrews 9:23 is the sacrifice of Christ helps us eliminate some interpretive options. Let’s discuss option one, that the “heavenly” in Hebrews 9:23 could be referring to the Temple in heaven and objects associated with it. The problem with that option is that there is no indication in Scripture that anything in heaven needs cleansing with blood. God dwells in the Temple in heaven (Heb. 9:11, 24; Acts 17:24), and God’s Temple is repeatedly called holy (Ps. 11:4; Jon. 2:7; Hab. 2:20). So when it comes to the Temple in heaven and the things associated with it, there is no solid Scriptural reason to suspect that sin would be present there, and thus we should not expect it to need purification or cleansing with sacrifices. Although some scholars have said that God’s Temple in heaven needs to be cleansed, there is not one reference in the Bible that refers to Jesus’ blood cleansing God’s Temple in heaven, and in fact, that possibility would likely never even have been suggested if it were not for Hebrews 9:23.

Interestingly, a number of scholars say outright that the things in heaven do not actually need to be cleansed, but then sidestep the issue and say that the cleansing is related to Christ’s work. For example, Meyer says, “For the heavenly sanctuary is removed from contact with the sinful world; it has no need, therefore, of an expiation or purification.”[[76]](#footnote-23431) Similarly, Simon Kistemaker writes, “The heavenly sanctuary is not man-made and therefore is untainted by sin. It does not need to be cleansed.”[[77]](#footnote-15200) James Moffatt writes: “when the writer pushes the analogy so far as to suggest that the sacrifice of Christ had, among other effects, to purify heaven itself, the idea becomes almost fantastic [fantasy]…the idea here is really unique.”[[78]](#footnote-14908) Those statements are correct; God’s Temple in heaven is holy and does not need to be cleansed, and if that is what Hebrews 9:23 is suggesting, it is unique in Scripture. The very fact that Hebrews 9:23, as it is generally interpreted, is saying that God’s Temple in heaven needs to be cleansed should move us to look in another direction for the answer to what this verse is saying. We must note that Hebrews 9:23 says it is “necessary” that “the heavenly” be cleansed. So that points to a “heavenly” something that is not the Temple in heaven or other “heavenly things” that are up in heaven.

It is also important to see that when Hebrews 9:23-28 are read together as a single argument, Christ went into heaven on behalf of believers and to cleanse them of sin. Not a word is said of him going there to cleanse the heavenly Temple. This is stated in Hebrews 9:23-28 (abridged): (23) “Therefore, it was necessary for the copies of the things in heaven to be cleansed with these *sacrifices*, but the heavenly *people* themselves with better sacrifices than these. (24) For Christ [entered]…into heaven itself on our behalf. (28) …so Christ also, having been offered one time to take away the sins of many, will appear a second time, not *to atone* for sin, but to save those who eagerly wait for him.” Jesus entered heaven “on our behalf,” not on behalf of the Temple in heaven, and his sacrifice took away the sins of many people, not any sins somehow associated with the Temple in heaven. If we follow the logic and argument of the chapter, the “heavenly” that is cleansed by the sacrifice are the heavenly people, the believers.

A second possibility that has been set forth by some scholars is that “heavenly” refers to the fact that angels, including the fallen angel Satan, have sinned, and they are the ones who caused the need for “heavenly things” to be cleansed with sacrifices. But again, there is no mention of that in Scripture. Furthermore, that angels need to be cleansed by Christ’s blood is contradicted by Scripture. Nowhere in scripture is there any mention of angels receiving atonement, or Jesus’ atonement being efficacious for angels. Furthermore, although Satan and his angels sinned and continue sinning, there is no indication that they would humble themselves to be cleansed by Christ’s blood, or that they even could be cleansed of their sin, or that their sin somehow taints the Temple of God in heaven. A very relevant point that Hebrews 2:16 makes is that Jesus did not come to sacrifice himself for angels: “Indeed, it hardly needs to be said that he [Jesus] did not come to help angels, but to give help to the seed of Abraham.” So the idea that the “heavenly” refers to “heavenly beings” such as angels or that sinful angels defiled the Temple of God in heaven is never stated in Scripture and, in fact, contradicts Scripture. Thus, that suggestion can be ruled out.

A third option, one that fits with the scope of Scripture, is that the “heavenly” refers to “heavenly people,” and that it is a reference to heavenly people (believers) and ultimately Christians. Christians in the New Testament are referred to as “heavenly” multiple times. Perhaps the most straightforward reference to Christians being “heavenly” is in 1 Corinthians 15:48, in which Christians are explicitly called heavenly or “of heaven.” Christians have a heavenly calling (Heb. 3:1), a heavenly gift (Heb. 6:4), and have come to the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22). Christians are also citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20) and are said to be seated in heaven (Eph. 2:6). So it would not be strange for the author of Hebrews to refer to Christians as “heavenly people.”

If “heavenly” is referring to believers, then it fits perfectly with the scope of Scripture, the greater context of Hebrews, and the immediate context of Hebrews 9. The Old Testament prophesied that Christ would be the sacrifice for people’s sin (cf. Isa. 53) and the New Testament mentions many times that Christ is the sacrifice for people’s sin. The book of Hebrews says it many times (cf. Heb. 1:3; 2:9, 11, 17; 7:17; 9:14-15, 28; 10:10, 12-14; and 13:12). In comparison with all those (and many more!) scriptures, there are none that say Christ died to cleanse God’s Temple in heaven. In the immediate context, both Hebrews 9:14 and 9:24 say that Christ’s atonement is for “our” sins. Who is the “our” referring to? Believers. From the scope of Scripture and the context of the book of Hebrews, Christ’s atonement was for those who would believe in him, not for angels or for the heavenly Temple. So, why should we interpret Hebrews 9:23 any differently?

There is also grammatical evidence that points to the “heavenly” referring to “heavenly people,” that is, believers. The common way to refer to something in the location of heaven is to say “in the heavens” (ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις), or something similar. That Greek phrase occurs 23 times in the New Testament and always refers to something that actually is in heaven. One of those 23 times is in the first phrase in Hebrews 9:23, and it refers to God’s Temple that is “in heaven” (ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς). If the second phrase of Hebrews 9:23 was also referring to things that were “in heaven,” then we would expect the phrase ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις (“in heaven”) to be repeated, but it is not.

That is especially startling when we realize that the writer of Hebrews seems to be trying to make some kind of “type-antitype” comparison between the earthly copies needing to be cleansed with animal blood and the “heavenly” needing to be cleansed by Christ’s blood, and that picture would be very clear if the copies of the Temple “in heaven” was matched by the things “in heaven” cleansed by Christ. But Hebrews 9:23 is not worded that way. The noun “heaven” in the first phrase is not repeated, and instead, the adjective “heavenly” is used. Also, the key preposition ἐν (*en*, “in,” “in heaven”) is absent from the second phrase of Hebrews 9:23, so the text never says the “heavenly” are actually “in heaven.” That is assumed, but it is never stated, and the evidence is that it is wrongly assumed.

It seems clear that if the author of Hebrews was trying to refer to “heavenly things” that were actually located in heaven and trying to push the type-antitype analogy between things that are in heaven versus things that are on earth, he or she would have used the same language in both the first and last phrase of the verse. Thus, we would expect Hebrews 9:23 to read, “It was necessary for the copies of the things in heaven to be cleansed with these sacrifices, but the things in heaven themselves with better sacrifices than these.” But Hebrews does not repeat the same phrase, instead, it says, “It was necessary for the copies of the things in heaven to be cleansed with these sacrifices, but the heavenly themselves with better sacrifices than these.” The difference is clear. The author removes the “in” from the second half of the sentence and changes “things in heaven” to simply “heavenly.” This was done purposefully, and the straightforward reading of the text is that Moses’ Tabernacle was a copy of things actually in heaven (God’s Temple in heaven) while Christ’s blood cleansed something “heavenly,” which in the greater context of Scripture refers to believers. When this third option is compared to the other two options given above, it becomes clear that the most likely object of the adjective “heavenly” here in Hebrews 9:23 is believers, who are cleansed by Christ’s blood and are indeed “heavenly.”

Another point of grammar that points to the adjective “heavenly” referring to “heavenly people” is the word “necessary” in the first phrase of Hebrews 9:23. The word “necessary” is distributive, meaning it applies to both phrases of the verse. It was “necessary” for Moses’ Tabernacle to be cleansed with animal sacrifices, and it was “necessary” for the “heavenly” to be cleansed by the sacrifice of Christ. That it is necessary that God’s people be cleansed by the blood of Christ is a message that is stated over and over in many different ways throughout Scripture. In contrast, there is no indication anywhere in Scripture that it was necessary for Christ’s blood to cleanse the Temple of God in heaven, as James Moffatt, quoted above, wrote, that idea is unique to this one verse. Thus, once again we see that “heavenly people” fits well in Hebrews 9:23, whereas “heavenly things,” referring to God’s Temple in heaven, would be an anomaly.

Once we understand that the “heavenly” refers to believers, we also have a clue as to why the writer of Hebrews would leave out the object of the adjective “heavenly.” The New Testament and Hebrews had already both stated and implied that believers were heavenly, so there was no genuine need to supply the object “believers” to cement the point the writer was making. In contrast, since the idea that angels or God’s Temple in heaven needed to be cleansed from sin is completely foreign to Scripture, it seems that if either of those options were what the writer of Hebrews had in mind, then he or she would have put that in Scripture for clarity’s sake. So the very fact that “heavenly” has no object in the Greek text is another piece of supporting evidence that “heavenly” refers to heavenly people, i.e., believers.

Overall, it is perfectly reasonable grammatically and strongly supported in the context and scope of Scripture that “the heavenly \_\_ themselves” should be translated as “the heavenly people themselves” in reference to believers. Christ’s atonement is the better sacrifice for believers than the blood of bulls and goats, which could never take away sins. What beautiful news.

Heb 9:26

**“for him to have suffered.”** The “him” is Jesus Christ.

Heb 9:28

**“not *to atone for* sin.”** The Greek is more literally, “with reference to sin,” but it is clear from the context that it means that Jesus dealt with sin, or atoned for our sin, during his first coming, and now we are waiting for our salvation; being rescued from our mortal bodies and this present evil age.

**Hebrews Chapter 10**

Heb 10:7

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Heb 10:9

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Heb 10:10

**“By that *same* will**.” By the same will of God of Heb. 10:9 that had Christ offered for a sacrifice, we have been sanctified.

**“once and for all.”** Competent scholars differ as to what this final phrase modifies. Some say that it modifies “made holy,” and that believers are made holy “once and for all.” These scholars point to the other verses that say Jesus was a one-time offering to support their position (cf. Heb. 10:14). Others say it modifies Christ’s offering of himself, which happened “once and for all” (cf. Heb. 9:28). Given the context and scope of Scripture, there is no reason that it cannot apply to both, which would explain its ambiguity in the sentence. If God had wanted to write the text in such a way that there was no doubt as to what the “once and for all referred to,” He could have. The Christian, once he is made holy by the presence of holy spirit born inside, is holy once and for all, and that was due to Christ’s sacrifice, which also, unlike the animal sacrifices that are mentioned in the chapter, happened once and for all. Given the ambiguity of the Greek phrase, we felt it best to leave it where it occurs in the Greek text; at the end.

Heb 10:15

**“the Holy Spirit.”** “The Holy Spirit” is the name for God that emphasizes His power in operation. God is called “the Holy Spirit” in a number of verses in the NT, including Matthew 1:20; 12:32; and Hebrews 9:8.

[For more information on the uses of “Holy Spirit,” see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

Heb 10:18

**“a *sacrificial* offering for sin is no longer *required*.”** This verse can cause confusion to those people who believe in a Millennial Kingdom on earth. A plain and literal reading of the Old Testament leads us to conclude that in Jesus’ Millennial Kingdom, there will be a temple and sacrifices (Ezek. 41-46). However, that very fact is one of the strongest reasons that many theologians think Ezekiel’s vision of a future temple is allegorical, not literal. However, there is no need to take the temple in Ezekiel as allegorical, as we will see. Furthermore, if Ezekiel’s vision is allegorical, what is it representing?

