

WEEK 49 ♦ CHRIST OUR SUPERIOR PRIEST

Hebrews begins what are called the General Letters (or Catholic Epistles) of the NT. Although the author of Hebrews is unknown, the audience seems to have been composed of both Christian Jews and some hearers who were considering a return to Judaism. Some among this community were watching as Christians were being severely persecuted by the Roman government. Accordingly, Hebrews served as a charge for believers to stand firm in their faith and endure. Why? Because Christ is superior and therefore worth it. God's heavenly promises will come to pass, and they will exceed the temporary appeal of anything on this earth.

The letter to the Hebrews was most likely a sermon given to the church that emphasized Christ's superiority over Judaism's emphasis on angels, priests, and temple sacrifices. This sermon is filled with OT passages that indicate the supremacy of Jesus above all things. Thus, the book's structure is built around the argument for Christ's supremacy:

- ♦ Jesus is superior to the angels and the law (Heb 1:1–2:18).

WHERE WILL I FIND CHRIST IN THIS WEEK'S READING?

- ♦ Find Jesus as the climactic revelation of God (1:2).
- ♦ See Christ as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe (1:2–3).
- ♦ See Jesus as the radiance of God's glory and exact representation of his character (1:3).
- ♦ Find Christ as the one seated at the right hand of our majestic God (1:3).
- ♦ See Christ as the one superior to the angels (1:4).
- ♦ See Jesus humbling himself by taking on our humanity (2:9; see Ps 8:4–6).
- ♦ See Christ as worthy of more glory than Moses (Heb 3:2–3).
- ♦ See Christ as providing the greater rest (4:9).
- ♦ Find Jesus as one who can sympathize with our weaknesses (4:15).

DAY 1	HEBREWS 1–3	<input type="checkbox"/>
DAY 2	HEBREWS 4–6	<input type="checkbox"/>
DAY 3	HEBREWS 7–9	<input type="checkbox"/>
DAY 4	HEBREWS 10–11	<input type="checkbox"/>
DAY 5	HEBREWS 12–13	<input type="checkbox"/>

- ♦ Jesus is superior to Moses and the original rest found in the promised land (3:1–4:16).
- ♦ Jesus is superior to the Levitical priesthood (5:1–7:28).
- ♦ Jesus is superior to the old covenant and its sacrifices (8:1–10:39).
- ♦ Hebrews offers encouragement to live by faith in Jesus and endure until we reach heaven (11:1–13:25).

Hebrews is arguably the most Christ-centered book in the Bible. Jesus is worthy of our endurance, so let's run to him with faith.

- ♦ See Christ as our priest-king from the order of Melchizedek (5:5–6; see Gn 14:18–20; Ps 110:4).
- ♦ Find Christ as our superior high priest (Heb 7:20–25; see Ps 110:4).
- ♦ See Jesus as the mediator of a superior covenant (Heb 8:6; see Jr 31:31–34).
- ♦ Find Christ offering himself as a superior sacrifice for our forgiveness (Heb 10:11–14).
- ♦ See Jesus returning to deliver our inheritance from heaven (Heb 10:36–39; see Isa 26:21; Hab 2:3–4).
- ♦ See Jesus as the pioneer and perfecter of our faith (Heb 12:1–2).
- ♦ Find Christ in the bringing of his unshakable kingdom (12:25–29; see Hg 2:6).
- ♦ Find Christ who is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8).



HEBREWS

The Nature of the Son

1 Long ago God spoke to our ancestors by the prophets at different times and in different ways. **2** In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. God has appointed him heir of all things and made the universe through him. **3** The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of his nature, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. **4** So he became superior to the angels, just as the name he inherited is more excellent than theirs.

The Son Superior to Angels

5 For to which of the angels did he ever say,

**You are my Son;
today I have become your Father,**

or again,

**I will be his Father,
and he will be my Son?**

6 Again, when he brings his firstborn into the world, he says,

And let all God's angels worship him.

7 And about the angels he says:

**He makes his angels winds,
and his servants a fiery flame,**

8 but to the Son:

**Your throne, God,
is forever and ever,
and the scepter of your kingdom
is a scepter of justice.**

9 You have loved righteousness

**and hated lawlessness;
this is why God, your God,
has anointed you
with the oil of joy
beyond your companions.**

10 And:

**In the beginning, Lord,
you established the earth,
and the heavens are the works
of your hands;**

11 they will perish, but you remain.

They will all wear out like clothing;

12 you will roll them up like a cloak,

and they will be changed like clothing.

**But you are the same,
and your years will never end.**

13 Now to which of the angels has he ever said:

**Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies your footstool?**

Overview of Hebrews

Who: Many figures—such as Paul, Luke, Barnabas, Apollos, and Clement of Rome—have been suggested as the author, but the writer of Hebrews remains unknown on any kind of conclusive level, though the book itself suggests a second-generation Christian (Heb 2:3).

What: The author warned believers not to revert to Judaism but to endure persecution for the sake of Christ.

When: Hebrews was likely written in the mid- to late 60s, which is most evident because it neglects to mention the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70, an event that would have strengthened the author's argument even further concerning the end of the sacrificial system.

Where: While the exact location is unknown, the audience of this letter was made up of Christians with an apparently Jewish heritage (or at least a deep appreciation of the OT).

Why: The recipients of Hebrews had experienced persecution for their faith, so this letter served as a reminder of Christ's superiority to the ways of old during troubling times.

¹⁴ Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve those who are going to inherit salvation?

Warning against Neglect

2 For this reason, we must pay attention all the more to what we have heard, so that we will not drift away. ² For if the message spoken through angels was legally binding and every transgression and disobedience received a just punishment, ³ how will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? This salvation had its beginning when it was spoken of by the Lord, and it was confirmed to us by those who heard him. ⁴ At the same time, God also testified by signs and wonders, various miracles, and distributions of gifts from the Holy Spirit according to his will.

Jesus and Humanity

⁵ For he has not subjected to angels the world to come that we are talking about. ⁶ But someone somewhere has testified:

**What is man that you remember him,
or the son of man that you care for him?**

⁷ **You made him lower than the angels
for a short time;**

you crowned him with glory and honor

⁸ **and subjected everything under his feet.**

For in **subjecting everything** to him, he left nothing that is not subject to him. As it is, we do not yet see **everything subjected** to him.

⁹ But we do see Jesus — **made lower than the angels for a short time** so that by God's grace he might taste death for everyone — **crowned with glory and honor** because he suffered death.

¹⁰ For in bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was entirely appropriate that God — for whom and through whom all things exist — should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. ¹¹ For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, ¹² saying:

**I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters;
I will sing hymns to you in the congregation.**

¹³ Again, **I will trust in him.** And again, **Here I am with the children God gave me.**

¹⁴ Now since the children have flesh and blood in common, Jesus also shared in these, so that through his death he might destroy the one holding the power of death — that is, the devil — ¹⁵ and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death. ¹⁶ For it is clear that he does not reach out to help angels, but to help Abraham's offspring. ¹⁷ Therefore, he had to be like his brothers and sisters in every way, so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in matters pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For since he himself has suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.

Our Apostle and High Priest

3 Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession.

