

# Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews

## Introduction

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#### Introduction

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### Introduction:

Paul's epistle to the Ephesians is sometimes called "the Queen" of his epistles. If that is so, in this writer's opinion, Hebrews is "the King". No other New Testament book exceeds it in its coverage of essential Bible doctrine. In Hebrews, Paul touches on a wide variety of biblical subjects, from theology to Christology, from soteriology to angelology, so that in the course of making his argument, he provides us with what amounts to a complete review of and re-indoctrination to basic biblical truths which span the entire spectrum of Christian systematics.

Every part of the Word of God, "all scripture", that is, is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2Tim.3:16 KJV). For that reason alone, the study of Hebrews is a worthwhile endeavor, and its broad coverage of doctrinal topics particularly useful for reminding us of important fundamental truths. At the same time, Hebrews' particular focus on eschatological issues, as we shall see, makes its study particularly timely for believers today, "especially as you see 'the day' drawing near" (Heb.10:25; cf. Rom.13:11; 1Cor.7:29; Phil.4:5; Jas.5:9; 1Pet.4:7; 2Pet.3:11-14; 1Jn.2:18; Rev.1:3; 3:11; 22:7; 22:12; 22:20). In its treatment of the situation within the Jerusalem church of that day which is in many important and eerily familiar respects directly analogous to the status of the Laodicean church era of our own day, Hebrews is essential reading for us who stand on the threshold of the Tribulation.

That said, Hebrews is a somewhat difficult and much misunderstood book. Part of the reason for this is that it is written to Jewish Christians who were slipping away from the faith and being drawn back into the Law and its temple rituals or being drawn into the milieu of Jewish Gnosticism. Paul therefore has to address the problems he perceives in a way which would not

be second nature to gentiles of the first century – how much less to modern Christians, especially gentiles. We also have to keep in mind that in addition to putting things into that peculiar (to most of us) frame of reference, Paul is also refuting by the way he makes his arguments the contemporary interpretation of the Law which was the original "default setting" of these Jewish believers living in Pharisaical times, and to which they are being pressured by circumstances to return, whether traditionally or in the modified application of the Gnostics.

A quick perusal of the contents of the book (see part IV below) will quickly show that Paul is concerned to reassert Christ as the center of all things in the thinking of these believers about whom he is very concerned, and to do so by demonstrating Christ's superiority, centrality, and fulfillment of the Law, however interpreted (i.e., either traditionally or gnostically). Indeed, the essential purpose of Hebrews is to show how the Law has been replaced by something better, something real, the New Covenant for the Old, the New High Priest for the old, the hope of eternity cloaked in shadow with the brilliant revelation of the Son of God in resurrection, to which resurrection we today also now eagerly look forward. In sum, Hebrews was designed to help the Jewish believers of Paul's day stop looking backwards and start looking forward to the glorious light of Jesus Christ, an essential perspective from which all believers can greatly profit.

## **I. Who Wrote Hebrews?**

The short and sweet answer to this question is "the apostle Paul". But while that answer is absolutely clear to this author, for a variety of defective reasons, not everyone has always agreed with this assessment. For example:

The writer of this letter does not identify himself, but he was obviously well known to the original recipients. Though for some 1,200 years (from c. AD 400 to 1600) the book was commonly called "The Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews," there was no agreement in the earliest centuries regarding its authorship. Since the Reformation it has been widely recognized that Paul could not have been the writer. There is no disharmony between the teaching of Hebrews and that of Paul's letters, but the specific emphases and writing styles are markedly different. Contrary to Paul's usual practice, the author of Hebrews nowhere identifies himself in the letter – except to indicate that he was a man (Heb.11:32). Moreover, the statement "This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him" (Heb.2:3), indicates that the author had neither been with Jesus during his earthly ministry nor received special revelation directly from the risen Lord, as had Paul (Gal.1:11-12).

*The NIV Study Bible*, ed. K. Barker (1985)

The above is a fairly accurate reflection of current evangelical scholarly opinion on the authorship of Hebrews – and wrong on every count. Let us examine the claims above which are said to prove that Paul could not have been the author.

1. Emphases. This is a curious objection, given the later admission that "there is no disharmony between the teaching of Hebrews and that of Paul's letters". It is true that Hebrews spends more time on some topics than the other epistles of Paul do, but all his letters differ one from another

in content, even in terms of the three sets of companion letters to the Corinthians, to the Thessalonians and to Timothy. In that regard, "emphasis" of necessity has as much if not more to do with the occasion and purpose of writing as it does with the writer. If by the prominence given to themes having to do with Jewish issues the Mosaic Law and the history of Israel are meant, surely the fact that this epistle was written to the believers in and around Jerusalem accounts for this. When examined closely, the argument turns out to be a highly subjective one. Assuming for a moment, that someone other than Paul had been commissioned by the Spirit to write the letter, how, we might ask, would it differ from the present one in terms of "emphases", and why? Because of its purpose and audience, Hebrews is "different", but that difference in and of itself does not provide any justification for doubting Pauline authorship.

2. Style. As the editors of the *NIV Study Bible* admit in the earlier quote, "for some 1,200 years" the book was commonly called "The Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews". They go on to say that "there was no agreement in the earliest centuries regarding its authorship". This is a bit disingenuous because, as any marginal student of church history knows very well, the information we have about the first four centuries of the Church Age is minimal on the one hand, and comes for the most part from a small variety of scholarly sources on the other (i.e., the very sorts of individuals who were interested in such controversies). In fact, the earliest known comments on the subject are those of Origen (ca. first half of the 3rd cent., cited by Eusebius), often quoted as saying about the authorship, "God only knows" (*Hist. Eccl.* 6.25). In Greek, the quote actually reads "As to who wrote the epistle, God knows the truth" – which is not nearly as emphatic or definitive.<sup>1</sup>

While we have only a very small amount of ancient scholarly speculation about the issue of authorship, we do possess manuscripts, complete or nearly complete ancient codices of the Bible, and their inclusion of Hebrews within the Pauline corpus leaves us in little doubt about the consensus of opinion in the early centuries, undoubtedly coming down directly from the beginning of the Church Age. In P46 (the Chester Beatty papyrus, ca. 2 cent. A.D.), Hebrews occurs amid the Pauline epistles, following Romans; in Sinaiticus (ca. 2-3 cent. A.D.), the letter to the Hebrews is also grouped among the other epistles of Paul, occurring between 2nd Thessalonians and 1st Timothy; in Vaticanus (ca. 4 cent. A.D.), it likewise follows 2nd Thessalonians, and this is the case with the majority of early Greek mss.<sup>2</sup> From the actual physical evidence, therefore, it would appear that the early church had no doubt about Pauline authorship. The small number of quibbles reported by *NIV SB* came from scholarly sources after the fact.

Another important thing to keep in mind here is that, with any writing, the intended audience will always influence the style of any writer. The way Paul writes to Timothy and Titus is somewhat different from what we find in his epistles to the churches he ministered to, e.g. And the Jerusalem church was unique, not only in that it was not one of Paul's own churches but in that he had also never before this letter, as far as we know, even ministered to it in his capacity of

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<sup>1</sup> See also Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.3.5; 3.38.2-3.

<sup>2</sup> D. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove 1965) 686.

apostle. From what we can tell from the scriptural record about his prior contacts with many of the believers in Jerusalem, receptiveness to such ministrations would have been lukewarm at best.