Some theologians say the vision that Ezekiel had represents the ideal worship, with the glory of God and the presence of Christ, but that explanation does not account for the tremendous amount of detail in Ezekiel. Some theologians say Ezekiel’s temple represents the post-Babylonian temple the Jews should have built after the Babylonian Captivity. But that explanation hardly seems credible since the people who returned from captivity built their temple on the model of Moses’ Tabernacle, and the old men wept because the new temple was not as magnificent as Solomon’s Temple, not because it was different from the way Ezekiel said it was supposed to be. Furthermore, there are many things mentioned in Ezekiel, such as the Messiah ministering, or water flowing from the temple, that never occurred in the post-captivity temple. Some theologians say Ezekiel’s temple is really just anticipating what John saw in Revelation 21, but John saw a “city,” and there was “no temple.” The most reasonable, and the most literal, explanation of what Ezekiel saw, is that he saw the Millennial Temple, complete with sacrifices.

Ezekiel’s temple has sacrifices but the Bible does not say why. Theologians surmise various reasons: For example, they are memorial sacrifices, reminding us of the death of Christ (like the communion we do today). Or they are sacrifices that make “real” how much our sin costs us and God, because people will still sin (the Millennial Kingdom has natural people). Or they are sacrifices that in some way cover for the sin of the natural people there, just as our confession of sin does for us today. Or also, most of them could be sacrifices of which a portion is eaten by the people, thus providing a fellowship meal.

It seems we can best understand the role of sacrifices in the Millennial Kingdom if we understand the purpose of sacrifices in the Old Testament. For example, the burnt offering speaks of total dedication to God, something that will still be needed. The fellowship offering (sometimes called a “peace” offering; Lev. 3; 7:11-38), was an expression of praise and thanksgiving, and a portion of it was eaten in a fellowship meal. The sin and guilt offering pointed out that there had to be some kind of payment for sin, and God had to provide some way for people to become “right” with God again. The grain offering reminded people that God was the source of life. No offering under the Law could actually take away sins, instead, they provided a covering for sin, and they pointed to Jesus Christ as the ultimate sacrifice for sin. That could well be the reason for the sacrifices in the Millennial Kingdom. Just as the Passover celebration pointed backward to the Exodus, so the Millennial sacrifices could point back to the work of Christ just as, before the death of Christ, they pointed forward to him. It helps us to remember that Hebrews tells us that it is “impossible” for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin before Christ (Heb. 10:1-4); those sacrifices just pointed to Christ. In the same way, in the Millennial Kingdom, they will point back to Christ.

[See Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Heb 10:19

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

Heb 10:20

**“newly made.”** The Greek is *prosphatos* (#4372 πρόσφατος), and originally meant “freshly killed.” By the time of the New Testament, it had the everyday meaning of “newly made.” However, given the context of this section of Hebrews, the choice of *prosphatos* should not be missed. The way into the presence of God was indeed freshly made. Furthermore, it was because Jesus was “freshly killed.” It needs to be pointed out that “newly made” is not in contrast to an old way that had been around awhile. Before Jesus’ death made entrance to God available for everyone (symbolized by the tearing of the Temple veil which separated God from the people), people did not have open access to God. The overtones of the death of Christ are very much in the verse because Jesus Christ both died (was freshly killed) and had risen from the dead in order to make the way to God available.

Heb 10:21

**“great priest.”** “Great” is from *megas* (#3173 μέγας), which does not mean “great” in the sense of *wonderful*, or “doing a good job”; rather, it refers to “being relatively superior in importance.” F. F. Bruce notes that this is the “commonest Hebrew title for the High Priest.”[[79]](#footnote-12870) Thus, some versions render the phrase, “great high priest” (cf. HCSB), or “high priest” (KJV, NJB) (see commentary on Heb. 4:14, where Jesus is called the “great high priest).

Heb 10:22

**“let us approach with a true heart.”** Old Testament believers approached God with a sacrifice or offering, but today believers can go through the veil and approach God because of the blood of Christ (see commentary on Heb. 4:16).

**“having our hearts sprinkled.”** This is a reference to what was required of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement in order for him to enter into the Holy of Holies. He had to have his body washed with water (Lev. 16:4, 24), and then he sprinkled the atonement-cover and in front of the atonement-cover with blood (Lev. 16:14, 15) and thus made atonement for himself and all Israel (Lev. 16:17). The point is that we, like the priests of the Old Testament, were not to draw near to God until we had been cleansed. However, we are not sprinkled with animal blood, but with the very blood of Jesus Christ (Heb. 12:24; 1 Pet. 1:2; cf. 1 John 1:7).

The reference to having our hearts sprinkled by the blood of Jesus Christ is not literal, since that cannot literally happen, but is an allusion to the fact that just as the blood of bulls cleansed the Tent of Meeting (the Tabernacle), so the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us, but it does so when we willingly accept his substitutionary sacrifice. When we accept Christ as Lord, we get saved and the blood of Jesus cleanses our sin. After our salvation, when we sin, we humbly confess it and God then honors that confession and cleanses us (1 John 1:9).

Heb 10:23

**“let us hold on firmly.”** This appeal to “hold on firmly” is an appeal to keep trusting Christ, and not forfeit one’s salvation by going back to Judaism.

[See commentary on Hebrews 10:26 for more information.]

Heb 10:24

**“one another.”** The phrase “one another” occurs in the context of the community of believers, and while we are to be good to everyone, in the context of the New Testament Epistles, the commands toward “one another” are specifically to other believers. Christians are to be “especially good to the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). It is very important for the richness of our lives together here on earth, for our personal growth here on earth, and for rewards in the next life, that each Christian needs to be “other-focused,” focused on others and how we can help them. The phrase “one another” occurs many times in the New Testament, stating and reinforcing that truth.

[For more on the “one another” commands, see commentary on Gal. 5:13, “one another.” For more on “love one another,” see commentary on John 13:34.]

**“spur.”** The Greek is *paroxusmos* (#3948 παροξυσμός) and it has three distinct definitions: 1. A rousing to activity, stirring up, provoking. 2. A state of irritation expressed in argument, sharp disagreement. 3. A severe fit of a disease, attack of fever, esp. at its high point: convulsion.[[80]](#footnote-16392) Here, in Hebrews 10:24 it means to stir up to action, while in Acts 15:39. it means a sharp disagreement (see commentary on Acts 15:39).

Heb 10:25

**“meeting together.”** It is not completely clear why the author of Hebrews used *episunagōgē* (#1997 ἐπισυναγωγή) in this verse. Historically, scholars have brought up two major reasons. First and most likely, the noun *sunagoge* is used in the Bible many times for Jewish meetings, or the place the Jews met, i.e., the synagogue. At the time Hebrews was written, there would have still been many Christians going to synagogue services, and so commanding people not to forsake the *sunagoge*, might be misinterpreted and taken to mean that God was commanding Jewish Christians (to whom Hebrews was at least in part addressed) to go to synagogues. By saying *episunagoge* a distinction is made between Jewish meetings and Christian ones. Other commentators point out that the prefix *epi* would emphasize that there was a place to meet, in contrast to simply “hanging out” wherever people happened to see each other and calling that a Christian meeting.

Heb 10:26

**“we keep on sinning deliberately.”** The consistent testimony of the New Testament is that it is repentance from sin (Mark 1:15; 6:12; Matt. 4:17; Luke 5:32; 13:3; Acts 2:38; 11:18), not ‘never sinning again’ (1 John 1:8, 10), that separates Christians from non-Christians. Christians repent, but non-Christians do not.

This is exactly what the phrase “if we keep on sinning deliberately” communicates. There is quite a bit of evidence in the context of this passage that this is not referring to simply sinning, but deliberate, unrepentant sin and rejecting Christ’s atoning sacrifice, which is behavior that is condemned elsewhere in the New Testament (Luke 13:3; Eph. 5:5; 1 Cor. 6:19; Gal. 5:19-21; Rom. 10:9). The first line of evidence is that Hebrews 10:29 refers to “the one who has trampled under foot the Son of God,” and “insulted the Spirit of grace.” These striking words depict a willful rejection of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice. “These clauses do not specify particular sinful actions, but rather characterize, in vivid metaphors, the repudiation of the new covenant.”[[81]](#footnote-23511)

Secondly, in Hebrews 10:35 the author pleads with these Jewish Christians not to “throw away” their confidence. Meaning he is not referring to a “one-off” sin, but deliberate rejection of their confidence in Christ. Thirdly, in Hebrews 10:23, the author appeals to them to “hold on firmly to the confession of our hope,” which implies again that this is not just about repeated sin, but a willful rejection of the hope Christians have of a “better and lasting possession” (Heb. 10:34). For all of these reasons, and the fact that the author of Hebrews specifically is addressing the person who continues “sinning deliberately,” not simply “sinning,” the author is referring to unrepentant sin here in Hebrews 10:26, which is further described as a willful rejection of Christ’s sacrifice (i.e., “trampling under foot the Son of God”).

**“received the knowledge of the truth.”** This phrase indicates that the people being spoken of are genuine Christians who have heard the truth and believed it. This is not referring to people who have just “heard” the good news and not believed it, but to people who believed the truth but then abandoned it for the pleasures of sin. This phrase is referring to genuine “born again” Christians because these people are described as having been “made holy” (Heb. 10:29), having been “englightened” (Heb. 10:32), people who have a “hope” (Heb. 10:23), and lastly are referred to in the 1st person (“we,” Heb. 10:19, 26) by the author, and so by implication, the author, who is clearly a Christian believer views his intended audience is also genuine Christians along with him.

**“there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.”** If the people being addressed in Hebrews 10:26 are genuine Christians (see above), then this verse is giving one of the most grave and sobering warnings—that Christians can forfeit their salvation. The logical argument the author is making with this concluding statement is that: (1) if forgiveness of sin is based on the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and (2), if there is no longer a “sacrifice for sins” for the person who continues “sinning deliberately,” then (3) such people no longer have forgiveness for their sins.

The author of Hebrew’s call to endure in the Faith is repeated in multiple different ways in this passage and in the book of Hebrews itself: “Let us hold on firmly to the confession of our hope without wavering” (Heb. 10:23), “Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which will have a great reward. For you have need of endurance…” (Heb. 10:35-36), and “But my righteous one will live by trust, and if he draws back, my soul has no pleasure in him” (Heb. 10:38 from Hab. 2:4 LXX). The author of Hebrews is repeatedly encouraging the reader to not abandon their faith.

One could argue this is the main point of the book of Hebrews. To call Jewish Christians to not abandon their faith and return to Judaism, because Christ and the New Covenant are better than the Old Covenant they were under. In Hebrews 1, he argues that Christ is better than the angels who mediated the Mosaic Law (Heb. 2:2) so he pleads with them not to neglect so great a salvation (Heb. 2:3). In Hebrews 3, the author argues that Christ is greater than Moses (Heb. 3:6), and thus, he pleads with them not to “fall away from the living God” (Heb. 3:12). In Hebrews 4, the author argues that Jesus is an even greater high priest because he is “without sin” (Heb. 4:15). In Hebrews 5, he argues that Jesus is a high priest after the order of Melchizedek, which he later demonstrates is a greater order than that of Moses/Aaron (Heb. 7:1-10), and therefore, he pleads with them not to “fall away” (Heb. 6:6). In Hebrews 7, the author argues that perfection was unattainable under the “Levitical priesthood” (Heb. 7:11), and that the “law made nothing perfect” (Heb. 7:19), but that “Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant” (Heb. 7:22). In Hebrews 8, the author argues that Jesus is a minister in the true tabernacle in heaven, not in an earthly tabernacle “man” set up (Heb. 8:2), thus, he is greater than the high priest who ministers in an earthly sanctuary. He also argues that Jesus is the mediator of a “better covenant” with “better promises” (Heb. 8:6). In Hebrews 9, the author makes an argument from the lesser to the greater, namely, that if the “blood of goats and bulls...make people holy,” then, “how much more will the blood of Christ, cleanse our conscience from dead works” (Heb. 9:13-14). Then in Hebrews 10, in which the author argues that Jesus is better than the Old Testament sacrifices because they had to be offered year after year and could never “take away sins” (Heb. 10:4), but Jesus only offered himself once and for all, and he has “perfected for all time those who are being made holy” (Heb. 10:14).