² He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was in all God's household. ³ For Jesus is considered worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder has more honor than the house. ⁴ Now every house is built by someone, but the one who built everything is God. ⁵ Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's household, as a

testimony to what would be said in the future. ⁶ But Christ was faithful as a Son over his household. And we are that household if we hold on to our confidence and the hope in which we boast.

Warning against Unbelief

⁷ Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says:

**Today, if you hear his voice,
⁸ do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,
on the day of testing in the wilderness,
⁹ where your ancestors tested me, tried me,
and saw my works ¹⁰ for forty years.
Therefore I was provoked to anger with that generation
and said, "They always go astray in their hearts,
and they have not known my ways."
¹¹ So I swore in my anger,
"They will not enter my rest."**

¹² Watch out, brothers and sisters, so that there won't be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage each other daily, while it is still called **today**, so that none of you is hardened by sin's deception. ¹⁴ For we have become participants in Christ if we hold firmly until the end the reality that we had at the start. ¹⁵ As it is said:

**Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.**

¹⁶ For who heard and rebelled? Wasn't it all who came out of Egypt under Moses? ¹⁷ With whom was God angry for forty years? Wasn't it with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, if not to those who disobeyed? ¹⁹ So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

The Promised Rest

4 Therefore, since the promise to enter his rest remains, let us beware that none of you be found to have fallen short. ² For we also have received the good news just as they did. But the message they heard did not benefit them, since they were not united with those who heard it in faith. ³ For we who have believed enter the rest, in keeping with what he has said,

**So I swore in my anger,
"They will not enter my rest,"**

even though his works have been finished since the foundation of the world. ⁴ For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in this way: **And on the seventh day God rested from all his works.** ⁵ Again, in that passage he says, **They will never enter my rest.** ⁶ Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news did not enter because of disobedience, ⁷ he again specifies a certain day — **today**. He specified this speaking through David after such a long time:

**Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts.**

⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. ⁹ Therefore, a Sabbath rest remains for God's people. ¹⁰ For the person who has entered his rest has rested from his own works, just as God did from his. ¹¹ Let us, then, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall into the same pattern of disobedience.



DAY 2
Heb 4–6

¹²For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³No creature is hidden from him, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account.

Our Great High Priest

¹⁴Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens — Jesus the Son of God — let us hold fast to our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.

Christ, a High Priest

5 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed in matters pertaining to God for the people, to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. ²He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he is also clothed with weakness. ³Because of this, he must make an offering for his own sins as well as for the people. ⁴No one takes this honor on himself; instead, a person is called by God, just as Aaron was. ⁵In the same way, Christ did not exalt himself to become a high priest, but God who said to him,

**You are my Son;
today I have become your Father,**

⁶also says in another place,

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

⁷During his earthly life, he offered prayers and appeals with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. ⁸Although he was the Son, he learned obedience from what he suffered. ⁹After he was perfected, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, ¹⁰and he was declared by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

The Problem of Immaturity

¹¹We have a great deal to say about this, and it is difficult to explain, since you have become too lazy to understand. ¹²Although by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the basic principles of God's revelation again. You need milk, not solid food. ¹³Now everyone who lives on milk is inexperienced with the message about righteousness, because he is an infant. ¹⁴But solid food is for the mature — for those whose senses have been trained to distinguish between good and evil.

Warning against Falling Away

6 Therefore, let us leave the elementary teaching about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works, faith in God, ²teaching about ritual washings, laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³And we will do this if God permits.

⁴For it is impossible to renew to repentance those who were once enlightened, who tasted the heavenly gift, who shared in the Holy

Spirit,⁵ who tasted God's good word and the powers of the coming age,⁶ and who have fallen away. This is because, to their own harm, they are recrucifying the Son of God and holding him up to contempt.⁷ For the ground that drinks the rain that often falls on it and that produces vegetation useful to those for whom it is cultivated receives a blessing from God.⁸ But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless and about to be cursed, and at the end will be burned.

⁹ Even though we are speaking this way, dearly loved friends, in your case we are confident of things that are better and that pertain to salvation.¹⁰ For God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you demonstrated for his name by serving the saints — and by continuing to serve them.¹¹ Now we desire each of you to demonstrate the same diligence for the full assurance of your hope until the end,¹² so that you won't become lazy but will be imitators of those who inherit the promises through faith and perseverance.

Inheriting the Promise

¹³ For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater to swear by, he swore by himself: **¹⁴ I will indeed bless you, and I will greatly multiply you.**¹⁵ And so, after waiting patiently, Abraham obtained the promise.¹⁶ For people swear by something greater than themselves, and for them a confirming oath ends every dispute.¹⁷ Because God wanted to show his unchangeable purpose even more clearly to the heirs of the promise, he guaranteed it with an oath,¹⁸ so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us.¹⁹ We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain.²⁰ Jesus has entered there on our behalf as a forerunner, because he has become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

The Greatness of Melchizedek

7 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of God Most High, met Abraham and blessed him as he returned from defeating the kings,² and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means king of righteousness, then also, king of Salem, meaning king of peace.³ Without father, mother, or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.

⁴ Now consider how great this man was: even Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the plunder to him.⁵ The sons of Levi who receive the priestly office have a command according to the law to collect a tenth from the people — that is, from their brothers and sisters — though they have also descended from Abraham.⁶ But one without this lineage collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises.⁷ Without a doubt, the inferior is blessed by the superior.⁸ In the one case, men who will die receive a tenth, but in the other case, Scripture testifies that he lives.⁹ And in a sense Levi himself, who receives a tenth, has paid a tenth through Abraham,¹⁰ for he was still within his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

A Superior Priesthood

¹¹ Now if perfection came through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the law), what further need was there



DAY 3

Heb 7–9

CHRIST AS PRIEST

WHO WAS AN OLD TESTAMENT PRIEST?

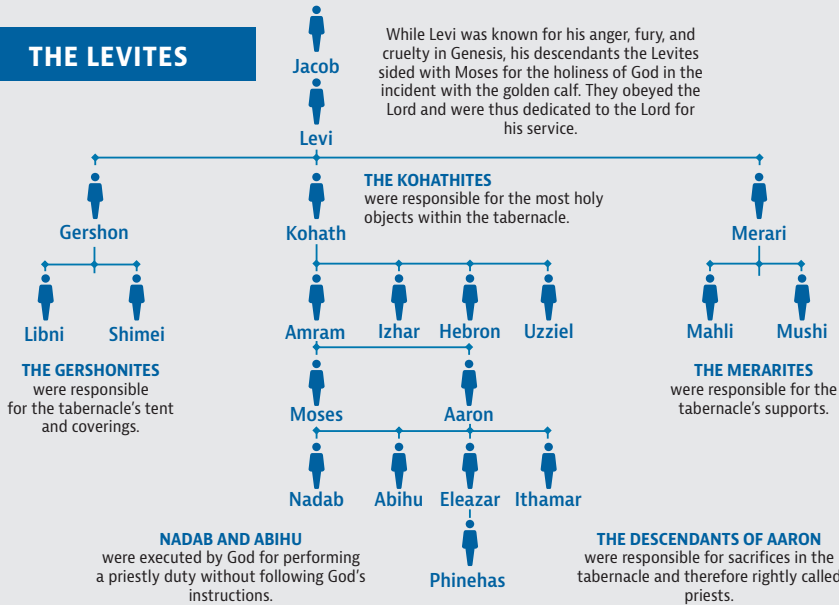
REQUIREMENTS

- ◆ A Levite, a descendant of Levi
- ◆ Specifically, a descendant of Aaron
- ◆ Holy to the Lord
 - ◆ Physically without blemish
 - ◆ Ceremonially clean
 - ◆ Morally clean by virtue of prescribed sacrifices

DUTIES

- ◆ Offer sacrifices to God on behalf of the people
- ◆ Bless the people on behalf of God
- ◆ Teach the people the law of God

THE LEVITES



WHO WAS AN OLD TESTAMENT HIGH PRIEST?