After all, before his conversion, Paul was personally very much involved in persecuting the believers there (Acts 8:1-3; 22:4-5; 22:20; 26:9-11; Gal.1:23). Later, when he tried to commune with them, his sincerity was doubted and only Barnabas was willing to give him a hearing at first (Acts 9:26-27); he was sent home to Tarsus when threats were made upon his life (Acts 9:28-29); and after Barnabas sought him out, went to Antioch, not Jerusalem (Acts 11:25-26). Paul's contacts with the Jerusalem church thereafter are in the nature of an outsider seeking to gain favor rather than him ever being able to feel that he belonged there in any serious way (Acts 11:27-28; Gal.1:15-20; 2:1-10). This was, of course, the reason why he had gone up to Jerusalem (against the Spirit's guidance: Acts 20:22-23; 21:3-4; 21:10-14; cf. Act 22:17-18; Rom.15:31) on the occasion that led to his arrest, that is, to present the offering he had laboriously gathered from the gentile believers for that church (Acts 24:17; 2Cor.8-9; Gal.2:10). And lest we forget, as a result of this visit, Paul was coerced into participation in a ritual he certainly knew had been superseded, producing the incident that led to his arrest and first Roman imprisonment. It was from his second captivity in Rome, moreover, that Paul wrote this letter (see below section II). The occasion for this epistle, therefore, is significantly different from any other letter of Paul we possess, and his relationship to the audience to whom he was writing was completely unprecedented when compared to any of his other epistles.

Merely because of his prior history there and because of his lack of authority in the eyes of the Jerusalem church (as most there seem to have perceived matters in spite of his apostleship; cf. Gal.2:9), there was therefore good reason for Paul to adopt a different tone and take a different approach. These considerations help to explain both the omission of the apostolic signature we find in his other epistles (e.g., Rom.1:1; 11:13; 1Cor.1:1; 9:1-2; 15:9; 2Cor.1:1; 12:12; Gal.1:1; 2:8; Eph.1:1; Col.1:1; 1Tim.1:1; 2:7; 2Tim.1:1; 1:11; Tit.1:1) and also the modest variation in style. But the other major consideration which is also overlooked is the fact that this congregation was composed almost entirely of Jewish believers (with some small number of gentile converts). In fact, this is the only Pauline epistle to an exclusively Jewish audience, many if not most of whom were "in the faith" before he was.

The fact that the addressees were Jewish and that the subject matter had to do with issues of the Law and how it (and they) related to the new realities of the Church Age after the resurrection of Christ were important factors in determining the novel format of the epistle as well (cf. the uniqueness of the epistle of James, also written exclusively to Jewish believers: Jas.1:1). Hebrews is a long monograph to a specific congregation which was not Paul's own which deals with issues unique to them (on account of being Jewish and on account of their historical and continuing participation in the rituals of the Law) rather than an "encyclical" intended for a number of Paul's own congregations. That different purpose of Hebrews also necessarily affected its style. Its form is more in the nature of a detailed apologia on the issue of trusting in God instead of in tradition and fantasy. Such an approach was unnecessary with gentile congregations where turning away from paganism and philosophy to the truth was an absolute thing. For Jewish believers, however, the shift was away from God's previous economy of truth

– the Law – to the new revealed truth of the Messiah come in the flesh, crucified and resurrected, having fulfilled the Law and having sent the Spirit instead as the One who would henceforth illuminate the truth.

At least that is how things should have worked out in Jerusalem. Instead, we find an environment of pervasive and corrosive external influences – the old ways drowning out the new – where the believers in question were succumbing to the powerful pull to come back to traditional Judaism or being seduced by incipient Gnosticism. This situation demanded that a different sort of method be employed, different arguments deployed, and the personality of the author, who was, for reasons obvious and previously discussed, not abounding in the necessary good will to obtain a ready hearing, placed as far as possible in the background – in order for the teaching to speak for itself as much as possible.

It is therefore not surprising that there are differences between Hebrews and Paul's other letters. Indeed, it would be surprising if there were not. But that some readers and scholars have interpreted these differences as indications of non-Pauline authorship strikes this writer as odd. In terms of the way of thinking it embodies and the manner of expression in the Greek it exhibits, Hebrews is more like Paul's letters than anything else in the Bible – and more so than anything else in Greek generally. Hebrews does not so closely resemble the Greek of any other extant author as it does that of Paul.

The above impression of this writer may be subjective, but it is based upon considerable knowledge, training, reading and experience of Greek. To give one concrete example, Paul has a unique tendency to defer his main point and digress through the use of a subordinate clause which, if translated literally into English, would confuse most English readers (and no doubt confused more than a few Greek readers; cf. 2Pet.3:15-16).

(12) For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law . . .

(13) (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; (14) for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, (15) who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them)

. . . (16) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

Romans 2:12-16 NKJV

The above would be red-penciled by most English composition teachers, but it is not unique in Paul's corpus (e.g., Rom.1:13; 1Cor.1:2; Col.2:22; 2Thes.1:10; 2Thes.2:8; and cf. 1Cor.1:4 to which the relative pronoun of verse 8 refers; also in 1Cor.12:2 the hyperbaton of the participle from the main verb). It is also strikingly present in Hebrews:

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels . . .

(for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor)  
. . . that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.  
Hebrews 2:9 NKJV

Both of these examples, necessarily cleaned up as much as possible in the English versions, are even more striking and vivid when read in the Greek. This is a "tick" of style which this scholar has never seen manifest in this particular way in any other Greek writer. Just as John's asyndetons (i.e., not connecting one sentence to another with conjunctions) is characteristic of his style as is Mark's use of the Greek conjunction *kai* in a manner similar to the Hebrew *waw* (following the manner of the LXX), or his penchant for using the adverb *euthys* ("immediately", used 42 times by him but only 12 other times in the entire rest of the New Testament), such stylistic quirks may not be "smoking guns" proving authorship, but they do represent persuasive evidence which must be considered, especially when only direct and deliberate imitation would otherwise be likely to account for them. When it comes to books of the Bible, the secular scholarly trend has always been to deny traditional authorship (e.g., denying Moses' authorship of the Pentateuch in favor of "JEPD", claiming two or even three "Isaiahs", suggesting that Peter did not write 2nd Peter or that John did not write Revelation – or that Paul did not write the Pastorals). For that reason alone, skepticism about such scholarly skepticism should be the default.

Finally here, the supposed differences between Paul's quotations from the Old Testament and what we find in Hebrews is also overblown. On the one hand, the great majority of quotations in the New Testament including those in Paul's epistles come directly from the Septuagint version (the Greek translation of the Bible in use in Palestine during this time, also known as the LXX), so that the fact that this is true of Hebrews is hardly a valid proof of non-Pauline authorship. Paul did, it is true, sometimes re-translate verses directly from the Hebrew – in whole or in part – but only when it was important to do so. And the claim that this never happens in Hebrews is in fact not true. To take one example, the very first Old Testament quotation in the epistle, Hebrews 1:6 (a quote from Psalm 97:7) has two differences from the LXX version which, while they may seem insignificant enough to the casual reader, are actually of no small importance.

3. Anonymity. The first thing to note is that just because Paul does not identify himself as the author of this epistle does not mean that he is not. While that may seem obvious, this point is at the heart of all doubt about his authorship. As suggested in the section above, there were good reasons for Paul not to have signed his name to this letter. The Christians receiving it were not his converts and he had never before had an opportunity to minister to them in doctrinal matters. And while he could expect that some in that church would be willing to give him the benefit of the doubt, there were many who would have rejected out of hand any communication signed by him in his capacity as an apostle. After all, we know from Acts that there was a large contingent in that church which was skeptical of gentile conversion in the first place, and averse to gentiles failing to convert to traditional Judaism in the second (Acts 10:45; 11:2-3; 15:5; 21:21-25). A "letter from Paul" would have been a red flag to many if not most of these, and we can expect that they would have made an issue of this now famous prisoner and his record of preferring grace to Law (not to mention his violent behavior prior to his conversion) rather than the truths to which he was trying to persuade his fellow countrymen to respond.

(20) When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. (21) They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. (22) What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, (23) so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. (24) Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. (25) As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality."