Therefore, the clear theme of the book of Hebrews is that the New Covenant and Jesus himself are better than the Old Covenant in countless ways, so he repeatedly urges them not to turn back to Judaism.

From the repeated warnings throughout the book of Hebrews, and most specifically here in Hebrews 10, the author is attempting to communicate as emphatically as possible the danger for those believers who turn back to Judaism—they are forfeiting the hope of salvation that they have in Christ. And that is why the author goes to great lengths to prove to them the supremacy of Christ above anything that the Old Covenant had to offer. Jesus is far better, so why turn back to something less?

Heb 10:27

**“but only a fearful expectation of judgment.”** Believers, those who “were made holy” (Heb. 10:29), if they turn away from the Faith and “trample underfoot the Son of God” (Heb. 10:29), only have a “fearful expectation of Judgment” to look forward to, and will discover that God’s furious fire is “about to devour the adversaries,” that it, God’s adversaries.

**“a fury of fire.”** This phrase personifies the fire, as if it is angry and zealous to devour those who defy God. This seems appropriate, because it is as if the fire has a life of its own, and it refuses to be quenched until everyone who is thrown into it, into the “Lake of Fire,” is burned up, at which time it will be appeased and die out.

[For more on the annihilation of the wicked, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**“which is about to devour the adversaries.”** It also warns Christians not to take their lives and their salvation lightly. Unbelievers are natural adversaries to God, so unless they come to Christ and get saved, they will be destroyed in the Lake of Fire (Matt. 10:28; Rev. 20:15-21). However, Christians can reject their trust in Jesus and return to their natural pagan ways and become adversaries to God. 2 Peter 2:20-22 speaks of people who escape the world but then return to it and get “overcome;” “conquered” by the ways of the world and their end is worse than if they had not heard in the first place.

This verse and its context are severe warnings for unbelievers that they should not continue in their disobedient ways but come to Christ and be saved.

[See Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.”]

Heb 10:29

**“the blood of the covenant by which he was made holy.”** The “blood of the covenant” refers to the blood of Christ whose blood ratified the New Covenant. Just as the blood of animals made atonement for people (temporarily!) under the Old Covenant, and made things holy (e.g., Exod. 29:21; Lev. 16:19), so the blood of Christ makes atonement for us so we are holy in the sight of God. That Hebrews 10:29 says, “by which he was made holy” lets us know that this verse is about Christians.

Heb 10:32

**“after you were enlightened.”** This phrase, which parallels Hebrews 6:4, provides evidence that the warning not to fall away from the Faith in Hebrews 10 is to Christians.

[See commentary on Hebrews 10:26 for more information.]

**“a great struggle, with *much* suffering.”** The Greek text is more literally, “a great struggle of sufferings,” which is a genitive of character, that is, a great struggle that was characterized by suffering, or as we might say in modern jargon, “a great struggle with lots of suffering.” In the Greek, the word “suffering” is plural, “sufferings,” to indicate a lot of suffering.

Heb 10:35

**“which will have a great reward.”** This phrase provides evidence that the warning not to fall away from the Faith in Hebrews 10 is to Christians.

[See commentary on Hebrews 10:26 for more information.]

Heb 10:36

**“the promise.”** The “promise” is put by metonymy for that which was promised. We will receive what God has promised us, which in this context is everlasting life.

[See Word Study: “Metonymy.”]

Heb 10:37

**“For in just a little *while* (How little! How little!).”** The first part of the verse is quoted from Isaiah 26:20 (LXX), the second part from Habakkuk 2:3. The parenthetical phrase “How little! How little!” is the figure of speech interjectio (interjection), which is a form of parenthesis in which an exclamation, whose sense is dependent upon the context, is thrown into the sentence. It is also the figure epizeuxis (duplication), a repetition of the same word in the same sense for emphasis. The Greek text reads *micron hoson hoson*, which would literally be translated, “a little, how very! How very!” We get the English “micron” from the Greek *micron* (little). Bullinger translates *hoson hoson* as “How little, how little,” picking up “little” as part of the meaning of the word in this context.[[82]](#footnote-20523) Rotherham does something similar and translates the verse, “For yet a little while, how short! How short! The Coming One will be here….” The point should be well taken. To those who are suffering trials in life, Jesus seems to be in heaven for a very long time, but compared to the eternity we will spend with him, our suffering, and his not coming yet, is “How little! How little!”

**“the Coming One will come.”** This is the figure of speech polyptoton (“many inflections”).[[83]](#footnote-22305) The Greek just has two words side by side, one for “Coming one” and one for “will come.”

[See Word Study: “Polyptoton.”]

Heb 10:38

**“soul.”** This is more than just saying, “I will have no pleasure in him.” See commentary on Hebrews 6:19.

Heb 10:39

**“draw back.”** In the commentary on Hebrews 10:26, it was established that the author’s pleas to remain faithful were to Christians. This verse provides even more support to the teaching, which is prevalent in Hebrews 10, that Christians can forfeit their salvation if they reject Christ, and doing that will “result in destruction” (Heb. 10:39).

[See commentary on Hebrews 10:26 for more information.]

**“resulting in...resulting in.”** The Greek preposition is *eis* (#1519 εἰς), and it is being used to indicate result. When a person “shrinks back,” that will result in their “destruction” (in the age to come). And when a person has “trust,” it will result in “preserving” their life (in the age to come).

**“preserving.”** The Greek word is *peripoiēsis* (#4047 περιποίησις), and it means to keep, to preserve, to acquire, to obtain. The person who has faith in Christ will keep their life and live forever. The person who rejects Christ will lose his life and be annihilated in the Lake of Fire.

[For more about annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**“life.”** The Greek word is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here the context shows it refers to the life of the body, which is why quite a few versions translate it “life,” which is accurate in this context. This is one of the many verses that show that *psuchē*, soul, is not immortal. If a person does not have faith, his life, his “soul,” is not preserved; it is annihilated in the Lake of Fire.

It can be confusing to translate this verse as “saving of the soul” as in the KJV, because of the common belief that the soul can live on after the human body dies. This verse is not saying that a person’s “soul” can be saved or kept without the person being alive. That belief is not from Scripture but comes in large part from the doctrine of the immortal soul, which, though traditional, is not biblical.

[For a more complete explanation of *psuchē*, “soul,” see Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

**Hebrews Chapter 11**

Heb 11:1

**“trust.”** The Greek is *pistis* (#4102 πίστις), a noun. In both ancient secular Greek and in the Bible *pistis* means “confidence, trust, assurance.” When the Greek New Testament was translated into Latin, *fides* was the natural choice as a translation of *pistis*, because *fides* means “trust, confidence, reliance, belief.” As the English language developed, the word “faith” came from the Latin word *fides*. There should be nothing mysterious about *pistis*, *fides*, or “faith.” We know what trust is. *Merriam-Webster* defines it as “assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something.”

It needs to be clearly understood that the ancient and biblical definition of *pistis* differs from the modern definition of “faith.” If both *pistis* and *fides* mean “trust,” how did “faith” come to be defined in our modern culture as “firm belief in something for which there is no proof”?[[84]](#footnote-21673) The actual historical process is long and tedious, but the concept is simple. The Church asked people to trust doctrines that were neither logical nor clearly backed up by Scripture. People were asked to accept “by faith” doctrines for which there was no biblical support. Over time, belief in something for which there is no proof became the most accepted definition of “faith.” This is harmful because people then import that made-up definition of “faith” back into the Bible, although that is not what “faith” means when used in the Bible.

If we put the biblical definition of faith into Hebrews 11:1, and say, “Trust is firm confidence in things hoped for,” the sentence makes perfect sense. Christians should have trust in God’s promises about salvation and everlasting life in new and wonderful bodies because we trust the God who made those promises. Furthermore, based on our trust in God, we should have a firm confidence in those things that we hope for daily.

[For more on “faith,” see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:7. Also see Appendix 2: “‘Faith’ is ‘Trust.’”]

Heb 11:2

**“obtained a *good* testimony.”** See commentary on Hebrews 11:39.

Heb 11:3

**“word of God.”** Here the word for “word” is not *logos*, as might be expected, but *rhēma*. Although often used interchangeably in the Greek language, the word *rhēma* often refers more to the words that are spoken. The author of Hebrews is referring to the fact that God created all things by his spoken word, just as Genesis teaches (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, etc.).

Heb 11:4

**“By trust Abel.”** The record is in Genesis 4:3-5. Abel trusted God and thus obeyed what He said, whereas Cain did not.

**“by which *trust*.”** The Greek reads, “by it,” or “by which,” but it is not the sacrifice that is the focus of why he was accepted, but his trust in God.

**“he still speaks.”** The verse says Abel is dead, so he does not literally “speak.” Nevertheless, he “speaks” in the sense that his good example shines on through the years. We are used to thinking of the “good example” that people who are now dead left us to follow, and that is exactly what Abel and the other people in Hebrews chapter 11 did—they left us a good example to follow (see commentary on Heb. 12:1).

[For more on dead people being dead in every way and not alive in any form, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead”]

Heb 11:5

**“moved.”** The record of Enoch is in Genesis chapter 5, and this verse specifically refers to Genesis 5:24. The Greek word translated “moved” is *metatithēmi* (#3346 μετατίθημι), and it means “to convey from one place to another, *put in another place, transfer.*”[[85]](#footnote-28447)

There are a few things to consider when studying Enoch. First, the word *metatithēmi* means “to move from one place to another.” It does not mean “take up,” or that Enoch was taken up into heaven. That is theological tradition, not what the Bible actually says. Similarly, to say that Enoch was “translated,” is only confusing. We do not use that word today of anyone or anything being moved.

It is also theological tradition to say that Enoch was taken into heaven, where he still is living. The Bible does not directly say where he was “moved” to, but we know from the scope of Scripture it cannot be into heaven. We know this for a couple of reasons: First, Hebrews 11:13, speaking of the heroes of the Faith who were mentioned in the chapter, says, “These all died....” It does not say that most of them died, or that all except Enoch died, it says they all died. So Enoch did not live forever in heaven. Secondly, if Enoch (or Elijah) could go to heaven and live forever before Christ paid for their sin, then anyone could live forever without Christ paying for their sin, in which case Christ died for nothing; he did not need to suffer and die. The truth is that no one could go to heaven until Christ paid the price for their sin.

Enoch lived three generations before Noah and was prophesying of judgment to come upon the wicked people of his time (Jude 14). Just as wicked people tried to kill Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, Jesus himself, and many others who prophesied boldly for God, so Enoch’s evil contemporaries tried to kill him. God protected him from an untimely death by moving him from place to place, just as God moved the boat that Jesus and the apostles were in (John 6:21), and as he moved Philip to Azotus (Acts 8:39-40). In spite of the fact that God was able to protect Enoch on earth for a while, he eventually died just like all the other people listed in Hebrews 11.

**“could not be found.”** Cf. Nyland, *The Source New Testament*; W. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13* [WBC]; Hendriksen and Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews.*

Heb 11:6

**“trust.”** Traditionally, the Greek word pistis is translated “faith,” but we believe “trust” is a better translation.

[For more information, see commentaries on Heb. 11:1 and 2 Cor. 5:7. Also see Appendix 2: “‘Faith’ is ‘Trust.’”]

Heb 11:7

**“By trust Noah.”** The record of Noah is Genesis 6:8-9:29. The record of the Flood is Genesis 7:6-8:19.

**“warned.”** See commentary on Hebrews 8:5.

Heb 11:8

**“By trust Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place that he was going to receive as an inheritance.”** The record of God calling Abraham into Canaan is Genesis 11:31-12:7.

Heb 11:11

**“By trust also Sarah herself received power to conceive seed.”** God came to Abraham and Sarah and told Sarah that she would have a son (Gen. 18:9-15), and she did (Gen. 21:1-2).