- ◆ A specific descendant of Aaron
- ◆ Appointed by God
- ◆ Had the responsibility of entering the most holy place once a year to make atonement for the people's sins on the Day of Atonement

WHO WERE SOME OF THE HIGH PRIESTS?

- ◆ **AARON** (Ex 28:1; Heb 5:1–4)
- ◆ **ELEAZAR** (Nm 20:25–28)
- ◆ **PHINEHAS** (Jdg 20:27–28)
- ◆ **ELI** (1Sm 1:9)
- ◆ **AHIMELECH** (1Sm 21:1)
- ◆ **ABIATHAR** (1Sm 23:9; Mk 2:26)
- ◆ **ZADOK** (1Kg 2:35)
- ◆ **JEHOIADA** (2Kg 12:2)
- ◆ **HILKIAH** (2Kg 22:8)
- ◆ **JOSHUA** (Hg 1:1; Zch 3:1)
- ◆ **ELIASHIB** (Neh 3:1)

AARON

Aaron, along with his descendants after him, was appointed by God for the priestly ministry of offering sacrifices to God on behalf of the people and for blessing the people in the name of the Lord.

PHINEHAS

Phinehas was zealous among the Israelites with the Lord's zeal when he put a man and woman to death for blatant disobedience against God (Nm 25:1–13).

HOW WAS JESUS A PRIEST?

REQUIREMENTS	JESUS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ A Levite, a descendant of Levi ◆ Specifically, a descendant of Aaron ◆ Holy to the Lord <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Physically without blemish ◆ Ceremonially clean ◆ Morally clean by virtue of prescribed sacrifices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The King, the Messiah, a descendant of the tribe of Judah (<i>Heb 7:14</i>) ◆ Holy to the Lord (<i>Heb 4:15</i>) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Tested in every way as we are, yet without sin ◆ A priest in the order of Melchizedek, based not on physical genealogy but on the power of his indestructible life, having been raised from the dead never to die again (<i>Heb 7:15–17</i>)

HOW WAS MELCHIZEDEK THE GREAT HIGH PRIEST?

- ◆ Genesis 14:17–20; Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 7
- ◆ Name means “King of Righteousness”
- ◆ King of Salem, or “King of Peace”
- ◆ A priest of the Most High God
- ◆ Blessed Abraham after a battle and received a tenth of Abraham’s possessions
- ◆ Appears in Genesis (a book of beginnings, genealogies, births, and deaths) without father, mother, or genealogy, without a beginning of days or end of life
- ◆ A king-priest who remains a priest forever, foreshadowing the Son of God (*Heb 7:3*)

HOW WAS JESUS THE GREAT HIGH PRIEST?

THE LEVITICAL HIGH PRIEST	JESUS THE GREAT HIGH PRIEST
◆ Mediator of the old covenant (<i>Heb 9:1–10</i>)	◆ Mediator of a new, better covenant (<i>Heb 9:11–28</i>)
◆ Offered a sacrifice first for his own sin (<i>Heb 5:3</i>)	◆ Tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin (<i>Heb 4:15</i>)
◆ Appointed by God according to physical descent from Aaron (<i>Heb 5:4</i>)	◆ Appointed by God not according to physical descent but in the order of Melchizedek (<i>Heb 5:5–6</i>)
◆ Remained in the office of priest until death (<i>Heb 7:23</i>)	◆ Remains a priest forever because he lives forever (<i>Heb 7:24</i>)
◆ Offered sacrifices daily for the sins of the people and himself (<i>Heb 7:27</i>)	◆ Offered himself once for all for the sins of the people (<i>Heb 7:27</i>)
◆ Entered the most holy place only once a year with the blood of an animal to make atonement for himself and the people, but this sacrifice could never perfect the worshiper’s conscience (<i>Heb 9:7,9</i>)	◆ Entered the most holy place in heaven once for all with his own blood to make eternal atonement for the people and to cleanse their consciences from dead works to serve the living God (<i>Heb 9:14</i>)
◆ Offered the same sacrifices year after year that could never perfect the worshiper (<i>Heb 10:1</i>)	◆ Offered himself once for all to sanctify the worshiper (<i>Heb 10:10</i>)
◆ Stood day after day offering the same ineffectual sacrifices (<i>Heb 10:11</i>)	◆ Offered himself as the one effectual sacrifice for sins and sat down at the right hand of God (<i>Heb 10:12</i>)

The priests of the old covenant were appointed by God according to their lineage, being descendants of Aaron, the brother of Moses. These priests were to be holy and set apart to the Lord and, as Phinehas demonstrated, zealous for the Lord’s holiness. The priesthood of Aaron served its purpose for a time but could never accomplish the ultimate goal of sanctification for the worshiper because of sin in both the priest and the people. Therefore, the kind of priest we need is one who is holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens (*Heb 7:26*). Jesus is this high priest. This sinless Son of God is a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek (*Heb 7:17*). He is the unblemished Lamb of God (*Jn 1:29,36*) who offers himself once for all as the atoning sacrifice for the worshiper (*Heb 10:10*). He is zealous for his Father’s holiness (*Jn 2:13–17*) and has sat down at the right hand of the Father in heaven, having completed his sacrificial work (*Heb 10:12*). As our great high priest Jesus accomplishes the work of reconciling us to God. He is the one whose perfect righteousness is presented to the Father for our justification. He is the one who intercedes for us before the Father (*Heb 7:25; 9:24*) and prays for us to remain faithful (*Lk 22:31–32; Jn 17*). In him we find our forgiveness for sin and peace with God.

for another priest to appear, said to be according to the order of Melchizedek and not according to the order of Aaron? ¹² For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must be a change of law as well. ¹³ For the one these things are spoken about belonged to a different tribe. No one from it has served at the altar. ¹⁴ Now it is evident that our Lord came from Judah, and Moses said nothing about that tribe concerning priests.

¹⁵ And this becomes clearer if another priest like Melchizedek appears, ¹⁶ who did not become a priest based on a legal regulation about physical descent but based on the power of an indestructible life. ¹⁷ For it has been testified:

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

¹⁸ So the previous command is annulled because it was weak and unprofitable ¹⁹ (for the law perfected nothing), but a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

²⁰ None of this happened without an oath. For others became priests without an oath, ²¹ but he became a priest with an oath made by the one who said to him:

**The Lord has sworn
and will not change his mind,
“You are a priest forever.”**

²² Because of this oath, Jesus has also become the guarantee of a better covenant.

²³ Now many have become Levitical priests, since they are prevented by death from remaining in office. ²⁴ But because he remains forever, he holds his priesthood permanently. ²⁵ Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, since he always lives to intercede for them.