Acts 21:20-25 NIV

Further, Paul was writing to the Jerusalem church from prison in Rome, and his accusers, the unbelievers who had stirred up the crowd against him and later tried to assassinate him, were still in Jerusalem. It could have been a dangerous thing to possess a letter from such a notorious personage on that account: those who had persecuted Paul would have been all too happy to persecute anyone who had anything to do with him, be it the original bearer of the letter of anyone found with a copy of it – if it bore the name of "Paul".

And what reason would there have been for anyone else who was well enough known to the recipients to command some sort of a hearing from them *not* to identify himself, other than Paul? Rather than being any proof of non-Pauline authorship, this fact alone makes it all the more likely that only he could have been the author. Paul was the only one of whom we know with the personal "baggage" to require this approach whose letter was yet likely to have been received and preserved by the genuine believers in that church.

So there are very good reasons why Paul would not have wanted to append his name to this letter. We know from his own words in other epistles that he was averse to "building on another's foundation" (Rom.15:20; cf. Gal.2:9). No doubt the decision to write this letter was a difficult one, made in the Spirit for the benefit of these people and this church he loved and on whose behalf he was suffering imprisonment, but one taken under the duress of the disturbing news he was hearing about that church slipping back into the old ways of works and away from grace, influenced not only by the pull of tradition and fear of persecution, but also by the incipient Gnosticism which Paul had had to combat in his pastoring of the gentile churches as well. The last thing he would have wanted to do was to compromise this attempt to set things straight by provoking a negative reaction through an overt and unnecessary assertion of his apostolic authority.

#### 4. The Hebrews 2:3 Objection.

Moreover, the statement "This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him" (Heb.2:3), indicates that the author had neither been with Jesus during his earthly ministry nor received special revelation directly from the risen Lord, as had Paul.

The fact that Hebrews 2:3 states that others had received special revelation "directly through the Lord" at an earlier time does not logically demand that the writer of Hebrews had not also done so later. Hebrews is considered by the church generally as part of the canon of scripture and rightly so, inspired by the Holy Spirit regardless of authorship. Moreover, it is replete with special revelation about Jesus Christ. Given the depth of mastery of doctrinal truth which this epistle contains, the fact that a person of the caliber of the author of Hebrews was not personally present for Jesus' earthly ministry almost guarantees that he has to be Paul. Who else, we might ask, had the intellectual and spiritual credentials to write such a letter, if the other apostles are to be excluded from consideration?

The NIV SB's interpretation of Hebrews 2:3 is, however, typical of all who reject Pauline authorship. Here is how the King James renders this passage:

(2) For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; (3) How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; (4) God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?  
Hebrews 2:2-4 KJV

What ought to immediately strike any reader of the Greek text is how the KJV and most other versions (including the NIV which the NIV SB references in the first quote above) violently misapply the second prepositional phrase in verse three above, namely, "by them that heard him". That phrase does *not* occur after "confirmed unto us" but *before* it. Moreover, there are good grammatical reasons for taking it *not* with what follows but with what *precedes*:

(3b) . . . which [salvation], having received its initial expression through the Lord *by those who had heard* [Him previously] (i.e., the previous generation in the early days of the Church, ca. mid to late 30's A.D.) has now been confirmed to us [in our day] (i.e., the present day generation of the Church, ca. mid to late 50's A.D.), (4) through God [the Father Himself] bearing witness to it through signs and wonders and various [other] demonstrations of His power, and with distributions of the Holy Spirit (i.e., spiritual gifts) according to His will.  
Hebrews 2:3b-4

Understood in this way, "those who heard" are the eleven and their comrades who, "through the Lord" – *not* "by the Lord" (i.e., through His agency in empowering the eleven with His Spirit following the day of Pentecost, not during our Lord's first advent) – spread the message of salvation in the early days of the Church Age after our Lord's ascension and according to His command (Acts 1:8; cf. Matt.28:19).

The second problem with the incorrect word order represented in most of the translations is that it makes it seem as if the miraculous activities of verse four apply to "those who had heard Him" when in fact they go with "confirmed to *us*", explaining just how it was that the Word of salvation was confirmed in that present-day generation of the Church Age, namely to the



recipients of Paul's ministrations of the gospel, "confirmed" as valid through the various and sundry miracles that the Spirit performed at Paul's own hands. Understood correctly, therefore, this assigning of miracles as confirmation "to us" is actually an indication of Pauline authorship because it deliberately calls attention to the signs he was given to perform which were a proof of his apostleship (2Cor.12:12; cf., Rom.15:18-19).

5. Positive Indications of Pauline Authorship. There are also many positive indications to suggest that Paul wrote Hebrews. Consider, for example, the book of Romans, an epistle of comparable size to Hebrews and with many important similarities. Both were written by an authoritative figure who was not, however, the founder of the church in question. For that reason, no doubt, both end with an apology (for boldness in Romans: Rom.15:15; for brevity in Hebrews: Heb.13:22). Both epistles mention Timothy as a collaborator (in first place in Rom.16:21; uniquely in Heb.13:23). Both epistles are long, digressive, yet focused on one particular theme which unites them, dealing with Jewish issues in both, the correct nature of relations between Jews and gentiles in the Church in Romans, the correct nature of relations of Jews to the Law after the cross in Hebrews. Of all ancient Greek literature, Romans and Hebrews have more in common with each other than they do with any other letter, tract or epistle.

It is difficult to believe that the deep doctrinal insights contained in Hebrews and the mastery of doctrine generally which it displays could have come from anyone other than an apostle of Jesus Christ or that the Spirit would have entrusted such an important task to anyone else. Moreover, in many respects Hebrews is the greatest of the epistles since it not only lays the foundation for the break with the Law which the transitional period of the Church Age was designed to accomplish – something which elsewhere in the New Testament only Paul really addresses in terms of doctrinal explanation for the triumph of grace – but Hebrews also gives us our most masterful demonstration of why grace has replaced the Law in the person of Jesus Christ (Pauline territory elsewhere as well).

There are other positive indications too, some of which we shall leave for their proper places in our verse by verse study of the book (i.e., the numerous instances of Pauline phraseology which fulfill Peter's characterization of "hard to understand" in a uniquely Pauline way: 2Pet.3:16). The reference to "those from Italy" and Timothy's release from captivity (which strongly suggests that the same does not apply to the author; *n.b.*, Heb.13:23 actually says "if *you* come shortly") certainly jibes well with Paul's second Roman captivity. And the reference to the author's prior imprisoning of some of the recipients at Hebrews 10:34 (i.e., "my chains" are the ones he imposed on them), could only mean that Paul was the author.

Finally, the lack of any good alternative to Paul is not an inconsequential proof either. Over the centuries, many alternatives to Paul have been suggested, but none has ever come close to achieving any sort of consensus – and for good reason. Even for those who are unsure for whatever reason with the idea of Pauline authorship, an honest assessment ought to conclude that it is more likely that Paul wrote this epistle than anyone else.

## **II. The Date and Occasion of Hebrews**

Reconstructing the life of the apostle Paul in terms of the specific chronology of his travels and the dating of his epistles is a far more complicated task than meets the eye through a casual reading of scripture. As a result, there is no overall scholarly consensus on many important issues related thereto (indeed, most do not even accept the fact that he is the author of Hebrews). To begin, we may say that Hebrews was Paul's last canonical letter, written along with 2nd Timothy towards the end of his second captivity in Rome, ca. 59/60 A.D.

The book of Acts, written by Luke, one of Paul's most loyal and constant companions, ends with the statement at Acts 28:30 that following his arrest in Jerusalem, eventual appeal to Caesar, and eventful voyage to Rome, "Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him". This was his first Roman captivity, and we can see from Luke's characterization that it was a comfortable one, relatively speaking. Not so his shorter, second captivity, the one which most likely resulted in his martyrdom for Jesus Christ.