Hebrews 11:11 is subject to both textual and lexical questions that alter significantly the way the verse is translated.[[86]](#footnote-17906) There is justifiable scholarly debate, and in the final analysis, the text can be understood to say, “By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised” (NASB), or “By faith he [Abraham] received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. (NRSV). There are reasons that support both readings, which is why the modern versions are so divided on the subject.

Heb 11:13

**“the promises.”** The “promises” is put by metonymy for what was promised; they did not receive what was promised. However, the metonymy is so clear that there is no need to change the English to accommodate the figure of speech.

**“saluted them.”** The Greek word is *aspazomai* (#782 ἀσπάζομαι). It appears in the Greek writings of a person who salutes another person or his homeland from afar. The word *patris*, “homeland,” appears in Heb. 11:14, while in this verse the people are called “foreigners and temporary residents,” or foreigners and people living in a foreign land. The believers were “living by trust” on this earth in this present evil age, and had not received the promises, namely the promises connected with the Messianic Kingdom on earth; they only saw them from afar. They were people away from home and thus had to “salute” their homeland from afar. Christians today are in a similar place. We are citizens of heaven, but we have not been raptured there yet, so we “salute” it from afar; and we also “salute from afar” the Kingdom of Christ on earth that we will be part of when we return from heaven with Christ (Rev. 19:11-21), the same Kingdom on earth that the Old Testament believers saluted.

**“resident aliens.”** See commentary on 1 Peter 1:1

Heb 11:15

**“they would have had an opportunity to return.”** The “Promised Land” was the land that God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (see commentary on Gen. 15:18). But being there was very difficult at times. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not own the land, they were sojourners there. The peoples who owned the land were Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Jebusites, etc., and they presented a constant danger. There were fights over wells and family issues. Also, there were famines. These things provided some incentive to return to the land of Mesopotamia where they had come from. But the Bible tells us that they thought of the Hope and the promises of God, and those things kept them motivated to push through challenges and stay where God wanted them. Many years later, when Israel came out of Egypt, the Canaanites and other tribes still were in the land, and Joshua and the army of Israel had to conquer them to take what God gave them, God was, after all, the ultimate owner of the land.

Heb 11:17

**“By trust Abraham...offered up Isaac.”** The record of Abraham being willing to offer Isaac is in Genesis 22:1-19. Here in Hebrews, the text says that Abraham “offered up Isaac” even though an angel stopped Abraham from offering Isaac (Gen. 22:11-12) because Abraham’s willingness to obey God was there. Also, Hebrews 11:19 adds a detail that is not in the Old Testament. Abraham had heard directly that it would be through Isaac that his seed would be called (Gen. 21:12), so Abraham believed that God would fulfill that promise and would therefore have to raise Isaac from the dead (Heb. 11:19).

**“tested.”** See commentary on Matthew 4:1, “tempted.”

Heb 11:19

**“from among the dead.”**[[87]](#footnote-14827) See commentary on Romans 4:24.

Heb 11:20

**“By trust Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.”** The record of Isaac blessing Jacob and Esau is in Genesis 27. Although the whole chapter is about the blessings and how they came about as they did, the most relevant verses are Genesis 27:26-46. In the record in Genesis, Jacob supposedly “stole” Esau’s blessings, but that was only the way it looked in the flesh. It was God who gave Isaac the words to say, which only God would know would come true as accurately as they did. For Isaac’s part, he accurately communicated the words God gave to him. So although Isaac thought he was blessing Esau, God knew he was blessing Jacob and gave to Isaac the words of blessing that God wanted spoken over Jacob, and God also gave the words of blessing that were spoken over Esau, which also came true. Both men, and their descendants would have been blessed if they continued in the worship of the true God, but it was God’s plan to bring the Messiah through Jacob, not Esau. Sadly, as it turned out, neither the Israelites descended from Jacob nor the Edomites descended from Esau continued in the worship of the true God. The Israelites always had a core of faithful people, but the history of Israel is notable for the idolatry and defiance of God that ran throughout its history.

Heb 11:21

**“each of the sons of Joseph.”** The record of this blessing is in Genesis 48. Jacob blessed the two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, and he adopted them as his own, (Gen. 48:5), which is why the two tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh, were reckoned among the twelve tribes of Israel.

**“bowed.”** There is good evidence that the one Jacob bowed to was Joseph. Joseph was the one who is said to be with Jacob and had just brought his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, to be blessed by Jacob (Gen. 45:1-12).

[See commentary on Matthew 2:2 for bowing and paying homage to.]

**“on the top of his staff.”** A reference to Genesis 47:31. The word *proskuneō* can mean to prostrate oneself on the ground, but that would have been too difficult for Jacob at his age and physical condition, so he bowed while leaning over his staff. Some versions, such as the NASB, supply “leaning,” (“*leaning* upon his staff”) and that was what Jacob was doing, but it does not have to be supplied for the verse to make sense.

The book of Hebrews clears up a problem for us. The Hebrew text of Genesis 47:31, as it is currently pointed, says that Jacob leaned on his “bed,” but the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament done about 250 BC and abbreviated LXX) says “staff.” Since the unpointed Hebrew text can read “staff” if pointed differently, and the LXX reads “staff,” and the Greek NT clearly reads “staff,” that is apparently the true record.

Heb 11:22

**“gave a commandment concerning his bones.”** This commandment is in Genesis 50:24-25.

Heb 11:23

**“he was hidden by his parents for three months.”** See Exodus 2:2.

**“beautiful** ***before*** ***God*.”** The word “beautiful” is from *asteios* (#791 ἀστεῖος), which in the New Testament occurs only here and in Acts 7:20. In the Septuagint it has the connotation of physical beauty and charm. The words “to God” are added from the wording in Acts 7:20. It is not that they saw their child was good-looking—what parent wouldn’t think that?—or worse, that God cared about how “well-bred”[[88]](#footnote-12335) Moses was. Rather, the connotation is that the child was something special. The NIV captures that with their translation: “they saw he was no ordinary child.”

The translation in the KJV, “proper child,” may be due to influences expressed by some commentators, that Moses was of good breeding and good descent. But Amram and Jochebed, Moses’ parents (Exod. 6:20), knew their ancestry and thus Moses’ lineage. Their decision to hide Moses was something that Jochebed “saw” when Moses was born, it was not based on a knowledge of their ancestry, nor on how beautiful or healthy Moses was as a baby (see commentary on Exod. 2:2).

**“and they were not afraid of the king’s commandment.”** The reason that the text gives that Amram and Jochebed, Moses’ parents, were not afraid of Pharaoh’s command was that they were acting “by trust.” God revealed things about Moses to them, and they were acting “by trust” on what God showed them (see commentary on Exod. 2:2).

Heb 11:29

**“By trust they passed through the Red Sea.”** This record is in Exodus 14:21-30.

Heb 11:30

**“By trust the walls of Jericho fell down.”** The record of Yahweh instructing Joshua on how to conquer Jericho is in Joshua 6:1-5, and the record of the conquest is Joshua 6:6-21.

Heb 11:31

**“By trust Rahab the prostitute did not perish.”** The record of Rahab welcoming and protecting the spies sent by Joshua is Joshua 2:1-21. The record of Rahab’s life and the lives of her family members being spared is Joshua 6:22-25. Rahab married an Israelite man from the tribe of Judah named Salmon and gave birth to Obed, the father of Boaz, the father of Jesse, the father of King David, and she is written in the genealogy of Christ (Matt. 1:5).

Heb 11:34

**“deprived fire of its power.”** The Greek text is more literally, “quenched (or “put out”) the power of fire,” or, less likely, “put out raging fires,” but the allusion is to Daniel 3 and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego being thrown into the fiery furnace but not being hurt by the flames. The presence of the men in the fire did not put out the fire, but the power of the fire was put out. Weymouth’s translation reads, “deprived fire of its power,” and that is exactly what happened to the men in the fire—they were walking around in the midst of the fire (Dan. 3:21-26).

**“the mouth of the sword.”** The phrase “mouth of the sword” is a Semitic idiom, used to show great destruction, as if the sword was eating its victims (see commentary on Josh. 6:21).

Heb 11:37

**“sheepskins, in goatskins.”** It took a stable lifestyle to raise the sheep or grow the flax that was then made into wool or linen garments. People who were constantly persecuted and had to move from place to place had to make do with rough clothes made from animal skins. It has been taught that the reference of skins is to a person being tied up in a skin when it was fresh, and then letting it shrink and asphyxiate the person. However, there is no evidence anything like that was ever done, and the vocabulary of moving from place to place does not support that conclusion.

Heb 11:39

**“having obtained a *good* testimony.”** The Greek is *martureō* (#3140 μαρτυρέω), and it is an aorist passive participle. As an active verb, *martureō* means, to bear witness to, or to be a witness. However, in the passive voice it means that someone bears witness of you. Also, the word often has the connotation of a good witness, or good testimony, as it does here. The reference is to the record of people’s lives that is being kept in heaven, and these people have a good report that has been entered into God’s books. This is a good example of why the reader has to have a wide scope of the teachings of Scripture and the biblical culture to clearly understand what the verse is speaking about. One scholar loosely translated the Greek word in this context as “having had their names entered on the record.”[[89]](#footnote-12098)

**“the promise.”** The subject of what God promised is a major theme of Hebrews. In fact, the Greek word *epangelia* (#1860 ἐπαγγελία), which means “promise,” occurs more in Hebrews than in any other book in the New Testament. Hebrews 4:1 is the first use of *epangelia*, and it is associated with the promise of everlasting life. In fact, most of the uses of the plural “promises” in Hebrews include the gift of everlasting life, although they also include other things that were promised, such as the Promised Land, and the promised blessings. Hebrews 9:15 shows us that the work of Christ opened the door for people to receive the promise of everlasting life. Here, as in Heb. 9:15, the word “promise” is singular. Although the other promises are important, the gift of everlasting life is the pinnacle promise.

The “promise” is put by metonymy for what was promised; they did not receive what was promised. However, the metonymy seems clear enough not to modify the phrase to “they did not receive what was promised.”

**Hebrews Chapter 12**

Heb 12:1

**“so great a cloud of witnesses.”** The “witnesses” in this context are dead people. We are familiar with this concept. For example, at funerals, we often speak of how the person who has just died is a good example for us to follow, and their lives are a witness to us of how a person can trust God, obey God, and endure adversity. Similarly, Hebrews 11 and 12 fit together to encourage us to obey God. To see how Hebrews 11 and 12 fit together, we have to know that the original text of the Bible had no chapters and verses. So the “therefore” of Hebrews 12:1 is connected to Hebrews 11 and is a conclusion and call to action based on the information presented in Hebrews chapter 11.

Hebrews 11 presents a number of people whose lives are witnesses that we can live by trust and God will reward us. Hebrews 11:1-2 mentions “people of old” who trusted and obeyed God. Then those verses are followed by an impressive list of people who trusted God, including Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab (the prostitute), Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets. Furthermore, Hebrews 11 comes to a close with, “all these...obtained a *good* testimony because of their trust” (Heb. 11:39). These people are a “cloud of witnesses” even though they are dead because their lives continue to be a witness. Hebrews 11:4 makes this very clear when it says, “By trust, Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice...and through it, though he is dead, he still speaks.” Abel is dead, but the witness of his life is still speaking, and the same is true for the other “greats” in the chapter. Then, based on the witness left us by all those people, Hebrews 12 encourages us with, “seeing we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that so easily entangles us, and let us also run with endurance the race that is set before us.” Like Abel, the people are dead, but the witness of their lives continues on after them and encourages us to stop sinning and live our lives with endurance so we can please God and be rewarded.

[For more on dead people being dead in every way and not alive in any form, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead”]

**“let us lay aside every weight.”** This phrase brings the mind of the reader to the races that were held throughout the Roman world, especially when the bigger games, such as the Olympic Games, Isthmian Games, etc., were held. The runners ran nude and stripped themselves of all their clothing and anything else that might impede them or weigh them down. So here our lives are being compared to a race, and if we are going to finish, and finish well, we need to discover and set aside the things that entangle us and weigh us down such that we are not as effective in doing God’s will as we should be.