²⁶ For this is the kind of high priest we need: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ He doesn't need to offer sacrifices every day, as high priests do — first for their own sins, then for those of the people. He did this once for all time when he offered himself. ²⁸ For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak, but the promise of the oath, which came after the law, appoints a Son, who has been perfected forever.

A Heavenly Priesthood

8 Now the main point of what is being said is this: We have this kind of high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, ² a minister of the sanctuary and the true tabernacle that was set up by the Lord and not man. ³ For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; therefore, it was necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. ⁴ Now if he were on earth, he wouldn't be a priest, since there are those offering the gifts prescribed by the law. ⁵ These serve as a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was warned when he was about to complete the tabernacle. For God said, **Be careful that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown to you on the mountain.** ⁶ But Jesus has now obtained a superior ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been established on better promises.

A Superior Covenant

⁷ For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion for a second one. ⁸ But finding fault with his people, he says:

CHRIST OUR SUPERIOR PRIEST

◆ HEBREWS 8:1–13 ◆

With the letter to the Hebrews, some central themes of the entire Bible come full circle: covenant, kingdom, sacrifice, and redemption. The old covenant, represented by the whole of the OT story, failed to accomplish complete redemption for God's people. This first covenant failed not because something was bad about it but instead because God's people remained sinful. The conventions and rituals of the OT, in other words, could not overcome humanity's sin problem, which made something "new and better" necessary to bring about true salvation. Despite Moses, Aaron, and other leaders proving faithful at times, they were still sinful and eventually died, pointing to the need for a more effective ministry. A greater mediator was needed who could fully sanctify the people.

To cut to the chase, Jesus Christ came as our great high priest to establish a new covenant with God's people. The covenant he enacted with his sacrifice would bring permanent blessing as opposed to being provisional and temporary like the priestly ministry of the Mosaic covenant. Accordingly, the author of Hebrews summarized his central argument:

Now the main point of what is being said is this: We have this kind of high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister of the sanctuary and the true tabernacle that was set up by the Lord and not man. (Heb 8:1–2)

As indicated in the previous chapter, the Levitical priesthood was weak and ineffective to bring about permanent redemption because it was earthly in character and its ministers were mortal. Jesus came from a different tribe than the Levites—namely, Judah—and he was also of a different priestly order—namely, the eternal order of Melchizedek (see 7:11–22).

Furthermore, the Son of God entered the heavenly tabernacle to make his offering, something the sons of Aaron could not do (8:2–3). Though it was to serve its function during its time, the Levites' ministry was merely a copy and shadow of the true realities (vv. 4–5). Unlike the earthly tabernacle that contained no chairs for sitting, Jesus sat down (v. 1), showing the completeness of his work. For these reasons, the covenantal blessings Jesus achieved were superior to the benefits of

the old covenant. Jesus obtained a superior ministry (v. 6).

The author of Hebrews then went on to say this: "For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion for a second one" (v. 7). Yes, the sordid story of the OT is the failure of God's people to remain faithful to their covenant obligations. There were too many flaws: faulty people, faulty priests, and faulty kings. However, that is not the only reason the old covenant was at fault. The conventions and offices of the Mosaic covenant in themselves were inadequate to overcome human faultiness—above all else the people's sinfulness and fragility.

The only thing in the OT that wasn't faulty was God and his promises. Through the prophets, God declared he would usher in a new kingdom founded on a new covenant. With this new covenant, God would provide a perfect priest-king to serve as mediator. Thus, in his death and resurrection, Jesus brought this new covenant into effect (Lk 22:20). Subsequently, the Holy Spirit actualized the lived experience of this new covenant in the hearts of God's people (see Jr 31:31–34; Ezk 36:26–27; Ac 2:33).

As the passage presents them by quoting the prophet Jeremiah, let's consider the covenant promises Jesus has obtained for us as our superior priest:

- ◆ The inward power of the Holy Spirit
- ◆ Intimate and saving knowledge of God across the covenant community
- ◆ The internalizing of God's commands toward realized obedience
- ◆ The permanent forgiveness of sins (see Heb 8:8–12)

In summation, these new-covenant promises describe a thriving and everlasting relationship between God and his people, the kind of relationship God had intended from the beginning.

The author of Hebrews thus drew this conclusion: "By saying a new covenant, he has declared that the first is obsolete. And what is obsolete and growing old is about to pass away" (8:13). Indeed, the old has passed away, and the new has come (2Co 5:17). Let us live with the utmost gratitude for the permanent salvation secured by Christ our superior priest.

See, the days are coming, says the Lord,
when I will make a new covenant
with the house of Israel
and with the house of Judah —

⁹ not like the covenant
that I made with their ancestors
on the day I took them by the hand
to lead them out of the land of Egypt.
I showed no concern for them, says the Lord,
because they did not continue in my covenant.

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

¹¹ And each person will not teach his fellow citizen,
and each his brother or sister, saying, “Know the Lord,”
because they will all know me,
from the least to the greatest of them.

¹² For I will forgive their wrongdoing,
and I will never again remember their sins.

¹³ By saying a new covenant, he has declared that the first is obsolete.
And what is obsolete and growing old is about to pass away.

Old Covenant Ministry

9 Now the first covenant also had regulations for ministry and an earthly sanctuary. ²For a tabernacle was set up, and in the first room, which is called the holy place, were the lampstand, the table, and the presentation loaves. ³Behind the second curtain was a tent called the most holy place. ⁴It had the gold altar of incense and the ark of the covenant, covered with gold on all sides, in which was a gold jar containing the manna, Aaron’s staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. ⁵The cherubim of glory were above the ark overshadowing the mercy seat. It is not possible to speak about these things in detail right now.

⁶With these things prepared like this, the priests enter the first room repeatedly, performing their ministry. ⁷But the high priest alone enters the second room, and he does that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. ⁸The Holy Spirit was making it clear that the way into the most holy place had not yet been disclosed while the first tabernacle was still standing. ⁹This is a symbol for the present time, during which gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the worshiper’s conscience. ¹⁰They are physical regulations and only deal with food, drink, and various washings imposed until the time of the new order.

New Covenant Ministry

¹¹But Christ has appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come. In the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands (that is, not of this creation), ¹²he entered the most holy place once for all time, not by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. ¹³For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a young cow, sprinkling those who are defiled,

sanctify for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works so that we can serve the living God?

¹⁵ Therefore, he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance, because a death has taken place for redemption from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. ¹⁶ Where a will exists, the death of the one who made it must be established. ¹⁷ For a will is valid only when people die, since it is never in effect while the one who made it is living. ¹⁸ That is why even the first covenant was inaugurated with blood. ¹⁹ For when every command had been proclaimed by Moses to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, along with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll itself and all the people, ²⁰ saying, **This is the blood of the covenant that God has ordained for you.** ²¹ In the same way, he sprinkled the tabernacle and all the articles of worship with blood. ²² According to the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

²³ Therefore, it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves to be purified with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴ For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with hands (only a model of the true one) but into heaven itself, so that he might now appear in the presence of God for us. ²⁵ He did not do this to offer himself many times, as the high priest enters the sanctuary yearly with the blood of another. ²⁶ Otherwise, he would have had to suffer many times since the foundation of the world. But now he has appeared one time, at the end of the ages, for the removal of sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷ And just as it is appointed for people to die once — and after this, judgment — ²⁸ so also Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

The Perfect Sacrifice

10 Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come, and not the reality itself of those things, it can never perfect the worshipers by the same sacrifices they continually offer year after year. ² Otherwise, wouldn't they have stopped being offered, since the worshipers, purified once and for all, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? ³ But in the sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year after year. ⁴ For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

⁵ Therefore, as he was coming into the world, he said:

**You did not desire sacrifice and offering,
but you prepared a body for me.**

⁶ **You did not delight
in whole burnt offerings and sin offerings.**

⁷ **Then I said, "See —
it is written about me
in the scroll —
I have come to do your will, God."**

⁸ After he says above, **You did not desire or delight in sacrifices and offerings, whole burnt offerings and sin offerings** (which are



DAY 4

Heb 10–11

offered according to the law),⁹ he then says, **See, I have come to do your will.** He takes away the first to establish the second.¹⁰ By this will, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all time.