. . . for which [gospel] I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained.  
2nd Timothy 2:9 NKJV

Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come – and the books, especially the parchments.  
2nd Timothy 4:13 NKJV

(16) At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. (17) But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.  
2nd Timothy 4:16-17 NKJV

Rather than being at liberty to receive friends in his own rented dwelling (Acts 28:30), the verses above as well as other passages in 2nd Timothy show clearly that Paul was now in prison, not, as in the previous incident, on unspecified charges but indicted "as an evil-doer" or felon (2Tim.2:9).<sup>3</sup> Rather than living in relative comfort, Paul was now in need of the most basic items (2Tim.4:13), and in a very dangerous legal situation. There are many other persuasive reasons to accept that there were two Roman captivities,<sup>4</sup> not merely one; for example, Paul's statement at 2nd Timothy 4:20 to the effect that he had left Trophimus (who had been with him in Jerusalem: Acts 21:29) "sick in Miletus", although on the voyage from Caesarea to Rome and his first captivity there was no stop-over in Asia Minor at all, let alone at Miletus.

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<sup>3</sup> The Greek word *kakourgos*, etymologically meaning "evil-doer", has a technical connotation equivalent to "felon" in English, indicating a serious level of crime, unambiguously meriting the most severe penalties.

<sup>4</sup> For detailed treatments of this issue see F.J. Goodwin, *A Harmony of the Life of St. Paul* (1895) 189-196, 215-220; P. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (1910) v.1, 328-333; H.C. Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament* (1943) 268.

We can briefly sketch the final years of Paul's ministry as follows. After his imprisonment in Caesarea following the riot in Jerusalem in ca. 52/53 A.D., Antonius Felix, the procurator or governor of Judea, kept Paul in captivity all the way to the end of his term (for reasons of self-interest: Acts 24:27). His successor, Porcius Festus, sent out to replace him by the emperor Nero shortly after the latter's ascension to power in A.D. 54, likewise unmindful of Paul's civic rights, had forced the apostle to appeal to Caesar to avoid being transported to Jerusalem for trial and probably subsequent assassination (Acts 25:11). As a result, some time in ca. A.D. 54/55, Paul was sent to Rome by sea, enduring as a result the terrible storm chronicled in Acts chapter 27, but eventually arriving and being allowed lenient circumstances for two years while his case was pending (Acts 28:16; 28:30).

For reasons in part described above, it is reasonable to conclude that Paul was released after this two year period mentioned by Luke. Luke ends Acts here because he wrote the book (along with the gospel of Luke) while with Paul in Rome at this time and thus naturally did not yet know the future course of events of his ministry. Between Paul's release from his first captivity in early 57 A.D. and the second captivity and trial at Rome, the one which resulted in his death in late A.D. 59/60, Paul made the following journeys:

1) to Corinth (cf. 2Tim.4:20a):

Erastus stayed in Corinth, but Trophimus I have left in Miletus sick.  
2nd Timothy 4:20a NKJV

Following his release, Paul probably departed Rome overland to the south of Italy on his way to Corinth. Corinth was a natural jumping-off point coming from Rome, since it was a relatively short and relatively safe voyage from southern Italy (Rhegium) across to Epirus (Nicopolis) or directly to the territory of Corinth on the Gulf of Corinth side of the peninsula.<sup>5</sup> Timothy, who had been with Paul at Rome (Phil.1:1; Col.1:1; Philem.1:1), either journeyed with Paul to Corinth or was sent on ahead and already in Corinth at that time (compare his prior association with that church: 1Cor.4:17; 16:10; 2Cor.1:1; 1:19). From there, Paul sent him to Ephesus to take charge of that church and address the issues mentioned in 1st Timothy (1Tim.1:3).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> To avoid the dangerous Cape Malea at the southern end of the Peloponnesus, much east to west and west to east shipping transferred cargo across the Isthmus of Corinth and even hauled entire ships across it via the *diolkos*, a paved track built for that purpose which stretched from the Gulf of Corinth to the Saronic Gulf.

<sup>6</sup> "I urged you when I went into Macedonia – remain in Ephesus" at 1st Timothy 1:3 means "go to Ephesus and stay there". Paul was not at Ephesus but at Corinth when he gave Timothy this command and they subsequently went their separate ways. Paul had previously made it clear that he would not be returning to Ephesus (Acts 20:15; 20:25; 20:38), in no small part because of the danger of being arrested there on account of the opposition from Jews hostile to his ministry and to him personally (Acts 24:18-19; cf. 1Tim.1:20; 2Ti 2:17; 4:14). It is unlikely that Luke would have been led to write Acts 20:15; 20:25; 20:38, if he knew Paul had in fact eventually returned to Ephesus.

2) to Macedonia:

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia – [go to and] remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine.

1st Timothy 1:3 NKJV

It is not certain where Paul was when he wrote 1st Timothy, whether Macedonia, or Crete or Miletus. At some point in this his final journey, Paul had the leisure to write and the opportunity of sending that letter by the hand of a trusted associate, possibly Tychichus (cf. Eph.6:21; Tit.3:12; 2Tim.4:12); but there is much about Paul's circle and their travels and ministrations we cannot recover because scripture gives us glimpses only (cf. Tit.3:13; 2Tim.4:10).

3) to Crete:

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.

Titus 1:5 NKJV

After traveling to Macedonia and encouraging the brethren there (in Philippi and Thessalonika), Paul sailed to Crete with Titus. The epistle to Titus was written on Paul's return to Asia Minor, most likely to Miletus. We know about this missionary trip only from that letter, but it is certainly consistent with Paul's desire to open up new areas for the gospel rather than "building on another's foundation" (Rom.15:20).

4) to Miletus:

Erastus stayed in Corinth, but Trophimus I have left in Miletus sick.

2nd Timothy 4:20a NKJV

Miletus was centrally located on the Aegean coast of Asia Minor, directly across the bay where the river Maeander empties into that sea. As such, it was a natural departure point both for short voyages up and down the coast and also to the Aegean islands, as well as being a hub for commerce with the inland cities of the Maeander valley (such as Laodicea and Colossae). As discussed in the previous footnote, Paul had his reasons for not returning to Ephesus personally, and Miletus provided a suitable alternative both because of its geographical advantages and on account of its growing Christian community (Acts 20:17; Philemon 1:2; 1:22; cf. Col.4:17).

5) to Nicopolis:

When I send Artemas to you, or Tychicus, be diligent to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there.

Titus 3:12 NKJV

Having consolidated and expanded his ministry efforts in the Aegean, once the weather was

again suitable for navigation in the following spring, Paul probably meant to travel to Spain next (as he had previously intended before his first arrest and imprisonment: Rom.15:24; 15:28). While there were a number of towns by this name, the Nicopolis mentioned above is most likely the one in Epirus, that is, in northwest Greece on the Adriatic coast, near the island of Corfu. This was a logical place to winter since Epirus had always been considered an excellent base for journeys to the western Mediterranean from the east, both because it was already a good distance along the way and also because sailing from there avoided having to risk the dangers of the southern coast of the Peloponnesus or alternatively engaging in a time-consuming portage at the Isthmus of Corinth.

6) But Paul never got as far as Nicopolis. After leaving Miletus (from which city the passage above was written), Paul was arrested in Troas, up the coast to the north, no doubt as a result of the efforts of the anti-Pauline group in Ephesus which had done him so much damage over the years (Acts 21:27; 24:18-19; 2Tim.4:14; cf. Acts 19:26-7; 19:33; 20:3; 1Tim.1:20).

Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come – and the books,  
especially the parchments.  
2nd Timothy 4:13 NKJV

The above was written by Paul from his prison cell in Rome (as the winter of 58/59 was approaching) to Timothy, who was still ministering in Ephesus according to Paul's prior command (1Tim.1:3). From the above we may glean that Paul expected Timothy to come to him in Rome quickly by following initially the same route he had taken, namely, a short coastal voyage north along the coast of Asia Minor to Troas (a common transit point to Greece south of the Dardanelles; cf. Acts 16:8-11; 20:1-6), then crossing over to Macedonia from there. From Macedonia, even if winter was close or had already set in, Timothy could have traveled to Italy by way of the Via Ignatia to the Adriatic coast and then could have made a short day-voyage over to Brundisium on the "heel" of Italy (which would have been possible even in winter time, weather permitting).