**“easily entangles.”** The Greek is *euperistatos* (#2139 εὐπερίστατος). It only occurs here, and Robertson notes that there are probably a dozen ways to translate it.[[90]](#footnote-28788) Here we have a word that only occurs one time and can be translated many different ways. Note the variations in translation: “clings so closely” (ESV); “so easily beset” (KJV); “so easily entangles” (NASB); “so prone to be ensnared” (God’s New Covenant); “easily hampering” (Lenski); “the sin which controls (us) so tightly” (Louw-Nida); “so readily (deftly and cleverly) clings to and entangles us” (Amplified). The context of the verse is that of a runner who needs to set aside everything that would slow him down. Thus, he sets aside every weight. He also sets aside sin, which, like the long robes that people wore, were taken off by the Greco-Roman runners. If left on, the robes would readily (even cleverly) cling to the runner and surround and entangle them, hindering them. This is exactly what sin does in the life of a believer. In this case, one could be tempted to conflate the translation as the Amplified Version does, but we have felt it best to go with “easily entangles.”

**“let us also run.”** Hebrews 12:1 begins with an initial *kai humeis* (“and us” or “us also”) that connects the modern-day believers to the great cloud of witnesses mentioned in Hebrews 11. The *kai umeis* goes with the verb of the sentence, let’s also run, and not with the participles “having” witnesses or “throwing” off sin. The point is, since these great men and women of faith persevered even though they have not yet received the promises (Heb. 11:39), *let us also* run with perseverance to the finish line where we will be “made perfect” together (Heb. 11:40). The point is not “we also have a great cloud of witnesses” (as though the saints in chapter 11 had great witnesses too), nor is it “let us also throw off sin” (as though the context of chapter 11 was about how the saints threw off sin, so we should too). Rather, the author is urging us also to run with perseverance as these great witnesses ran. Surprisingly, most of our versions get this wrong. The ESV, NASB, NRSV, NJB, and ASV make the latter mistake, and the KJV and HCSB make the former.

Heb 12:2

**“leader.”** The Greek word *is archēgos* (#747 ἀρχηγός), from *archē*, “beginning, origin, first; when referring to a person: leader.” *Archēgos* refers to one who takes the lead in anything and thus is an example. Thus, it has meanings that include: a predecessor, a pioneer, the chief leader, a prince, or an author. Balz and Schneider correctly point out that Jesus being called the “‘originator of eternal salvation’ in Heb. 5:9 is not synonymous with ἀρχηγός; [Hebrews] 12:2 is hardly to be translated as ‘originator and perfecter of the faith,’ for Jesus is the originating source neither for the אֱמוּנָה of the OT witnesses nor for Christological πίστις; rather, God effects faith in Jesus as the leader.”[[91]](#footnote-25493) We agree that Jesus is properly the leader when it comes to trust, not the “author.”

**“finisher.”** (see Lenski); “the faith” (Greek text and see Lenski); “enduring” because of the similar “endurance” in verse 1.

**“because of the joy.”** The word “because” is translated from the Greek preposition *anti* (#473 ἀντί), which, like most prepositions, has a very broad semantic range. *Anti* includes meanings in several groupings: 1) over against, opposite to, before; 2) for, instead of, in place of; 3) for that, because, for this cause. In this case, it has the meaning “for, because of, for the sake of, in consideration of,” which is the same meaning it has in verse 16 where Esau sold his birthright “for,” or “because of,” a meal. Jesus endured the cross “because of,” “in consideration of,” the joy that was set before him. Jesus often spoke of reigning as king in his future kingdom, and looked forward to that, and providing salvation for God’s people, with great joy (cf. Matt. 19:28, 25:31). Other translations of this phrase include: “because of the joy” (BBE, NLT); “in view of the joy” (DBY); “for the sake of the joy” (NAB, NJB); “in consideration of the joy” (Rotherham).

Because the word *anti* can mean “instead of,” some very knowledgeable theologians (including the authors of BDAG) think the meaning of the verse is that Jesus endured the cross “instead of” experiencing the joy set before him. The main reason for asserting that is that grammatically *anti* seems to usually be used in the sense of “instead of” in the New Testament. The response to that argument is that while that may be true, *anti* is not always used in the sense of “instead of,” and in fact is not even in Hebrews 12:16, later in the chapter. In any case, theologians who say *anti* means “instead of” here say that Jesus had a choice of having the “joy” set before him, or he could endure the cross. Many of them say that the joy Jesus gave up was the joy of living forever in heaven with God and not experiencing the cross. However, other theologians, such as William Lane[[92]](#footnote-20507) feel the joy Jesus gave up could not be the eternal joy of being in heaven, but would have had to have been some temporal joy he could have had on earth that he gave up for the cross, but what that particular joy was is not exactly known. We feel that the majority of the commentators, and almost every English version, are correct in saying that Jesus endured the cross “for” or perhaps more clearly, “because of” the joy that was set before him of purchasing redemption for mankind and earning his place as “King of kings and Lord of lords.”

**“thinking nothing of.”** The Greek word translated “thinking nothing of” is *kataphroneō* (#2706 καταφρονέω), and it has a range of meaning that encompasses looking down on someone or something with contempt or aversion; considering something not important and thus disregarding it; and not caring about, or ignoring, someone or something. It is surprising that many modern versions continue to use the word “despise” in this verse, even though it gives most readers the wrong impression. In defense of “despise,” it is true that one of the primary meanings of the English word “despise” is to look down on with contempt or to regard as worthless. However, the much more well-known use of “despise” is an intense dislike and even loathing. Given that fact, “despise” is not the best translation in Hebrews 12:2 or in the other places where *kataphroneō* is used in the New Testament. A better translation is “to ignore,” or “to think nothing of.”

Jesus did not endure being crucified, “despising the shame,” as if he hated the shame. It was indeed a shameful thing to be crucified, but Jesus did not “hate” it; he ignored it. In doing that, he set a wonderful example for us to follow. Many times we will find that if we are to be a true follower of Jesus, we will have to ignore the shame and mistreatment we endure.

There are other times when *kataphroneō* is usually translated “despise,” which can give us the wrong impression of what the verse is saying. One is when Paul writes to Timothy and says, “Let no one despise you for your youth” (1 Tim. 4:12 ESV). No one would hate someone who was young; the better way to understand the verse is that Paul told Timothy not to let anyone ignore him just because he was young. Matthew 6:24 about the two masters is another place we need to properly understand *kataphroneō* (see commentary on Matt. 6:24).

**“sat down.”** That Jesus sat down at the right hand of the throne of God shows his royal status. Nehemiah 2:6 shows the royal status of the queen in that she sits beside the king. In the ancient world much more than in the modern, the position of sitting or standing demonstrated one’s position in that particular situation. James 2:3 shows the favoritism that could be wrongly shown to a wealthy person versus a poor person by giving the wealthy person a seat but having the poor person stand (James 2:3). Rulers sat while those of lower status stood before them. This protocol starts with God, who sits on his throne while His army stands before him (1 Kings 22:19; cf. Isa. 6:1), and extends to earth. Rulers are often specifically depicted as sitting (1 Kings 22:10). The ruling elders of a city are often said to be sitting in the gate (Gen. 19:1; 2 Sam. 18:24; 19:8; Esther 2:19, 21). One stood before the kings as a mark of respect and recognition of the power of the king versus one’s own lower status (cf. Esther 5:1). It is still part of courtroom protocol that when the judge enters the room everyone stands up in respect.

**“right hand.”** In the ancient world in general, certainly in the biblical world, and still in many parts of the world today, the right hand is the hand of honor. In the ancient world, before the invention of modern conveniences, the custom was that people washed themselves with their left hand after going to the bathroom. Furthermore, it was the custom (understandably!) that people ate with their right hand. Thus, culturally, the right hand was the hand of honor (cf. Ps. 110:1). Jesus told the High Priest and those with him that they would see him seated at the right hand of “Power,” a title of God, after which they accused him of blasphemy. The Bible says in a number of different places that Jesus is at the right hand of God ([Mark 16:19] Acts 2:33; 7:55, 56; Rom. 8:34; Col. 3:1; 1 Pet. 3:22).

That Jesus “sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” is very strong evidence against the Trinity. For one thing, Jesus is depicted as being at the right hand of “God,” not “the Father.” In fact, “right hand of the Father” never appears in Scripture. This is good evidence that “God” and Jesus are two separate beings and Jesus is not “God.” (Trinitarians say that “God” in these texts is the Father, but that is an assumption based on their theology. It is not what the Bible says, nor is that point of view ever explained in the Bible). Second, there never is a “person,” “the Holy Spirit,” when Jesus is at the right hand of God. We would expect, if the Trinity were correct, that Jesus would be at the right hand of the Father and the Holy Spirit, but we never see that in the Bible. Also, in this verse, Jesus is at the right hand of the “throne” of God. That phrase only makes sense if Jesus is not “God.” If he were God, it would be demeaning to say he was at the right hand of the “throne of God,” because if he were God, he would not be beside his own throne, and if he were co-equal with the Father he would not be depicted as beside his Father’s throne. The scene is simple and straightforward. Jesus is not God; he is the Son of God, and he has been exalted to the right hand of God, which is also the right hand of the throne of God.

Heb 12:3

**“Yes.”** The Greek word *gar* (#1063 γάρ) in this context is the “confirmatory gar,” and could be translated “yes,” “indeed,” etc. Many English versions omit it altogether.

**“think carefully about.”** The Greek word is *analogizomai* (#357 ἀναλογίζομαι), where the Greek prefix *ana* (“again,” “up”) is combined with *logizomai* (“to consider, reason, take into account, deliberate”), such that it means to go over and over something in the mind, thus to consider it carefully or think about it carefully, to think something over thoroughly or completely. Although the English word “consider” does technically mean to think about something carefully, the more common way it is used is to “take into account,” or keep in mind as an option. For example, “I’ll consider the person’s age when rendering my judgment,” or “I will consider walking instead of riding my bike.” That being said, “think carefully about” seems more on point for the modern reader.

**“souls.”** The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is used more broadly of the individual himself with an emphasis on his thoughts and emotions. Thus, while the verse could read something such as, “so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (NIV; cf. HCSB, ESV, NASB, NET), the inclusion of the word “soul” points us to the fact that the thoughts, feelings, and emotions are specifically being emphasized. If we are going to stay mentally and emotionally strong in the spiritual battle, we have to keep Jesus Christ and what he did firmly in our minds.

[For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

Heb 12:5

**“Have you completely forgotten.”** This can be a statement or a question. The tone of the Epistle seems to favor a question. The Author is not demeaning the hearers, but challenging them to look inside themselves. The Greek word *eklanthanomai* (#1585 ἐκλανθάνομαι) is in the middle voice, so here this compound verb means “to completely forget.”[[93]](#footnote-15016)

Heb 12:9

**“live.”** This refers to living forever. See commentary on Luke 10:28.

Heb 12:15

**“Watch over others.”** The Greek verb translated “watch over” is *episkopeō* (#1983 ἐπισκοπέω), and in this context, it means to oversee, to accept responsibility for the care of someone, watch over, care for.[[94]](#footnote-17880) The word is built from *epi*, “over, on top of” and *skopos*, “to watch, to see in the distance.” The noun *episkopos* is the person who is the “overseer,” and the job he does is to “oversee,” *episkopeō*. If a congregation is to remain godly, the “Overseer” (today we might say “Pastor”) has to make sure that people do not infiltrate the flock and turn them from the Lord. The people to watch out for covered in this section fall into three categories. The first is people who have turned away from the grace of God and turned to legalism. Hebrews was written to Hebrews, so when a person turned away from grace, the normal path was a return to legalism. Just as Paul warned the Galatians against legalism, so here those in congregations are warned against legalism.

The second type of person a leader should watch for is bitter people who defile others (see “root of bitterness” below). The third type of person leaders should watch for in a congregation is godless people, people like Esau who are spiritually immoral and secular; who are irreligious. This kind of person can infect a congregation with a desire for, and focus on, the godless, secular, things of the world.