¹¹Every priest stands day after day ministering and offering the same sacrifices time after time, which can never take away sins.¹² But this man, after offering one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God.¹³ He is now waiting until his enemies are made his footstool.¹⁴ For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are sanctified.¹⁵ The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. For after he says:

¹⁶ **This is the covenant I will make with them
after those days,
the Lord says,**

**I will put my laws on their hearts
and write them on their minds,**

¹⁷ **and I will never again remember
their sins and their lawless acts.**

¹⁸Now where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.

Exhortations to Godliness

¹⁹Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have boldness to enter the sanctuary through the blood of Jesus — ²⁰he has inaugurated for us a new and living way through the curtain (that is, through his flesh) — ²¹and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water.²³ Let us hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, since he who promised is faithful.²⁴ And let us consider one another in order to provoke love and good works,²⁵ not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.

Warning against Deliberate Sin

²⁶For if we deliberately go on sinning after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,²⁷ but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire about to consume the adversaries.²⁸ Anyone who disregarded the law of Moses died without mercy, based on the testimony of two or three witnesses.²⁹ How much worse punishment do you think one will deserve who has trampled on the Son of God, who has regarded as profane the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?³⁰ For we know the one who has said,

Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay,
and again,

The Lord will judge his people.

³¹It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

³²Remember the earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings.³³ Sometimes you were publicly exposed to taunts and afflictions, and at other times you were companions of those who were treated that way.³⁴ For you sympathized with the prisoners and accepted with joy the confiscation of your possessions, because you know that you yourselves have a better and enduring possession.³⁵ So don't throw away your confidence,

which has a great reward. ³⁶ For you need endurance, so that after you have done God's will, you may receive what was promised.

³⁷ For yet in a **very little while,**
the Coming One will come and not delay.

³⁸ **But my righteous one will live by faith;**
and if he draws back,
I have no pleasure in him.

³⁹ But we are not those who draw back and are destroyed, but those who have faith and are saved.

Living by Faith

11 Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen. ² For by this our ancestors were approved.

³ By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

⁴ By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was approved as a righteous man, because God approved his gifts, and even though he is dead, he still speaks through his faith.

⁵ By faith Enoch was taken away, and so he did not experience death. **He was not to be found because God took him away.** For before he was taken away, he was approved as one who pleased God. ⁶ Now without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

⁷ By faith Noah, after he was warned about what was not yet seen and motivated by godly fear, built an ark to deliver his family. By faith he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

⁸ By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed and set out for a place that he was going to receive as an inheritance. He went out, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he stayed as a foreigner in the land of promise, living in tents as did Isaac and Jacob, coheirs of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

¹¹ By faith even Sarah herself, when she was unable to have children, received power to conceive offspring, even though she was past the age, since she considered that the one who had promised was faithful. ¹² Therefore, from one man — in fact, from one as good as dead — came offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky and as innumerable as the grains of sand along the seashore.

¹³ These all died in faith, although they had not received the things that were promised. But they saw them from a distance, greeted them, and confessed that they were foreigners and temporary residents on the earth. ¹⁴ Now those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they were thinking about where they came from, they would have had an opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But they now desire a better place — a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. He received the promises and yet he was offering his one and only son, ¹⁸ the one to whom it had been said, **Your offspring will be traced through Isaac.** ¹⁹ He considered God to be able even to raise someone from the dead; therefore, he received him back, figuratively speaking.

²⁰ By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. ²¹ By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and **he worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.** ²² By faith

Joseph, as he was nearing the end of his life, mentioned the exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions concerning his bones.

²³ By faith Moses, after he was born, was hidden by his parents for three months, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they didn't fear the king's edict. ²⁴ By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter²⁵ and chose to suffer with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasure of sin. ²⁶ For he considered reproach for the sake of Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, since he was looking ahead to the reward.

²⁷ By faith he left Egypt behind, not being afraid of the king's anger, for Moses persevered as one who sees him who is invisible. ²⁸ By faith he instituted the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn might not touch the Israelites. ²⁹ By faith they crossed the Red Sea as though they were on dry land. When the Egyptians attempted to do this, they were drowned.

³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after being marched around by the Israelites for seven days. ³¹ By faith Rahab the prostitute welcomed the spies in peace and didn't perish with those who disobeyed.

³² And what more can I say? Time is too short for me to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets,³³ who by faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions,³⁴ quenched the raging of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, gained strength in weakness, became mighty in battle, and put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵ Women received their dead, raised to life again. Other people were tortured, not accepting release, so that they might gain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Others experienced mockings and scourgings, as well as bonds and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawed in two, they died by the sword, they wandered about in sheepskins, in goatskins, destitute, afflicted, and mistreated. ³⁸ The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and on mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground.

³⁹ All these were approved through their faith, but they did not receive what was promised,⁴⁰ since God had provided something better for us, so that they would not be made perfect without us.



DAY 5

Heb 12–13

The Call to Endurance

12 Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us,² keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Fatherly Discipline

³ For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, so that you won't grow weary and give up. ⁴ In struggling against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons:

**My son, do not take the Lord's discipline lightly
or lose heart when you are reproved by him,
⁶ for the Lord disciplines the one he loves
and punishes every son he receives.**

⁷ Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline? ⁸ But if you are

◆ A Cloud of Witnesses ◆

Without receiving their full promises in this world, the witnesses listed in Hebrews 11 declared in their lives and deaths that the life of faith in the promising God is worth it. As the apostle Paul put it, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us" (Rm 8:18). Encouraged by these witnesses, we look to Jesus Christ, and by faith, his victory over sin and death belongs to us all. So let us run the race of faith with endurance.