7) After Timothy's arrival, Paul wrote the Book of Hebrews, a final offering on behalf of the church and people he loved so well (although they did not in the main reciprocate that love, at least with the same fervor). We know from 2nd Timothy 4:16-17 that Paul's preliminary hearing had already taken place even before he wrote that epistle, probably not long after Paul's arrival in Rome. The delay between this hearing and the final trial at which he was condemned to die was lengthy enough to allow Timothy to receive Paul's appeal and reach Rome, as well as for Paul to write Hebrews thereafter with the expectation of his circle of friends in Jerusalem likewise being able to come to him in time (such delays were not uncommon and in this instance the respite was probably extended in order to allow his accusers from Asia Minor time to arrive). Hebrews 13:23 in the correct reading actually says "if *you* [pl.] come quickly", and encourages his supporters, unnamed to prevent them from being subject to similar persecution and/or prosecution (Timothy had apparently been arrested after his arrival in Rome), to make haste in coming because Paul had little doubt that his trial proper would not be delayed indefinitely. Once in Rome, Timothy was to be their guide in gaining access to wherever Paul was being held, making use of the services of Roman believers and allies who had some connections in the

imperial service (Phil.1:13; 4:22; cf. 2Tim.1:16-17).

Know that our brother Timothy has been released: if you come fairly quickly, I will see you with him.

Hebrews 13:23

8) After his conviction, Paul was executed, most likely in the winter of A.D. 59/60. Tradition has it that Paul was beheaded, suffering the penalty reserved for Roman citizens rather than crucifixion.

Romae Petrus passioni Dominicae adaequatur, Paulus Joannis exitu coronatur.

*At Rome, Peter suffered a death like his Master's, where Paul was crowned with an end like [John] the baptist's (i.e., crucifixion vs. beheading).*

– Tertullian *De Praescript. Haeret.*, c. 36

Paul's death thus occurred almost exactly a decade before Jerusalem, the temple, and everything else in that city was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. at the conclusion of their suppression of the Jewish revolt which had begun several years earlier (A.D. 68). For the believers in Jerusalem who had made the bad bargain of becoming involved again in the rituals of the Law in order to "get along", rituals which proclaimed a Messiah not yet come (and thus defamed the cross: Heb.6:4-12; 10:26-39), clearly, no good came of that compromise. And for all who refused to repent and reform upon receiving Paul's epistle, being caught up in the destruction is rightly seen as divine discipline.

(26) For if we willfully continue in the life of sin after accepting and recognizing the truth [of the gospel], there remains no further sacrifice we can make for our sins, (27) but only a terrible expectation of judgment, and a burning fire, ready to devour those who oppose [His will]. (28) For anyone who set aside the law of Moses perished without mercy on the [testimony] of two or three witnesses. (29) How much greater punishment do you suppose will not justly come to someone who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, and who has considered His blood of the covenant to be unclean (the very blood by which you were sanctified), and who has violently insulted the Spirit of grace?  
Hebrews 10:26-29

### III. The Background of Hebrews

We do not know for certain who brought the book of Hebrews to Jerusalem (possibly Tychicus: Tit.3:12; but cf. 2Tim.4:12; or some unnamed faithful follower), nor to whom Paul had ordered it initially entrusted in that city. But it does seem likely that the bearer of the letter, whoever he or she was (cf. Rom.16:1-2), would have been instructed by that apostle to give it first to those closest to him. That could have meant Barnabas or Silas, for example (cf. Paul's rapprochement with Barnabas and Mark: 1Cor.9:6; Col.4:10; 2Tim.4:11; cf. Philem.1:24), or some other unnamed persons whom he knew were most sympathetic to his work and present purpose and presently residing there. Next, it is logical to suppose that, after copying it, these friends would have made the letter available to the elders of the Jerusalem church, among them James and Jude, and, depending on their location at that time, also Peter and John.

Whatever positive effect the epistle had on the Jewish believers outside of Jerusalem in Palestine generally, we can say that this letter, along with the impetus provided by Paul's death and, in his absence, the resultant vacuum of apostolic oversight in the newly opened gentile areas of the Church, did seem to spur the other apostles into action. That is demonstrated by the subsequent production of the so-called "general epistles", namely, the letters of Jude and James first, then those of Peter and John later, which follow Hebrews in relatively quick succession thereafter, with the result that the entire canon of scripture was completed before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

Hebrews is a long monograph to a specific congregation not his own rather than an "encyclical" intended for a number of Paul's own congregations. The tone of the letter is thus also different from his other epistles, more like to that of Romans (also not his own church) than to any of the other letters. And the purpose of Hebrews is different as well. It is more of a detailed apologia on the issue of trusting God vs. tradition in an environment of pervasive and corrosive external influence where the believers in question were largely succumbing to the powerful pull to come back to traditional Judaism (or being seduced by the fantasies of Gnosticism). Therefore it is not surprising that, as we have seen, there are some differences in its style from the other letters – it would be surprising if there were not.

Being presently in jail in uncomfortable conditions and suffering under the burden of knowing that he had very little time left, the effort required to write this great epistle should not be underestimated. Yes, the work is inspired by the Holy Spirit. Yes, the Spirit helped Paul in many ways. But Paul still had to formulate it and write it – and do so quickly. The entire Word of God is a wonderful blessing for us to possess, and all of Paul's epistles are especially precious by virtue of the great concentration of biblical doctrine therein. But in many respects, the book of Hebrews was Paul's greatest accomplishment – and all the more impressive considering the difficult circumstances and pressures of time under which it was written.

There was also a heavy emotional toll involved in writing this letter. Paul loved his fellow countrymen more than his own life and would have gladly forfeited that life in order to bring about the salvation of those who did not believe (Rom.9:1-5; cf. Acts 21:13; Rom.11:13-14). And now, at time of writing, even those in Palestine who had turned to Jesus Christ had put themselves in grave spiritual danger. Paul could not effect any change through a personal visit: not only was that now impossible but his last attempt at just such an intervention had ended in disaster in every way (which no doubt explains in part why he had refrained from returning after his release).<sup>7</sup> In the wake of his first arrest and now this second captivity, while Paul not *persona non grata* with everyone in the Jerusalem church, it is fair to say that his reputation had suffered, even if wrongly so. Paul would not have cared about that per se, but he *was* concerned about gaining a hearing from these wayward believers for whom he cared so deeply. His dilemma lay

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<sup>7</sup> At Galatians 2:2 Paul says that when he had gone up to Jerusalem earlier it was by divine command (*kat' apokalypsin*), but no such command prompted his last fateful journey to that city; indeed he was told by the Holy Spirit *not* to go on more than one occasion (Acts 20:22-23; Acts 21:3-4; 21:10-14; cf. Act 22:17-18; Rom.15:31). The fact that he persevered in spite of these ominous warnings is a measure of Paul's love for the Jewish people.

in finding a way to reach them, to wake them up to their spiritual peril, but without giving them cause to reject his words of truth on account of who the messenger happened to be. The solution was the book of Hebrews, an epistle which sets just the right tone of humility balanced with firmness, of careful exposure of faults but in the context of broader truths which no one could refute. Hebrews was the perfect "life-preserver" for these Christians who were on the verge of spiritual shipwreck, and it was a gift from the Spirit to Paul as much as to the Jerusalem church and to the rest of us. Composing it, however, must have been one of the most heart-rending and difficult experiences of Paul's eventful life. It took a particular boldness in the Spirit to reprove his fellow Jewish believers, many of whom looked down on him, for doing precisely what he had been persuaded to do a few years earlier, a compromise that had backfired disastrously and had nearly led to his death several times over.