**“root of bitterness sprouts up.”** This phrase has great depth of meaning because it can refer both to the person who is the “bitter root,” and the process that leads to the root of bitterness. The primary meaning in this context does not refer to a bitter thought, but a bitter person. In that sense, the translation would be something like, “that no one is a ‘bitter root’ springing up and causing trouble, and through him many become defiled.” The context is about people, and how believers (in particular leaders) should exercise oversight so that 1) no person is falling away from the grace of God, 2) no person is a bitter root who defiles others, and 3) no person is immoral and irreligious like Esau.

However, the text about the “root of bitterness” is written in such a way that it can also refer to the thoughts that are behind the behavior of the bitter person, and how a “root of bitterness” can grow up inside a person and eventually lead to many being defiled. Behind the person who is a “bitter root,” is the thought process that leads to bitterness—and this is something that each of us must be aware of and be prepared to deal with in our own lives, and help others deal with in their lives.

When a person becomes unthankful, selfish, angry, etc., that person’s brain neurons grow in a way that reinforces those thoughts. Over time as a person thinks bitter thoughts, the once loosely connected (or associated) neurons that produced occasional angry or bitter thoughts become more and more tightly associated, and nerve cell fibers, like the roots of a tree, actually grow and strengthen that thought process. We understand this growth and strengthening process when it comes to our ordinary memories. A memory we do not often access is fuzzy and vague, and we have a hard time “remembering” it. In contrast, a memory that we access regularly becomes stronger and stronger as we continue to access it. Two thousand years ago, the God who formed our brain knew that bitterness, like any other attitude or memory, would increase as the behavior continued. If we do not make up our minds to obey God and stop our anger, the angry thoughts we rehearse in our minds become more and more like a strong root, becoming more intertwined with emotions, which we then feel simultaneously with the thought. Eventually, the now strong root of anger and bitterness breaks forth out of our thought life into the open, where it can defile many. A thought in the heart is like a root in the ground, it will spring out in the open eventually, unless it is killed off or rooted out. The brain is wonderfully designed by God so that we can, if we desire, stop the harmful thoughts of anger and bitterness, and that is what Christians are called to do. Bitter roots among the congregation are mentioned in Deuteronomy 29:18.

**“become defiled.”** The subjunctive mood in the Greek sentence comes from the word “lest.” The point is not lest some might become defiled,” but rather, lest some become defiled.”

Heb 12:16

**“worldly-minded.”** The Greek word is *bebēlos* (#952 βέβηλος), and it refers to something that is accessible to everyone, and therefore devoid of any real spiritual significance. In religious contexts, an area that was *bebēlos* was available to anyone, religious or not, and therefore not special in any way. It was used literally to refer to things or areas that, although in or used in the Temple, were not special in any way. It was then also used for things that were pointless or worthless. It was also then used for things that were not valued or valuable spiritually, or were held in opposition to holiness (that which was separated for God) and thus were common, worldly, godless, irreligious, etc., depending on the context.

**“like Esau.”** Esau was raised in the godly home of Isaac and Rebekah. However, Scripture shows him doing some godly things, but making some important decisions that showed his disregard for God and family. Chief among these was he sold his birthright, which included the right to be the family patriarch and priest, for a bowl of lentil soup. He also chose to marry two Hittite women (Gen. 26:34). When they proved to be a great distress to his mother, he married a daughter of Abraham’s son, Ishmael, but reading the record in Genesis shows that Esau was not focused on a godly life. The point in this record in Hebrews seems to be that some people are just not interested in being godly, but are profane, secular, worldly. That attitude can infiltrate a church and cause a lot of damage, and the vigilant leader will watch out for such people.

Heb 12:17

**“found no opportunity for his repentance.”** The Greek phrase, μετανοίας τόπον εὗρεν is a Greek idiom for someone who looks for a chance to repent and thus come into different circumstances, but finds no such opportunity.[[95]](#footnote-29809) Furthermore, the common translation of the word *metanoia* (#3341 μετάνοια) in the New Testament is “repentance.” Some commentators think that the verse is saying that Esau could not bring about a “repentance” or “change of mind” in his father. While it is true that *metanoia* can mean “change of mind,” there is no need for that rare an understanding of the word in this context: “repent” just does not seem to be used as eliciting repentance or a change of mind in someone else.

It was Esau who repented and was sorry for the mistake he made, but there was no opportunity for his repentance to change anything (Gen. 27:34). He had sold his birthright and the deal was done. No amount of his tears could change what had happened. There are times in life when we do something that we later cannot undo. That is why the Bible says that we are to use wisdom in how we live (Prov. 4:7 KJV: “Wisdom *is* the principal thing; *therefore* get wisdom”). Esau could not undo his earlier decision, no matter how badly he wished he had acted differently than he did.

Esau’s foolishness should be a big lesson for each of us. On the Day of Judgment, many people will be judged as to their salvation, and the prophecy is that many will weep and wail, but it will be too late. Now, when people have the chance to get saved, they often mock and reject it. Later, their tears will not change their fate. Similarly, people who are saved will be judged for rewards, which will be given out based on what the person did in life. Many people will rue their wasted life and will wish they had done more for the Lord to earn more rewards in the Kingdom, but again, it will be too late. Now is the time to get saved, and now is the time to work hard and obediently for the Kingdom. No one needs to be ashamed on Judgment Day.

[For more on rewards, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10. For people, even Christians, being ashamed when Jesus comes, see commentary on 1 John 2:28.]

Heb 12:18

**“not come to what can be touched.”** Some manuscripts add the word “mountain,” but the manuscript evidence is clear that it was a later addition to the text.

To the person familiar with the record of the Israelites at Mount Sinai, this verse can be difficult to understand at first reading. The commandment in the Old Testament was that if any person or animal even touched Mount Sinai, he was to be killed (Exod. 19:12-13). So why does this verse speak of “what can be touched,” instead of “what cannot be touched,” i.e., what they were not allowed to touch? The answer lies in reading the entire context and the two sentences in contrast to each other. The first sentence is Heb. 12:18-21, and it speaks of things in the flesh, things that can be touched. The second sentence is Heb. 12:22-24, and they speak of heavenly things such as God, Jesus, angels, and the heavenly Jerusalem that are spiritual in nature and cannot be touched. Thus, the section is saying, you have not been dealing with things in the senses world like the Old Testament believers did, you are dealing with heavenly things, so “see that you do not refuse him who is speaking” (Heb. 12:25).

Heb 12:19

**“the voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further word should be spoken to them.”** This statement is easy to understand for those people who really know the Old Testament, but an enigma to those who do not. The common, but erroneous, teaching is that the first time the Ten Commandments were given, they were written on stone and given to Moses. That is not correct.

After the Exodus, Moses went up and down Mount Sinai seven times, and they all are recorded in the book of Exodus.

* 1st time up: Exod. 19:3; 1st down: Exod. 19:7.
* 2nd time up: Exod. 19:8; 2nd down: Exod. 19:14.
* 3rd time up: Exod. 19:20; 3rd down: Exod. 19:25 [it was right after Moses’ third trip down the Mountain, when Moses was down with the people, that God spoke the Ten Commandments audibly to the people].
* 4th time up: Exod. 20:21; 4th down: Exod. 24:3.
* 5th time up: Exod. 24:15; 5th down Exod. 32:15 [on this 5th trip Moses had been on the Mountain 40 days and nights. During that time he received the revelation about the Tabernacle, and also the Ten Commandments on stone. He had the tablets of stone with him when he came down, but he broke them when he saw the golden calf].
* 6th time up: Exod. 32:31; 6th down: Exod. 32:34.
* 7th time up: Exod. 34:4; 7th down: Exod. 34:29 [this 7th time Moses was again with Yahweh for 40 days and nights (Exod. 34:28), and came down with a new set (the second set) of the Ten Commandments].

On Moses’ 2nd trip up Mount Sinai, God told Moses to put boundaries around the Mountain so no one would touch the mountain. Then on his 3rd trip up the Mountain, God again told Moses to warn the people about not touching the Mountain. Thus, Exodus 19:25 says that Moses went down Mount Sinai to the people (3rd trip down), and that is where he was, at the bottom of Mount Sinai with the people, when God spoke the Ten Commandments audibly, in a loud voice so everyone could hear (cf. Exod. 19:19; 20:1-2). It was later, on his 5th trip up the Mountain, that he got the first set of the Ten Commandments on stone.

When the people heard the voice of God shouting out the Ten Commandments, they were terrified, and asked that they not hear the voice of God any more (cf. Exod. 20:19). God honored that request and after that time spoke to Moses, who then communicated the Torah to Israel.

At the end of the 40 years of wandering, in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses recounted to Israel that God had given them the Ten Commandments by speaking with them.

**Deut. 4:10-13 (ESV)**

“…on the day that you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, the LORD said to me, ‘Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me…And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while the mountain burned with fire…Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice. And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments….”

Again in Deuteronomy 4:15 God said that Israel had heard his voice, and again in Deut. 5:4, 22-23.

After Moses came down Mount Sinai the 7th time, the Tabernacle was set up, and it was finished on the first day of the first month, of the second year of the wanderings, less than a year after Israel came out of Egypt. Once the Tabernacle was finished and set up, Israel only stayed in the area of Sinai for a little more than a month and a half, because on the twentieth day of the second month of the second year, God moved them to the desert of Paran (Num. 10:11).

Heb 12:20

**“it will be stoned.”** This is from Exodus 19 when God was about to come down onto Mount Sinai, and then from there shout the Ten Commandments down to the people (which He did, starting in Exodus 20:1). Hebrews 12:20 cuts Exodus 19:13 off short and does not finish the full sentence. The full sentence in Hebrew reads that “it will be stoned or shot with arrows.” Due to the difference between the text in Exodus and the text here in Hebrews, scribes were under pressure to make the quotation read like the text in Exodus. Thus, a few Greek manuscripts enlarged the quotation in Hebrews so that it read like Exodus 19:13. Even though there were only very few manuscripts that had the enlarged reading, that larger reading came into versions such as the King James Version and Young’s Literal Translation, which is why the King James Version has, “it will be stoned or thrust through with a dart.”

[For more on harmonization and the effect it has on translation, see commentary on Luke 11:2, “Father.”]

Heb 12:22

**“that is.”** Here the Greek word kai, often translated “and,” is used as an “even,” or “that is,” identifying “Mount Zion” with the city of the living God.

**“an uncountable number.”** This is translated from the Greek word *murias* (#3461 μυριάς; from which we get “myriad”), and it refers to an uncountable number.

**“who are gathered for a festival.”** The Greek word is *panēguris* (#3831 πανήγυρις, pronounced pa-'nay-goo-ris), and in both Jewish and Greek sources it was used of joyful gatherings for the feasts and festivals. The Greeks would have festal assemblies to celebrate the games, to honor a god, for special days, etc. The Jews would have festal assemblies at the times of the feasts on their calendar. This word was not understood in 1611, so the KJV starts the next verse, Heb. 12:23, before it and translated it “general assembly,” but the syntax best fits if it is used as part of the whole phrase that speaks of an uncountable number of angels in joyful, festal assembly.[[96]](#footnote-24713) What a great picture! Sometimes we think of the things of God as so serious, solemn, or somber that no one has any fun or a good time. It is wonderful to know that even angels gather at times in joyful assemblies, and it would seem from the word that just as God gave feasts to Israel, so there are specific feast times for the spiritual world as well.

Heb 12:23

**“firstborn.”** The Greek word is *prōtotokos* (#4416 πρωτότοκος), which means “firstborn.” There has not been general agreement as to what group this is referring to. It does not refer to Jesus because it is plural. Some scholars see this as a reference to the angels, who are the first ones created by God. In support of that is the structure, which has three things that refer to the heavenly Jerusalem which would be followed by three things that refer to angels. However, the phrase “whose *names* have been written in heaven” mitigates against that interpretation. Much more likely is that it refers to the Jews, who were God’s chosen people, and the word *prōtotokos* is used in the Septuagint of the Jews when God led them out of Egypt (cf. Exod. 4:22; Jer. 31:9). That would especially make sense because this is the book of Hebrews, written to the Jewish people.