Abel	By faith, offered a sacrifice approved by God and was murdered by his brother	Gn 4:1–16
Noah	By faith, aligned himself with God and condemned the world in its sin	Gn 6:5–9:17
Abraham	By faith, lived as a foreigner in tents in the promised land	Gn 12–25
Abraham	By faith, offered up Isaac, his promised son, as a sacrifice when God tested him	Gn 22:1–19
Isaac	By faith, lived as a foreigner in tents in the promised land	Gn 21–35
Jacob	By faith, lived as a foreigner in tents in the promised land	Gn 25–50
Joseph	By faith, gave the Israelites instructions concerning his bones, though he died outside the promised land	Gn 50:24–26
Moses	By faith, chose to suffer with God's people rather than enjoy the sin of the Egyptians	Ex 2–4
Rahab	By faith, aligned herself with God's people rather than her own disobedient people	Jos 2; 6:22–25
Gideon	By faith, led his army of 300 men against a superior force of over 130,000 men	Jdg 7:1–8:12
Samson	By faith, called on the Lord for strength to kill about 3,000 Philistines in an act of self-sacrifice	Jdg 16:26–30
Samuel	By faith, confronted King Saul in his sin and anointed David as king in his place	1Sm 15:10–16:13
David	By faith, before he was king of Israel, ran from King Saul rather than strike down the Lord's anointed	1Sm 16:1– 2Sm 5:5
The Prophets	By faith, endured torture, mocking, scourging, imprisonment, stoning, being sawn in two, execution by the sword, homelessness, destitution, and mistreatment that they might gain a better resurrection	Heb 11:35–38
Jesus	Endured the cross, despising its shame, for the joy that lay before him—sitting down at the right hand of God, saving all those who believe in him	Heb 12:2

without discipline — which all receive — then you are illegitimate children and not sons.⁹ Furthermore, we had human fathers discipline us, and we respected them. Shouldn't we submit even more to the Father of spirits and live?¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time

based on what seemed good to them, but he does it for our benefit, so that we can share his holiness. ¹¹ No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

¹² Therefore, strengthen your tired hands and weakened knees, ¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated but healed instead.

Warning against Rejecting God's Grace

¹⁴ Pursue peace with everyone, and holiness — without it no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵ Make sure that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no root of bitterness springs up, causing trouble and defiling many. ¹⁶ And make sure that there isn't any immoral or irreverent person like Esau, who sold his birthright in exchange for a single meal.

¹⁷ For you know that later, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, even though he sought it with tears, because he didn't find any opportunity for repentance.

¹⁸ For you have not come to what could be touched, to a blazing fire, to darkness, gloom, and storm, ¹⁹ to the blast of a trumpet, and the sound of words. Those who heard it begged that not another word be spoken to them, ²⁰ for they could not bear what was commanded: **If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned.** ²¹ The appearance was so terrifying that Moses said, **I am trembling with fear.** ²² Instead, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God (the heavenly Jerusalem), to myriads of angels, a festive gathering, ²³ to the assembly of the firstborn whose names have been written in heaven, to a Judge, who is God of all, to the spirits of righteous people made perfect, ²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which says better things than the blood of Abel.

²⁵ See to it that you do not reject the one who speaks. For if they did not escape when they rejected him who warned them on earth, even less will we if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven.

²⁶ His voice shook the earth at that time, but now he has promised, **Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.**

²⁷ This expression, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of what can be shaken — that is, created things — so that what is not shaken might remain. ²⁸ Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful. By it, we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and awe, ²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire.

Final Exhortations

13 Let brotherly love continue. ² Don't neglect to show hospitality, for by doing this some have welcomed angels as guests without knowing it. ³ Remember those in prison, as though you were in prison with them, and the mistreated, as though you yourselves were suffering bodily. ⁴ Marriage is to be honored by all and the marriage bed kept undefiled, because God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers. ⁵ Keep your life free from the love of money. Be satisfied with what you have, for he himself has said, **I will never leave you or abandon you.** ⁶ Therefore, we may boldly say,

**The Lord is my helper;
I will not be afraid.
What can man do to me?**

⁷ Remember your leaders who have spoken God's word to you. As you carefully observe the outcome of their lives, imitate their faith.

⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. ⁹ Don't be led astray by various kinds of strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be established by grace and not by food regulations, since those who observe them have not benefited. ¹⁰ We have an altar from which those who worship at the tabernacle do not have a right to eat. ¹¹ For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the most holy place by the high priest as a sin offering are burned outside the camp. ¹² Therefore, Jesus also suffered outside the gate, so that he might sanctify the people by his own blood. ¹³ Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing his disgrace. ¹⁴ For we do not have an enduring city here; instead, we seek the one to come. ¹⁵ Therefore, through him let us continually offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. ¹⁶ Don't neglect to do what is good and to share, for God is pleased with such sacrifices. ¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit to them, since they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account, so that they can do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. ¹⁸ Pray for us, for we are convinced that we have a clear conscience, wanting to conduct ourselves honorably in everything. ¹⁹ And I urge you all the more to pray that I may be restored to you very soon.

Benediction and Farewell

²⁰ Now may the God of peace, who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus — the great Shepherd of the sheep — through the blood of the everlasting covenant, ²¹ equip you with everything good to do his will, working in us what is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

²² Brothers and sisters, I urge you to receive this message of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. ²³ Be aware that our brother Timothy has been released. If he comes soon enough, he will be with me when I see you. ²⁴ Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who are from Italy send you greetings. ²⁵ Grace be with you all.



◆ WEEK 49: SUMMARY ◆

Hebrews functions like a sermon that exalts Jesus above everything. Beginning with a focus on the incarnation, the letter declares that the same God who revealed himself through the prophets has revealed himself in these last days in the person of Jesus (Heb 1:1–2). The author presented Jesus and his work in the striking ways that follow:

- ◆ Jesus is our everlasting King, having been “appointed heir of all things” (1:2).
- ◆ Jesus is our Creator, God the Father having “made the universe through him” (1:2).
- ◆ Jesus possesses God’s glory: “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory” (1:3).
- ◆ Jesus reveals what God is like as “the exact expression of his nature” (1:3).
- ◆ Jesus holds the universe together, “sustaining all things by his powerful word” (1:3).

- ◆ Jesus became our ultimate priest and sacrifice for sin, having sat down “after making purification for sins” (1:3).
- ◆ Jesus also obtained the highest place of authority in sitting down “at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (1:3).

Even the name he inherited as a result of his work demonstrates that he is superior to the angels (1:4). The old hymn, written by Edward Perronet, highlights the same truth: “All hail the power of Jesus’ name! Let angels prostrate fall. Bring forth the royal diadem, and crown him Lord of all.”

As reflected in Hebrews 2:2, a common belief existed among the Jews that God gave the law to Moses on Mount Sinai through the mediation of angels (see Dt 33:2; Ac 7:53; Gl 3:19). For this reason, the author appealed to a series of OT passages,

mostly psalms, to show how Jesus is far greater than angels because of his position, place, power, and purpose (Heb 1:5–13; see Dt 32:43; 2Sm 7:14; 1Ch 17:13; Ps 2:7; 45:6; 97:7; 102:25; 104:4; 110:1). Angels are indeed powerful servants, but our Savior is superior (Heb 1:14).

Some within the church had drifted away from the Christian message and returned to Jewish tradition. The Jewish law is good because it condemns our sins, but it cannot provide permanent and lasting forgiveness. The Holy Spirit confirmed the early church's message by many signs and wonders. Thus, because of their greater exposure to the truth, devastating judgment would await those who rejected the message and fell away from the faith (2:1–4). Again, the Psalter pointed to how the Son of God would humbly take upon himself our humanity, becoming lesser than the angels for a time. Christ tasted death to provide salvation and subsequently ascended to heaven in honor and glory (2:5–9; see Ps 8:4–6). Thus, Jesus had to become like us to identify with our weaknesses and make atonement for our sins (Heb 2:10–18).