And when they heard [Paul's report], they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; (21) but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. (22) What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come. (23) Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow. (24) Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law."

Acts 21:20-24 NKJV

To be effective, Paul's letter to the Hebrews had to tackle the issues at hand in precisely the right order so as to gain a hearing and not immediately lose the goodwill of those receiving it. It had to rebuke their dangerous behavior but in the context of reminding them of the absolute superiority of their faith in Christ to their love of tradition in general and the Law in particular. And through this letter Paul had to remind them of and re-indoctrinate them to a whole range of basic biblical truths (cf. Heb.5:12-14 with Heb.6:1 ff.), truths necessary to comprehend the depths to which they had fallen and the grave spiritual danger they were now in, absent repentance – all without allowing the personality of this flawed individual (in their eyes in no small measure for his prior persecution of that church before he turned to Christ) to become a stumbling block to them to the point of rejecting his letter *a priori* for all the wrong reasons. This was a great deal to have to accomplish in a single letter, and no doubt explains why Paul, after finishing what to us is a very lengthy text, can still feel that it was "written to you in [but a] few words" (Heb.13:22). Time permitting, Paul would no doubt have written much more. What we have, therefore, is his best effort at a quick rescue mission, one last bold attempt to save the people and the church he loved so much.

Brothers and sisters, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for in fact I have written to you quite briefly.

Hebrews 13:22 NIV

In Hebrews, therefore, Paul sets the record straight regarding his previous error in going up to Jerusalem, compromising his own principles out of sentimentality and emotional attachment. In



that mistaken visit, it is also likely that he had had a strong desire to "make things right" for his prior persecution of that church (cf. 2Cor.9:1-15; Heb.10:33-34 in the Greek) through the presentation of the gifts he had so laboriously collected from the gentile churches in Greece.

(9) And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. (10) They desired only that we should remember the poor, *the very thing which I also was eager to do.*

Galatians 2:9-10 NKJV

Whatever lack of clarity Paul had previously harbored about the complete fulfillment and replacement of the Law through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ – and whatever reluctance to share that truth out of consideration for Jewish feelings – had at this point been entirely dispelled. The only question for Paul in writing this epistle was how best to make these facts crystal clear and still have them accepted rather than be rejected out of hand. Hebrews accomplishes this difficult task in a masterful way – as only a man as brilliant as Paul and having his particular life experience could do, empowered and guided and inspired by the Holy Spirit. No one can read Hebrews with the least bit of care and still believe that following the Law after the cross is biblical.

Paul had to come to see with a great depth of understanding the principle already on display in his other epistles (Galatians in particular) that the old way of following the Mosaic Law was now completely inappropriate for the new and powerful wine of the gospel of Jesus Christ empowered by the gift of the Holy Spirit. This lesson took all of the apostles time to learn and, in many cases as we have seen previously, they had to learn it the hard way.<sup>8</sup>

If transitioning from Law to grace was difficult for the apostles, it is not surprising that Jewish believers had issues with this important transformation as well. But in Jerusalem, rather than making progress – as all of the apostles and the churches of the gentiles clearly had – the believers in Palestine were falling away from grace and back to the Law. This reversal was partly for sentimental reasons, partly for socio-economic ones (being ostracized by their unbelieving fellow Jews), but also no doubt in large part through a failure of leadership in the Jerusalem church. The fact that unnamed persons there had urged Paul to sponsor some young men with a temple vow demonstrates not only that this community had already fallen back into following the Law but we also find no objection from any of the elders, neither from James nor Jude nor Peter nor John – nor any other apostle or elder or man of standing in that church. Paul was wrong to agree, but it is worth asking whether or not those who remained silent at this time were not at least partially culpable. Since that time some seven to eight years earlier, things had clearly gotten worse. A fact that reflects poorly on the "pillars" of that church (Gal.2:9; cf. Gal.2:6).

The book of Hebrews is thus many things at once. It is a correcting of the record and an apology

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<sup>8</sup> The book of Acts is in many ways devoted to chronicling this transition from Law to grace. See BB 6B: Ecclesiology, section I.B.5.c, "The Nature of the Book of Acts".

(in the forensic sense) on Paul's behalf for his prior persecution of the church in Jerusalem. It is a succinct refutation of the underlying premises of Gnosticism, the most incisive explanation of the true meaning of the Law and the most vivid demonstration of its obsolescence to be found anywhere in scripture. And it is a labor of love, a last desperate attempt by the greatest of the apostles to rescue from looming apostasy those whom he loved with a love so deep he was willing to die for them. As he wrote this epistle, Paul did indeed have only a few more days or weeks left to live. So it is in many ways fitting that this letter to the Hebrews constitutes his last major work on behalf of the Body of Christ.

Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.

Hebrews 13:7 NKJV

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

Hebrews 13:17 NKJV

The above should never have been needed to be said and certainly not by an outside party. But if the pillars of the Jerusalem church, her elders and famous apostles, had been keeping their charges under proper spiritual control, the entire book of Hebrews would have been unnecessary. Throughout the brief period of less than fifty years while the temple still stood between the first Pentecost of the Church Age and the destruction of Jerusalem, we see repeatedly in the New Testament examples of the leadership there either having great difficulty or entirely failing to properly exercise its authority over the quondam followers of the Law within that church (e.g., Acts 11:1-3; 15:1-5; 21:20-24; Gal.2:3-5; 2:11-14). At point of writing, it is clear from the situation evident in the book of Hebrews that spiritual authority in the Jerusalem church had either completely broken down or that those who should have been exercising it had at least largely abdicated that responsibility, having been bullied into inactivity (akin to Aarons' allowing of the Israelites to run amok as soon as Moses was not present: Ex.32:1ff., esp. Ex.32:25).

Rather than paganism as in the case of the exodus, however, the problems Hebrews addresses have to do with following Gnostic-Jewish myths out of a lack of respect for the deity of Christ on the one hand, and with returning to the rituals of the Law on the other – two satanic attacks that actually went hand in glove. With the leaders in Jerusalem temporarily, at least, cowed into submission so as not to be willing to oppose these spiritually destructive trends, who else could have, who else would have stood in the gap if not the apostle Paul? In using the last days of his life to perform this service of deliverance for the church in Jerusalem, Paul also performed the ultimate service for the Church of Jesus Christ which was now about to expand greatly through the inclusion of the gentiles even as it broke with obsolete Law. Explaining that necessary transformation to the very believers least likely to wish to embrace it was in many ways the turning point in the early history of the Church Age. Hebrews provides the most unmistakable and incontrovertible exposition of the fundamental change of dispensation which the cross and

resurrection of our Lord and His sending of the Holy Spirit had wrought.<sup>9</sup> No one who read Hebrews then or who reads it now can have any doubt about the humanity and deity of Christ, about the replacement of the Law by grace, or about the deadly danger of turning back to the Old Covenant instead of joyfully embracing the New. Hebrews supplied, for all who were willing to be corrected by the truth, a final and full break with legalism, and, to judge by the later efforts of the apostles and leaders still in residence there at the time (in completing the canon of scripture), also provided a reset for the leadership in Jerusalem as well.

With the books of Romans, Galatians and Hebrews in particular, Paul singlehandedly clarified the New Covenant and its relationship with the Old as well as providing an inspired road map for Jews and gentiles within the Church not only to co-exist but to have perfect harmony as equal brethren in Christ in spite of their completely disparate spiritual backgrounds (e.g., Rom.15:8-9; cf. Jn.17:11; 17:20-23; Rom.12:16; 15:5-6; 1Cor.1:10-17; 2Cor.13:11; Eph.4:3; Phil.2:2; 4:2). For all believers, Jews and gentiles alike, turning away from ritual and unauthorized tradition and turning instead towards the power of the Spirit in the grace of God was then as now absolutely essential for our individual spiritual growth and for the collective growth and health of the Body of Christ. The book of Hebrews was in no small part the key to explaining these critical issues – and we are more than a little blessed to possess it.