**“whose *names* have been written in heaven.”** These saved people are not up in heaven, but are assured a place in heaven. The sense of permanence comes from the use of the perfect participle; their names have been written there and remain there. The people do not have to be in heaven to have their names written there, as Luke 10:20 makes clear.

**“the spirits of righteous people who have finished *their race*.”** The phrase, “the spirits of righteous people” was a way of referring to righteous people who have died.

The phrase “who have finished *their race*” is from the Greek verb *teleioō* (#5048 τελειόω, pronounced te-lay-'ah-ōh), and it refers to coming to an end, and as such can have a large semantic range, depending on the context. Meanings can include: end, accomplish, finish, complete, perfect, reach a goal, reach maturity, fulfill, carry out, fill up, reach the end of one’s labors, etc., and there can also be meanings specific to something; for example, in the Roman mystery religions it was used of consecrate or initiate (because the person had reached the end of the requirements). Furthermore, the Greek Sophocles used the word in the sense of “come to the end of one’s labors,” which also makes sense in this verse.

Most theologians believe that dead people are alive and go on as a soul or spirit to live in heaven or “hell.” From that perspective, people who have died righteous have “been perfected” and live in heaven. But the Bible teaches that dead people are not alive in any form, they are dead in every way. Thus, these people have not “been perfected” in the sense that they are now alive in perfect spirit bodies, but they have “finished their course.” Actually, the wide range of how this phrase could be translated can be much more easily seen in Luke 13:32, which speaks of the death of Christ and also uses *teleioō* in the passive voice. The KJV, following its standard way of translating *teleioō* as “perfected,” has: “And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures today and tomorrow, and the third *day* I shall be perfected” (Luke 13:32). However, other versions have very different translations of *teleioō* and end Luke 13:32 very differently.

* HCSB, CEB, and NET: “I will complete my work” (the NRSV has, “I finish my work”).
* ESV and RSV: “I finish my course.”
* NASB and CJB: “I reach my goal” (the NIV has, “I will reach my goal”).
* NLT: “I will accomplish my purpose.”

If we translated Hebrews 12:23 as those verses are translated, then we see that it is speaking of the spirit of righteous people who have “finished their work,” “finished their course,” “reached their goal,” “accomplished their purpose,” and, from Sophocles, “come to the end of their labor.” All of those choices make sense, and we went with “finished their race” in the REV because God gives each person a ministry and work to accomplish on this earth, which changes to a certain degree as life and circumstances change. In 2 Timothy 4:7 Paul writes that he had “finished his race,” and was now at the end of his life.

Hebrews chapter 11 opened its review of people who had stayed faithful and died in faith, and mentioned that even though Abel is dead, he still speaks, that is, his life stands as an example to us. Similarly, those righteous people who have died before us are an example and constant reminder to live a godly and obedient life, and “not refuse him who is speaking” (Heb. 12:25).

[See Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

Heb 12:24

**“sprinkled blood.”** This is the figure of speech antimereia.[[97]](#footnote-22324) The Greek reads, “blood of sprinkling” moving the adjective into a nominative position for emphasis.

**“speaking better than *the blood of* Abel.”** A comparison is being made about Jesus’ sacrificial death and his shed blood upon the cross, thereby becoming the mediator of a new covenant for God’s people. The comparison that the author of Hebrews is making is with the effect of the death of Abel in contrast to that of Jesus. When Abel was killed by his brother Cain, his blood “cried out from the ground” (Gen. 4:10), which is a personification depicting Abel’s blood as an eyewitness condemning Cain’s violent crime against him. The voice of Abel’s blood was seeking justice and judgment from the Lord against Cain. As a result, a curse was issued by God upon Cain as the punishment for his wicked act (Gen. 4:11-13). But the new covenant realities brought about through Jesus’ death “speaks better” than what Abel’s blood did. The blood of Jesus in the new covenant speaks of forgiveness, redemption, sanctification, and reconciliation. Moreover, in Jesus’ death, he took upon himself the curse of sin that was upon every person (Gal. 3:10). He became a curse so that those who believe in him would not have to pay the penalty of sin’s curse but rather receive the promises God made to Abraham (Gal. 3:13). These are “better promises” (Heb. 8:6), by a “better covenant” (Heb. 7:22), for a “better possession” (Heb. 10:34), through a “better resurrection” (Heb. 11:35).

Heb 12:25

**“from the earth.”** The Greek reads, “on earth,” but it is referring to God who was on earth and who warned the people from the top of Mount Sinai. The Israelites gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai and God spoke audibly to them from off of the top of the mountain (see commentary on Heb. 12:19). God was “on earth,” on the top of Mount Sinai, and Moses and the elders of Israel saw Him there (Exod. 24:9-11). The problem we have with a strictly literal reading of the Greek if we do not know the context of the verse or the history of Israel is that we could think the phrase “on earth” referred to the people of Israel who were “on earth.” For example, the NASB reads, “See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned *them* on earth,…” That reading makes it seem like the people on the earth were being warned, and that is not what the verse is saying, as we can see from the last half of the verse when God warns from heaven. The point of the verse is that if the people whom God warned from earth did not escape punishment, then we will certainly not escape punishment if God warns us from heaven but we ignore Him.

If we wanted to stick closer to the literal Greek without losing the idea of the verse, we could move the prepositional phrase: “For if they did not escape when they refused the one who, on earth, warned them,….”

Heb 12:28

**“be thankful.”** One of the times that “grace” is used of gratefulness or thankfulness.[[98]](#footnote-14282)

**“reverent submission.”** This word is only used twice in the NT, here, and Hebrews 5:7. See commentary on Hebrews 5:7.

Heb 12:29

**“our God is a consuming fire.”** An allusion to Deuteronomy 4:24 in the Septuagint.

**Hebrews Chapter 13**

Heb 13:1

**“affection for *God’s* family.”** The Greek is *philadelphia* (#5360 φιλαδελφία, pronounced phi-la-del-'phee-a) a compound Greek word made up of *philos* (a strong liking, a friendship; see commentary on John 21:15) and *adelphos* (#80 ἀδελφός), which means “brother.” It is the strong bond of friendship that exists between brothers.

Heb 13:3

**“Remember.”** The Greek word is *mimnēskō* (#3403 μιμνῄσκω (μιμνήσκομαι), pronounced mim-'nace-koe), and it means, “remember,” but in the ancient cultures it did not mean just mentally “remember,” but to keep in mind and do something for. Thayer’s lexicon has, “remember and care for.” Samson called out to God, “Remember me,” meaning, “Help me.” The thief on the cross said to Jesus, “Remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42), meaning “Take care of me; let me be a part of your kingdom.” Abigail asked David to remember her when David became king (1 Sam. 25:31).

Heb 13:4

**“Marriage.”** The text moves from Heb. 13:1-3, which are about loving others (Heb. 13:1-2) and especially remembering and caring for other Christians who are suffering (Heb. 13:3), to respecting others via respecting the marriage. The word “honor” is the first word in the sentence in the Greek text and is made emphatic by its position in the sentence, and the adjectives are emphatic, thus the word “must” in the REV translation (cf. HCSB, NET).[[99]](#footnote-26253)

Heb 13:5

**“be content with what you have.”** The Bible says a lot about being content and not laboring to get rich (cf. Prov. 23:4; Luke 12:15; 1 Tim. 6:8-10; Heb. 13:5. See commentary on Prov. 23:4).

Heb 13:9

**“for it is good for our hearts to be established by grace, not by foods.”** The use of “foods” here, although it can be generalized to all foods, more specifically refers to ceremonial foods. Ritual sacrifices and ritual meals required by the Law caused some people to set and establish their heart before God by whether or not they did all the sacrifices correctly, and not due to the love, mercy, and grace in their lives. It is easy to get caught up in religious practices and miss the real heart of God.

Heb 13:10

**“We have an altar from which those who serve in the tent have no right to eat.”** In New Testament times, this “altar” was on the Mount of Olives east of the Temple, and evidence supports that it was very close to where Christ was crucified. What Hebrews 13:10-13 says is amazing because it points to a third altar associated with the Tabernacle and Temple. This third altar has almost been forgotten in history, but it plays a very important role in understanding Christ’s death and also locating where Jesus was crucified. Students of Scripture are well aware that the Tabernacle and Temple had two altars: the golden altar of incense inside the Holy Place (Exod. 30:1-10; 37:25-28) and the large altar of sacrifice in the courtyard of the Tabernacle/Temple (Exod. 27:1-8; 38:1-7). However, there was a third altar associated with the Tabernacle and Temple that was “outside of the camp,” that is, it was outside of the area of the Tabernacle/Temple. It was on this third altar that things that were often considered unclean, such as the bodies or body parts of sin offerings, were burned (cf. Exod. 29:14; Lev. 4:12, 21; 8:17; 9:11; 16:27).

Note the two places of burning sacrifices—the two altars—in Leviticus 4:8-12, especially verses 10 and 12. These two places were the great altar in the Tabernacle/Temple, and the “clean place” outside and to the east of the camp where there had to be some kind of altar or grate for burning animals. Hebrews 13:10-13 affirms that the bodies of animal sacrifices were burned outside the camp, but it then goes on to say “so Jesus also suffered outside the gate” (Heb. 10:12). Jesus suffered outside Jerusalem, but logically he would have died very near where the other sin offerings and such were burned since he himself was a sin offering (2 Cor. 5:21).

While it is true that this third altar is never called an “altar” in the Old Testament, it is called an altar in Hebrews 13:10, and with good reason. Each year there would have been thousands of sin offerings and other sacrifices that were burned in that clean place outside the camp, and it takes a lot of wood and oxygen to turn bodies into ash—you can’t just put wood on the ground and lay large, moist animal parts on the wood and expect the animals to turn to ash. There has to be a way for air to get to the fire and keep the fire burning hot enough to turn animal bodies to ash, and that requires some kind of altar-like platform. This third “altar” was not described in the Old Testament descriptions of the Tabernacle or Temple; the text just tells us that the animals had to be burned outside the camp. However, that there was a third “altar” or specific place of burning is clear from the Mosaic Law, Ezekiel, and Hebrews. The lack of directions on how to build this third altar seems to be because God left it up to the priests as to how to build it. Also, depending on how it was built, it is possible that it was not moved when the Tabernacle moved—it would have been associated with a huge ash pile. It could have been left where it was, and another place of burning built when the Tabernacle moved. God had exacting requirements for the altar of incense and the great altar of sacrifice, including size, shape, and materials, but He did not give specific instructions as to how to build this third burning place, or “altar” on which the bodies of the sin offerings were burned. One could postulate whether God’s lack of specific directions for the third altar had to do with the fact that the “real” sin offering would be sacrificed on a cross, not an altar platform, but the Bible does not say.

Because this third altar is not well understood, some scholars have asserted that it is a metaphor. But there is no reason to make Hebrews 13:10-13 a metaphor. The Old Testament Scriptures make it clear that there was a place outside the camp where unclean bodies and body parts of sacrifices were burned, and furthermore, we know that the animal sacrifices and the Red Heifer were types of Christ that emphasized different aspects of his ministry and the atonement he accomplished for humankind.

Ernest Martin wrote about the altar in Hebrews 13:10 and said, “The first thing that must be recognized is that a literal altar is being discussed by the author of Hebrews. It has been shown by Helmut Koester that the ‘altar’ cannot be a symbol for the Lord’s supper nor is it a figure of speech for the ‘cross’ of Jesus.[[100]](#footnote-32648) After all, the statement in the book of Hebrews about the ‘bodies of those beasts’ was certainly referring to literal beasts, and the ‘blood brought into the sanctuary’ was clearly a literal event, and the ‘high priest’ performing the ceremony was certainly a literal person, and the sin offerings that were ‘burned outside the camp’ were also literal animals, and the fact that the priests ‘had no right to eat’ of those well-known sin offerings was also a literal fact because these particular sin offerings were prohibited from being eaten, so why shouldn’t the altar itself be a literal altar?”[[101]](#footnote-30578)

This third altar also comes up in Ezekiel’s vision of the Millennial Temple. In Ezekiel 43:21, the bull that is the sin offering is to be burned “in the appointed place” and “outside of the holy place,” that is, outside the Temple compound. Thus, Ezekiel’s Temple had an altar outside the Temple compound on which unclean things were burned just like Moses’ Tabernacle and Solomon’s Temple did.