Looking at another portion of the OT, the author directed his audience to the pivotal figure of Moses. Moses faithfully led the household of Israel, but Jesus Christ is nonetheless the master builder of the house. Moses faithfully administered God's law, but Jesus fulfilled it. Moses led God's people through the wilderness, but Jesus will lead us successfully into permanent rest if we trust him to the end. In all ways Jesus is superior (3:1–6). A related passage, Psalm 95, warned the people of God not to harden their hearts like the Israelites in the wilderness who tried God's patience. They failed to enter Canaan, their promised place of rest (3:7–11). Likewise, those among the Christian community must not fall away like Moses's generation did. For this reason, the hearers of this letter ought to encourage one another daily to stand firm in the faith. After all, the Israelites' unbelief kept them from entering the promised land, and similarly, unbelief can prevent each of us from entering promised rest (3:12–19). Our enduring faith in Christ or lack thereof will indicate our future destination.

Although the Israelites of Moses's generation failed to enter God's promised rest, Christians can nonetheless remain confident because of how the message benefits those who exercise faith (4:1–3). We will one day find rest because of Christ's finished work since "a Sabbath rest remains for God's people" (4:9). Appealing to the creation account, the author observed how God rested after creating everything, and yet the Israelites failed to enter into this type of rest by hardening their hearts in disobedience (see Gn 2:2; Ps 95:7–8). Although Joshua led Israel into Canaan, the Israelites still did not experience permanent, everlasting rest.

Someone superior to Moses and Joshua had to come and provide God's everlasting rest for his people, a rest we can experience partially but whose fullness is still to come for those who do not fall into persistent disobedience (Heb 4:4–11; see Mt 11:28–29).

This promise for rest proves true because God's Word is perfectly true and penetrates the deepest part of our souls. God's Word pierces us and then heals us. We cannot hide anything from God and will give an account to him at the time of judgment (Heb 4:12–13).

Just as Jesus is superior to Moses, he is also superior to Aaron or any other high priest. Unlike Aaron, Jesus passed through the heavens, not just the earthly tent, through his ascension. Although Jesus was tempted like us, he remained sinless and yet sympathizes with us according to our weaknesses, extending grace during this time of need (4:14–16). The Levitical priesthood ultimately failed because it could not vanquish human sinfulness. As the author explained, on the Day of Atonement, Aaron had to offer a sacrifice for his own sins before making an offering for the people's sins. In contrast to Aaron, Jesus came from a different priestly order, that of Melchizedek. Christ's perfect obedience and effective intercession resulted in eternal life for all who trust and obey him (5:1–10; see Gn 14:18–20; Ps 2:7; 110:4).

Some who were among the community had left the church and returned to Jewish tradition. Additionally, some in the church were not growing in their faith, remaining spiritually immature, like those who needed milk rather than meat. They perhaps wanted the blessings of the Christian faith but not its hardships. They liked grace but lacked the required discipline and devotion (Heb 5:11–14). They needed to mature in their knowledge of Christ and move beyond basic teachings like repentance, rituals, the resurrection of the dead, and final judgment (6:1–3).

At this point, we come to perhaps the most challenging portion of the letter. Some within the church were enjoying the benefits of Christian community without fully committing themselves to Christ. Like many of the Israelites of old, they were enlightened to God's truth but never truly converted. They tasted the goodness of the gospel, similar to how Israel tasted manna from heaven, but never received the grace of salvation. They experienced the power of the Holy Spirit among the community but were never truly and personally born again. Like many Jews had done, they tasted the goodness of God's Word but were never transformed by it. Tragically, those who turn their backs on the gospel of grace after being exposed to it to the extent described here cannot be renewed again to repentance (6:4–8). Thus, they will never bear the fruit of Christ's kingdom. Jesus described the same reality in this way:

I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me. If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned. (Jn 15:5–6)

The author of Hebrews remained confident that the actual believers among the community, like a true remnant, will remain faithful to Christ, who saves forever. These Christians diligently served other saints, modeling perseverance and being on their way to obtaining their promised inheritance (Heb 6:9–12). Just as God made a promise to Abraham and swore by his character, he makes a similar promise to all believers. Abraham waited his whole life to see God answer his promise and then received Isaac, a tangible part of the fuller inheritance of innumerable offspring. Like Abraham, we too must wait longer to receive our full inheritance, but as the writer pointed out, we have full assurance that we will obtain it because God cannot lie. Jesus, our great high priest, entered the actual most holy place in heaven for us, which ensured God's promises would come to us. We have this hope because Jesus is the anchor of our souls (6:13–20).

As we read earlier, Christ came as a priest-king like Melchizedek. In Genesis 14, Abraham rescued his nephew Lot, whom neighboring kings had captured. As they returned home, a glorious king named Melchizedek appeared to them, bringing bread and wine to bless them. He was the king of Salem, which would later be called Jerusalem (or "city of peace"). In Hebrew, the name *Melchizedek* means "king of righteousness." He is a unique figure, having no recorded birth or death. In this way, he symbolized the Son of God's eternal nature and origin, something that neither the lineage of Aaron nor David could match. Thus, only Jesus could resemble Melchizedek and become our eternal priest-king (7:1–3).

The writer noted that Abraham humbly paid a tithe, a tenth of his plunder, to Melchizedek, showing Abraham's inferiority. Because the Levites—who descended from Abraham and later received tithes from the people—paid a tenth in a sense to Melchizedek through Abraham, they too are inferior to Melchizedek. Thus, in Melchizedek's blessing Abraham as the representative of his offspring, his superiority over even Abraham's descendants is demonstrated. In Abraham, the Levites offered a tithe to Melchizedek (7:4–10).

Relatedly, the imperfection of the Levitical priesthood would be revealed later to King David. In Psalm 110, he spoke of a superior priest-king, one who would come from a different tribe (Judah) and a different order (Melchizedek) (7:11–17; see Ps 110:4; Mt 22:41–46). The old covenant

and its priesthood were thus inferior and therefore failed. Jesus came as a forever priest-king who could ensure a better covenant. More pointedly, Jesus came to establish a new covenant.

Further, he is able to save completely and continually intercede for us. He did not need to offer the blood of animals on a daily basis like the priests of the old covenant. Instead, Jesus went to the cross, offering himself as the perfect once-for-all sacrifice. Because this priest-king is permanently exalted and not subject to death like the Levitical priests, his sacrificial work avails effectively and eternally. Jesus, our superior high priest, provided what the law could never do; he fully redeemed us and completely saves us, having been perfected forever (Heb 7:18–28).

Thanks to the author explicitly declaring his main point, the superiority of Christ over the Levitical priesthood is made clearer. Jesus is the effective and supreme high priest who sat down at God's majestic right hand, his heavenly sanctuary being superior to the earthly tabernacle. The old covenant (referring to God's covenant with Israel through Moses) was based on temporary promises, while the new covenant is based on permanent promises (8:1–6). There would be no need for a new covenant if the first one had been effectual. Jeremiah prophesied of the establishment of a new and better covenant, which would be inscribed on the hearts of God's people rather than scratched on tablets of stone. In this covenant, God's people will experience the forgiveness of sins once for all (8:7–13; see Jr 31:31–34).