#### **IV. Overview and Paraphrase of the Book of Hebrews**

**Overview:** The purpose of the book of Hebrews is to demonstrate the fulfillment of the Law in Jesus Christ and the folly of misapplying the old (in two ways: through Gnosticism and Legalism) and rejecting the new, the truth. In the very near future, antichrist will provide a similar test not only for Jews but also for gentiles, believers as well as unbelievers. The beast will likewise have a religion which is based in its trappings on traditional Judaism, the Law and the temple rites, and which also provides many flights of fancy in its "mysteries" which will resemble historic Jewish Gnosticism. Examining how the believers in Jerusalem in the first century ran afoul of both temptations – out of security concerns regarding the first (compare not being able to buy or sell in the future without "the mark": Rev.13:13-14; cf. Matt.24:10-13), and through morbid curiosity for "secret things" regarding the second (compare the signs and wonders that will be performed by antichrist's false prophet: Rev.13:13-14; cf. Matt.24:24). For us who find ourselves standing on the threshold of the Tribulation, therefore, Hebrews provides a very timely and practical inoculation against the most insidious threats to salvation we are all likely to face in the near future, while at the same time illuminating many blessed and wonderful truths about our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the One who saved us – and the only One who can see us safely through that difficult time to come.

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<sup>9</sup> See SR 5: The Seven Millennial Days, section II.5, "The Five Dispensational Divisions of Human History". In essence, God's dividing up of human history is described by scripture in terms of His means of "dispensing" the truth. The cross is the great division point between the Age of Israel and the Church Age, as it says in the first verse of Hebrews, "God, from antiquity having communicated to our fathers in the prophets at many times and in many ways, (2) has in these last days communicated to us *in a Son*" (Heb.1:1-2a). This topic will also be covered in the next installment, "The Book of Hebrews: Chapter 1".

**Paraphrase:** In addition to the broad synopsis for the chapters given below, a paraphrase of each chapter follows. These are not translations but are designed to provide an overall understanding of the contents of each chapter of the book in greater depth than a simple and faithful translation can accomplish. In the following installments of this series, an actual translation for each chapter will precede our discussion of the issues involved, along with detailed discussions of the important doctrinal truths lying behind each verse. For now, however, it is hoped that this paraphrase will illuminate the background of the book of Hebrews and give the reader a basic understanding of its essential contents.

**Chapter 1:** *The Son of God: Jesus Christ is the Father's unique Messenger, the very Son of God, the God-man who has won the victory of the invisible angelic conflict and who is thus superior to angels in every way.*

The Son is the Word of God, the Father's Messenger and the Message itself, unique and clearly revealed to us who stand on the threshold of eternity now that He has come into the world, and is thus intrinsically superior to the many methods and manners of God's sharing of the truth in the past. The Son is the Father's true heir, heir to everything in creation. The Son is in fact the Creator of all that is. Jesus Christ is God, and nothing could even continue to exist without Him sustaining this creation through the powerful word of Him who is the Word of God (Col.1:16-17). The Son is the Savior of all mankind, the One who has won the victory in this invisible conflict of angelic rebellion through His own blood, His sacrifice for us on the cross. The Son's work has been proven acceptable, validated by the Father through the Son's resurrection, ascension, and session in glory at the Father's right hand. Despite the false, Gnostic teaching into which some of you have lapsed, can there really be any doubt, then, about the Son's complete superiority to angels?

Consider the scriptures. The Father never called any of the angels His Son as He does Jesus (Ps.2:7), did He? And He never said He was or would become any angel's Father as He explicitly does of the Messiah (2Sam.7:14), did He? In fact, doesn't the Father tell all the angels to worship the Messiah as God when He returns at the second advent (Ps.97:7)? And while the angels are clearly described as servants of God (Ps.104:4), haven't you read in scripture how the Messiah is called God, praised for the perfection of the righteous rule He is going to extend over the entire earth, and lauded for the Father's commissioning of Him to do so (Ps.45-6-7)? And haven't you read in scripture how the Messiah's creation of the world is described, how His eternal rule is contrasted with the temporary nature of this world He Himself has created, and how His own eternal being is confirmed in that very passage (Ps.102:25-27)? Are these things ever said of angels? Did the Father ever tell an angel, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool" (Ps.110:1)? Aren't the angels really His servants? Yes. And sent forth by the Son on our behalf, we believers who are joint heirs of salvation with Jesus Christ through His death on our behalf.

**Chapter 2:** *For us to be saved, Jesus Christ had to become a human being in order to accomplish actual atonement for our sins – as opposed to the animal sacrifices of the Law which are merely symbolic.*

Given the importance of what has just been said, the absolute proof of Christ's deity and His superiority also in His humanity to angels in every way, it is critical that you repent of your dabbling with these dangerous ideas and that you repent of your turning back to the symbols of the Law which He has now fulfilled so as not to fall away from Christ entirely into apostasy. In regard to the latter, remember that even the Law was given through angels who were serving as intermediaries – the very angels to whom Christ is infinitely superior. Even in the case of that Law of shadows, all violations were severely punished. How is rejecting Christ Himself now clearly revealed as the Savior not immeasurably worse? How can anyone hope to escape God's judgment if the actual salvation of the Son of God be neglected? The good news about this salvation was first proclaimed by Jesus Himself and has now been confirmed in our day, with the Father Himself bearing witness to it through signs and wonders and various demonstrations of His power, and with distributions of the gifts of the Holy Spirit – all blessings direct from God and not mediated by angels as was the case with the Law.

And it is not angels who will share Christ's rulership in His millennial kingdom but us, just as scripture affirms when it says that God subordinated the world to us, not to angels (Ps.8:5-7). This subjection of the world to Man has not yet taken place in its entirety, clearly: Jesus Christ had to come into the world as One made temporarily less powerful than the angels in order for Him to suffer death to save us all, and on account of that victory on the cross we see Him now crowned with glory and honor far above any angelic being. For us to be saved, it was necessary for the Father to complete through suffering, that is, fulfill the plan of God through the cross, the One for whom and on account of whom all things exist, our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the One who has brought the rest of us, sons of God through Him, unto salvation, for He is the One who has "pioneered" that salvation for us. For both we and our Savior, the One who by His blood has bought us and made us holy and we who are made holy by Him belong to one and the same heavenly Father. Thus our Savior is pleased to call us His brothers as scripture prophesied, telling us of His love for us as His Bride (Ps.22:22), relating our trust in Him as those who now belong to Him (Is.8:17), and describing us as being one together forever (Is.8:18).

Since we are human beings, Jesus had to become a human being also in order to pay the price of redemption for us, bearing our sins in His human body, if we were going to be saved. It is through that spiritual death on our behalf that Satan's power over us – the power inherent in the fear of physical death we all would otherwise have to face without hope – that we have been saved and liberated from that fear that previously led us to serving the devil, in effect, in whatever false systems of false hope to which we had been enslaved. Was it angels that Christ delivered in this way? No, it was us, and in order to be our High Priest, the merciful and faithful One who would sacrifice Himself for our sake, Jesus, being God from all eternity, had to become like us, a true human being, in order to be our perfect sacrifice for sin – not a mere ritual symbol, but the One who actually expiated our sins by His blood, His spiritual death in the darkness on our behalf. He was severely tested before His spiritual death and suffered unimaginably in dying for all of our sins. He is therefore able to be our ultimate Helper in bestowing on us the salvation purchased with His blood, His spiritual death, and He is also able to aid us in every way now that we are saved, for He knows from bitter experience what human suffering is like (so that He is our perfect Intercessor as well: Rom.8:34; 1Jn.2:1-2).