Ernest Martin continues: “Early Christians were well aware of this outside altar. The location for burning the sin offerings was to be ‘in a clean place’ outside the camp (Lev. 4:12). Note that Moses commanded ‘a clean place’ (singular), not ‘clean places’ (plural). There was only one place outside the Camp of Israel in the wilderness, and only one place outside Jerusalem in the time of Jesus, where these offerings were burned to ashes. The Jewish authorities have maintained records that show the location of the specific ‘clean place’ within which the Third Altar was situated, mentioned by the book of Hebrews. It was *east* of the sanctuary.”[[102]](#footnote-27837)

Ernest Martin gives more proof that the altar was east of the Temple (for example by referencing the Mishna, Yoma 68a, and Zebahim 105b) and that is important because some Jews of the fifth century started to say the clean place was north of the Temple, but that late placement had more to do with the fact that the crucifixion site had been identified (actually misidentified) as what is now the Church of the Holy Sepulcher than it did with where the Jew’s historically had placed the third altar and the place, which they called the “House of ashes. The most important direction of the Tabernacle and Temple was east, and both the Tabernacle and Temple faced east. In fact, the Tabernacle had its two entrances—one to the Tabernacle courtyard and one to the Tabernacle tent itself—on the east side. The Jews knew where this third altar was located, and it is said to be “outside the gate” (singular), which would logically be outside the east gate.

More evidence that the ashes were carried east of the Tabernacle/Temple and the designated “clean place” was east of the Tabernacle/Temple comes from what happened to the ashes of the great altar of sacrifice inside the Tabernacle/Temple courtyard. Before those ashes were carried away to the clean place outside the camp of Israel (later the city of Jerusalem) they were dumped in the Tabernacle/Temple courtyard east of the altar (Lev. 1:16). If the ultimate destination of those ashes was to a place north of the camp of Israel, we would think that the ashes from the great altar would have been dumped north of it, not east of it.

The ritual of the Red Heifer gives more evidence that the “clean place” outside the camp was east of the Tabernacle and camp. The burning of the Red Heifer (a heifer is a young female cow) was one of the very important sacrifices of the Law, and the Red Heifer was a type of Christ. The Red Heifer was a sin offering (Num. 19:9), but unlike the other sin offerings which were sacrificed in the Temple and then the body burned outside the Temple (Lev. 4:4, 11-12), the Red Heifer was both slaughtered and then completely burned outside the Temple (Num. 19:3-5), just as Jesus was killed outside the Temple. The ashes of the Red Heifer were used to cleanse sin (Num. 19:2-22), and the person who was unclean because he or she touched a dead body but was not cleansed by the ashes of the Red Heifer was cut off from Israel (Num. 19:20). In a similar way, a person who refuses to acknowledge the death and blood of Jesus is cut off from the people of God.

The Red Heifer was taken out the east gate, as indicated in the Bible and in the Mishnah (Middot 1:3, and Parah 3:6,7). In fact, Middot 2:4 indicates that the place where the Red Heifer was burned was on top of the Mount of Olives, east of the Temple. It is noteworthy that the bodies of the sin offerings were burned east of the Temple, and the Red Heifer was burned on top of the Mount of Olives and its ashes used to cleanse priests and people because that ties directly into Jesus being a sin offering and that he would “make the people holy through his blood” (Heb. 13:12; 2 Cor. 5:21). Numbers 19:4 also indicates that the Red Heifer was slaughtered and burned east of the Temple: “and Eleazar the priest is to take some of her blood with his finger and sprinkle her blood toward the front of the Tent of Meeting seven times.” The only place that a priest, after slaughtering the Red Heifer, could stand and sprinkle blood toward the “front” (the east side) of the Tabernacle/Temple would be to the east of the Tabernacle/Temple. Thus, the fact that the priest sprinkled the blood “toward the front of the Tent of Meeting” shows that the Red Heifer was sacrificed on the east side of the Tabernacle/Temple because the “front” of the Tabernacle/Temple was to the east. Jacob Milgrom writes about the phrase “toward the front of the Tent of Meeting” in *The JPS Torah Commentary*: “According to the rabbis, the front, that is, the entrance of the Tent [the Tabernacle], must be seen. Hence, if the wind blows the Tent flap shut, the sprinkling is invalid. During Second Temple times [which was when Jesus lived], the High Priest performed the ceremony atop the Mount of Olives, which afforded a view of the entrance to the Temple building.”[[103]](#footnote-32237)

We can safely assume that from the time that the Temple was built on top of Mount Zion, there were lots of sin offerings and animal parts that were burned on the altar outside the camp, and since the Temple location never moved, the altar east of it had to be in a permanent place as well. There were not ash piles from the burnt bodies of animals scattered all around Jerusalem. The place where the animals and bodies of the sin offerings were burned outside the Temple was called by the Jews “Beth ha-deshen” the “house of ashes” (Mishna: Zevahim 104a-b). It was located on the slope of the hill (Yoma 68b) for proper drainage.

To understand the Bible and Jesus’ death on the cross, it is valuable to put all the evidence together. The Law of Moses makes it clear that the bodies of sin offerings and other unclean things were burned outside of the Tabernacle and the camp of Israel, and that would have involved a lot of burning. Since those animal parts were still part of the offerings, and from texts such as Hebrews 13:12, “outside THE gate,” it makes sense that the place where the body parts were burned was east of the Temple. Furthermore, we learn from the Bible and Jewish records that the Red Heifer, a sin offering, was burned east of the Temple. In saying that at this place of burning unclean things, this altar, was an altar from which the Levitical priests cannot eat, the Bible points us to the altar where the sin offerings were burned and the Red Heifer was burned to ashes. Jesus Christ was our sin offering and atoned for our sin (2 Cor. 5:21). Furthermore, this evidence, and there is other evidence as well, points to the place of Christ’s crucifixion as being near the top of the Mount of Olives.

[For more information on Jesus being crucified on top of the Mount of Olives, see commentary on Matt. 27:33.]

Heb 13:11

**“burned outside the camp.”** There was a clean place outside the camp where the bodies of sin offerings were burned (cf. Exod. 29:14; Lev. 4:12, 21; 8:17; 9:11; 16:27). Hebrews 13:10 correctly calls it an “altar,” and it was outside of the “camp” of Israel when they were in the wilderness and outside the city after Jerusalem was established as the capital of Israel.

Heb 13:13

**“let us go.”** The verb is imperative, and so it can be an invitation, “Let us go,” or a command, “We must go.” There are versions that support both readings, and indeed, this is a place where both meanings are in play. We believe the invitation, “Let us go,” is in better accord with the tone of the Epistle as far as the English translation goes, but we have to realize that if we are going to be saved and serve God, we “must” go to him outside the camp. We must go to him, we cannot remain in our ungodly, comfortable lifestyle and serve God; we must go to him outside the camp, and then follow him where he leads us.

Heb 13:17

**“Yield.”** The Greek verb is *peithō* (#3982 πείθω, pronounced 'pay-thoe). The common meaning of *peithō* in the active voice is “to persuade.” Thus, in the passive voice, it means to allow someone to persuade you, to win your favor. It is used in Greek literature of obeying or following a leader, of being confident in a leader, to listen to and obey a leader. The point we must keep in mind in translating this word would be how a native Greek speaker would read it. There were specific words that meant to “obey” a leader. For example, Titus 3:1, which speaks of obeying the government, uses the verb *peitharcheō* (#3980 πειθαρχέω), which is a compound verb using *peithō* with the word for “rule.” There have been too many times in history when Christian leaders have abused their authority and hurt Christians, using verses such as Hebrews 13:17 and demanding that other Christians “obey” them. According to this verse, Christians are to yield to their leaders, but not “obey” them no matter what they demand or say. The leaders are to persuade their followers and lead by example, and by making reasonable and believable requests.

**“souls.”** See commentary on Hebrews 12:3.

**“as those who *will* have to give an account.”** Leaders have a lot of responsibility and will have to give an account to the Lord concerning how they have led God’s people. This fact shows up in different ways in the Scripture. For example, Leviticus 4 lists the different offerings people had to bring when they sinned, and offerings were more involved and more expensive if the one who sinned was a leader or priest, and less expensive if the sinner was a common person. Also, teachers will have a stricter judgment than non-teachers (James 3:1).

Heb 13:18

**“because we desire.”** The participle is causal.

Heb 13:20

**“brought up.”** The Greek is *anagō* (#321 ἀνάγω), to lead up or out, or to bring up or out. It is not the usual word, which is that God “raised” (*egeirō*; #1453 ἐγείρω) Jesus from the dead.

**“from among the dead.”**[[104]](#footnote-26391) See commentary on Romans 4:24.

**“in connection with.”** This verse is saying that when God led Christ out from among the dead, he did it in connection, or association, with the blood of the eternal covenant. The dative phrase *en haimati* (“in/with the blood”) cannot be understood as instrumental or means, which would make God using the blood as the means to raise up the Son.[[105]](#footnote-27936) God could raise Christ from the dead “in connection with” the blood, because the blood allowed sins to be forgiven and people to be raised from the dead to everlasting life. Translating the verse “through the blood” is not exactly accurate, and had God wanted to say it, He could have (cf. Heb. 13:12, which uses the Greek, “through the blood”).

**“blood of the everlasting covenant.”** This is the New Covenant that was made in Christ’s blood. In his translation, Charles Williams expands the text and thus writes clearly, “the blood by which he ratified the everlasting covenant,” which is true because it was by Christ shedding his blood that the covenant was ratified.[[106]](#footnote-19223) The genitive, “blood of the covenant” is a genitive of relation: the blood that relates to the covenant, and in this case, the relation was one of ratification.

The Greek can mean either “everlasting covenant,” “covenant of the age to come,” or both. Here in 13:20, the answer is “both,” and frankly it is difficult to decide which emphasis to put in the text because both the everlasting nature of the covenant and the fact that it is not fully in force yet are important to understanding Hebrews 13:20. The covenant is everlasting, but it is also only fully in force in the age to come, the Messianic Age. It seems in this context that the “everlasting covenant” is being contrasted to the Old Covenant, and in that sense, “everlasting” seems to be perhaps the best translation, but we must keep in mind that it is a covenant that is not fully in force yet but will be in the age to come.

Heb 13:22

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

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25. A. Nyland, 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-31487)
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35. Both definitions from Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary; 11th ed. [↑](#footnote-ref-13706)
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40. Cf. Lenski. [↑](#footnote-ref-27052)
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92. Lane, Hebrews 9-13 [WBC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-20507)
93. Cf. BDAG, s.v. “ἐκλανθάνομαι.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15016)
94. BDAG, s.v. “ἐπισκοπέω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-17880)
95. Cf. BDAG; William Lane, Hebrews 9-13 [WBC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-29809)
96. See William Lane, Hebrews 9-13 [WBC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-24713)
97. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 491, “antimereia.” [↑](#footnote-ref-22324)
98. Vincent, Word Studies, 4:559. [↑](#footnote-ref-14282)
99. See also, William Lane, Hebrews 9-13 [WBC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-26253)
100. Helmut Koester, “Outside the Camp,” 299-315. [↑](#footnote-ref-32648)
101. Ernest L. Martin, Secrets of Golgotha, 14-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-30578)
102. Martin, Secrets of Golgotha, 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-27837)
103. Jacob Milgrom, The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers, 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-32237)
104. Cf. Wuest, New Testament, “up out from among the dead,” 537. [↑](#footnote-ref-26391)
105. Cf. R. C. H. Lenski, Interpretation of Hebrews, 501-503. [↑](#footnote-ref-27936)
106. Charles Williams, The New Testament: A Private Translation in the Language of the People. [↑](#footnote-ref-19223)