Again, the old covenant was merely a shadow of things to come. The instructions given to Moses made the earthly tabernacle look like heaven, with the gold furnishings and the ark of the covenant symbolizing God's presence among his people. On top of the ark stood golden cherubim, which guarded the mercy seat where atonement was made annually (see Lv 16:1–34). Only the Aaronic high priest was allowed to enter the most holy place and never without respective sacrificial offerings to cover both his and the people's sins (Heb 9:1–7). Regular worshipers were not permitted this kind of access to God's presence. Although the priests made an ample number of offerings, these sacrifices were symbolic rituals but ultimately ineffective (9:8–10).

In contrast, Jesus, our great high priest, entered the perfect, heavenly tabernacle. If the blood of animals made provisional, symbolic atonement for sin, how much more will Jesus's own sacrificial death, offered through the power of the Holy Spirit, bring us cleansing so that we can truly serve the living God (9:11–14)? In other words, just as the earthly high priest used blood to purify the people and the furnishings in the tabernacle, how much more are the people's hearts purified by Christ's shed blood? As the law affirms, without

the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness (9:15–22). With Jesus presently residing in the most holy place in heaven, God’s people have an actual representative in God’s presence, not merely within an earthly copy. Just as God appointed Christ to die once, he has appointed humans to die once before facing judgment (Heb 9:23–28; see 2Co 5:10). When Christ returns, he will come not to die on the cross again for his people but to complete their experience of salvation.

The old covenant sacrifices could not cleanse and perfect the worshipers, which was why they were performed continually. The prescribed sacrifices could make the people ceremonially pure, but this was provisional and not permanent. The offering of these sacrifices year after year indicated as much. These sacrifices were not sufficient because they could not take away sins once for all. By placing the words of Psalm 40:6–8 on Jesus’s lips, the author of Hebrews showed how the OT anticipated the incarnation and Christ’s offering of his own body as a sacrifice (Heb 10:1–7).

By offering himself, Christ nullified the first covenant and established the second. We thus receive complete sanctification through Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice (10:8–10). As a result of his perfect work, Jesus presently resides at the right hand of God, patiently awaiting the time when his enemies will permanently and publicly be put beneath his feet. Furthermore, with the words of Jeremiah 31:33–34, the Holy Spirit also indicated the dawn of the new covenant wrought through Christ’s perfect sacrifice and ascension. Because of Christ’s work, our redemption has been sealed and secured. God’s people are enabled to consistently obey the law and experience what it means to be fully forgiven (10:11–18; see Jr 31:33–34).

As a result of Christ’s perfect work as high priest, we have direct access to the living God because in his body Christ has passed through the threshold of the “curtain” for us (Heb 10:19–22). God’s new-covenant people can therefore worship with clean hands and pure hearts, confessing our faith in Christ without wavering (see Ps 24:4). When we gather for corporate worship, we should motivate one another toward love and good deeds, and we must not neglect to gather as some do. The gathering of the saints each Lord’s Day is vital for believers to enable them to persevere during the kind of difficult days facing this particular congregation (Heb 10:23–25).

Those who persistently live in sin and reject the gospel will one day face the fiery wrath of God. No sacrifice avails for them (10:26–28). If God declared the death penalty for those who violated the old covenant, how much more severely will God punish those who disregard God’s Son and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit? Thus, it is terrifying to find yourself guilty in the just hands of the living God (10:29–31). For this

reason, we should find motivation to never fall away, even when persecution comes, and the author of Hebrews expressed confidence that, by God’s grace, his hearers would persevere: “We are not those who draw back and are destroyed, but those who have faith and are saved” (10:32–39; see Hab 2:3–4).

The author of Hebrews then defined faith as “the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen” (Heb 11:1). To illustrate persevering faith, he surveyed the storyline of the Bible to show how faithful men and women endured various trials and afflictions (11:1–5). Pointing to Abel, Enoch, Noah, and the patriarchs, the author explained that we cannot please God without faith because trusting the invisible God necessitates faith (11:6–10). Sarah conceived in her old age, believing the God who promised her a child was faithful. All the patriarchs lived and died in faith, trusting that God’s promises would be realized (11:11–16).

In particular, by faith, Abraham was willing to offer up Isaac, believing in the resurrection from the dead. Near the end of their respective lives, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph extended blessings to their family members as they exercised faith in God’s promises. By faith, Moses left Pharaoh household and chose to suffer with the Hebrew slaves. Furthermore, by faith, Moses instituted the Passover, trusting God to spare Israel’s firstborn sons, and by faith, Moses led the people to walk across the Red Sea on dry land (11:17–29). Joshua and Rahab are also notable examples of living by faith along with the judges of Israel, David, and the prophets (11:30–32). An unnamed host of saints have been mistreated and martyred, living and dying with the faith that something better awaited them despite not yet receiving what was promised (11:32–40).

The faithful men and women of the past thus became a great cloud of witnesses for us who remain on earth. Their legacy reminds us to put away the sin that trips us up so we can run with endurance as we keep our eyes on Jesus, the ultimate pioneer of our faith. More than anyone, Christ modeled faithfulness by enduring the cross and is now reigning at the right hand of God (12:1–2). When we consider all Christ has accomplished for us, we find strength to endure because our suffering cannot compare to those who have shed blood to avoid sin as Jesus did.

Like a loving parent, God may discipline us in our struggle to overcome sin because he loves us. If he didn’t discipline us, this would mean we did not belong to him (see Pr 3:11–12). Even our earthly fathers disciplined us based on what seemed good to them, and God disciplines us so that we may share in his holiness (Heb 12:3–13).

Accordingly, all persevering saints should pursue peace with one another. We should forgive

one another and not let bitterness take root (12:14–17). Rather than coming to the physical location that was Mount Sinai with fear of consequence, God’s people now gather at Mount Zion before the living God, the angels, and the spirits of the departed saints. This is the benefit of Jesus’s work as the mediator of a new covenant (12:18–24).

When God called the Israelites to gather around Mount Sinai, the earth shook. If Moses’s generation did not escape the voice that spoke from earth, how much worse will it be for those who reject the voice from heaven? However, if,

by living faithfully, we receive Christ’s kingdom, which cannot be shaken, we can respond with thankfulness and worship God with appropriate reverence (12:25–29). The author then concluded the sermon with a series of commands promoting perseverance through brotherly love, practical holiness, and submission to church leaders (13:1–19). Fittingly, the letter ends with a benediction commending the readers to the care of Jesus, the great Shepherd who equips us for obedience through his new-covenant work (here called the “everlasting covenant”; 13:20), and giving him his rightful glory.

APPLICATION

- ◆ Jesus is not only superior to old-covenant realities but also to all of our trials; all the perseverance we need to keep going comes from the grace Christ provides (1:1–4; Rm 8:18; 2Co 4:16–17; 2Pt 1:3–11).
- ◆ We can easily become restless and despairing, so we must remain hopeful for the rest that awaits those who persevere in faith (Heb 4:1–11).
- ◆ We must not forsake weekly gatherings as the church since this is a vital means for stirring one another to love and good works (10:24–26).
- ◆ When difficulties come, we must keep our eyes focused on Jesus, the model for persevering faithfulness, whose perfect work is the basis for the perfecting of our faith (12:1–2).
- ◆ Church members should submit to the authority of their pastors/elders, seeking to make their ministry a joy, not burdening them with unreasonable concerns (13:17).