**Chapter 3:** *Jesus is superior to Moses (who mediated the Law containing the sacrifices). The need to avoid the mistakes of the exodus generation who fell into unbelief and rebellion.*

So, you who have been sanctified by the blood of Christ, not animals, you who have become partakers of an election to the heavenly assembly of Christ, His Church, which is far superior to the earthly assembly you now are compromising to remain a part of, consider carefully just who it is upon whom your confidence of eternal life is based, the true High Priest, the One sent by the Father to fulfill and replace the Law, Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus proved Himself absolutely faithful to the Father who sent Him to fulfill the true sacrifice just as Moses did in establishing the "house" which merely symbolizes that sacrifice. Christ's glory in what He did is clearly far superior to that of Moses, just as in the case of someone who furnishes a house being superior to the house itself: Christ's sacrifice fulfills the true divine purpose which the Law of Moses merely symbolized. Moses was merely a servant, so to speak, of that symbolic house, but Christ is the Son who is the Ruler over said house – and we are that very house, the Church He bought with His blood, if we boldly hold onto the confidence of our salvation firmly until the end.

That is where I am concerned about you. You remind me of the exodus generation to whom the Law was first given. Scripture warns against becoming hardhearted against God as they did, testing Him continually for forty years so that the Lord finally swore in His anger that they would never enter into His "rest" (Psalm 95:7-11). Beware, therefore, lest any one of you should likewise by your similar behavior develop an evil heart of unbelief in turning away from the living God. Instead you should be encouraging each other to scrupulously avoid being hardened in this way through sin's deceptiveness, and you should do so "today" as long as it is called "today", that is, as long as we are still here in this world waiting for our Lord's return. For we have become part of His Body and will enjoy all the blessings related thereunto at the resurrection – if we hold fast to that confidence and faith firm until the end.

Now when it says in the Psalm just quoted, not to harden our hearts if we have truly heard His voice and responded to Him (Psalm 95:7-8), who was it then that heard before but became embittered against Him? Wasn't it the entire generation led out of Egypt by Moses? And with whom was the Lord angry for forty years? Wasn't it those same rebels who sinned against Him whose bones are bleaching in the desert as a result? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His "rest" if not those who disobeyed and disbelieved Him? We see clearly that those ancestors of yours did not enter into the "rest" He promised precisely because of their lack of faith, a lack of faith confirmed by their actions – similar to your present ones.

**Chapter 4:** *Jesus is the Initiator of the true Sabbath (as opposed to the Sabbath of the Law). He is the living Word of God, and as the true High Priest, He is the One who has fulfilled all the ritual meaning of the Sabbath (and of all the festivals).*

To continue with what we have been saying, since the exodus generation failed to enter into "rest", not trusting the Lord and therefore not being allowed to enter into the land of promises which symbolizes that rest of faith, you should take pains not to make the same mistake: the fact that in our passage, Psalm 95, the psalmist says that "Today" is the day of entrance into that rest, and warns against hardening the heart so as not to enter it, means that this promise of faith-rest is

available for you right now – and you should be very careful about refusing to enter it, remembering that God's true rest is entered by faith, not by the works of the Law you seem to prefer and to which you have turned back just as the exodus generation turned back to Egypt in their hearts. They had the good news of salvation proclaimed to them just as you have, but in their case it did them no good because they refused to believe it as we know full well from their faithless behavior. Only those who believe enter into the rest of faith. After all, it says in our psalm that the Lord swore to them that they would *not* enter His rest. And He said that even though of course the original Sabbath of the seventh day of re-creation happened a very long time before those words were spoken or written (Gen.2:2). And since the exodus generation refused to enter the rest of faith, God set out another day, the "Today" of Psalm 95 written long after that rebellious generation had passed. They did not enter because of their lack of trust in the Lord and lack of faithfulness to Him, and not even their children fulfilled this "rest", because if Psalm 95 were talking about the entrance of that second generation into the land of promise, the psalmist, who wrote many centuries later, would not have said that "Today" was the day of entrance into rest. So there is a true "Sabbath rest" for God's people, a spiritual one which fulfills the symbolism of the ritual observance. Anyone who has entered into that true rest of faith has ceased trying to work for salvation (as in wrongly looking to the Law as the means thereof or engaging in so called "Gnostic combat"), just as God too ceased from His own works of reconstructing the world on the very first Sabbath. Let us therefore make every effort to enter into that true faith-rest, the rest of trusting the Lord and not of turning back to the works of the Law which cannot save, so that we do not fall into the same trap of disobedient lack of faith.

The Lord knows what is in all of our hearts. Rebellion cannot be hidden from Him who is the very Word of God. And we also have the written Word which, if we are honest and listen to the Spirit's voice in making it clear to us, will pierce through all lies and convict all false doctrines we may have believed, refute all lies we have been told and given ear to, right to the depths of our heart. Instead of turning back to the rituals of the Law (or Gnostic perversions of them), therefore, let us remember that we have been saved by putting our faith in the true High Priest, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Since He came into this world as a true human being in order to sacrifice Himself for our sins, He knows full well and experientially what it means to be human. And as one who drank to the full the cup of bitterness which is human life, Jesus is able to be sympathetic to the pressures you are under and to the ostracism you are suffering – all of the temptations that lie at the heart of your present rebellion. For He suffered all of the same pressures and temptations – only without ever succumbing to them as you are doing. So instead of giving in through lack of faith, let us take our petitions directly to Him, confident that we will indeed receive mercy, grace and timely help from Him who is seated on the throne of grace on high if we do so.

**Chapter 5:** *Jesus Christ is our true High Priest so that His spiritual sacrifice is the true sacrifice acceptable to the Father. You ought to know this by now, but you have reverted.*

Even high priests under the Mosaic Law make shadow sacrifices which represent what Jesus was going to do for us, and those priests know what it is like to be under pressure because they are sinners by nature just like us. That is why they have to offer sacrifices for themselves as well as for the people, even though they are "high priests" who symbolize Christ and the sacrifice which

He has now made. Even so, even human priests were called to that office by God and did not choose that honor by their own will. In Christ's case, His commission came directly from God the Father, just as scripture proves (Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110:4).

The sacrifice of the cross, the "blood of Christ", is beyond our complete understanding, but Christ endured it – along with all the unimaginable pain and suffering it entailed – and was delivered through it because of His perfect life and His perfect accomplishment of all that the Father asked of Him. Therefore Christ has genuine human experience – NOT of sin, since He was sinless and had to be sacrificed for us – but of what it means to pay the price for the sins of the world. And because of that greatest of victories, Christ has opened up the door of salvation for us – *if* we believe in Him and *if* we stay faithful to Him – and that is where you are falling down through your indulgence in Gnostic fantasies, sinful behavior, and return to the dead works of the Law. You should take note that it is as the result of Christ's actual and efficacious sacrifice for sin – a sacrifice that is now accomplished and complete – that the Father appointed Him as the unique High Priest, the only One capable of providing the salvation which the earthly priests merely symbolized in their regime of animal sacrifice.

By your actions in turning back to the Law and turning aside to sin and fantasy, you demonstrate that you have forgotten these basic truths, making it impossible for us to teach you more advanced principles. Shame on you! By this time you ought to be teaching others the truth but instead you are in desperate need of being taught again the most basic principles of our Christian faith. You have gone back to being spiritual babies, not yet weaned to solid doctrinal fare. For everyone who still needs their mother's milk is a baby – in spiritual terms, someone who has forgotten that our true righteousness comes from our faith in Christ, not from the works of Law or Gnostic combat. The solid food you should be craving, the deeper doctrinal truths that lead to spiritual advance and genuine service to the Lord, are not for babies but for those who are spiritually mature, those, that is, who through consistent growth and application of the truth have trained their faculties to perceive what is good and right to do and what is not – and who then act accordingly. But you are doing precisely the opposite.

**Chapter 6:** *By your conduct, you believers in Jerusalem seem to have forgotten the most fundamental doctrines. Continuing this way leads only to apostasy, and that is not where you want to be. Remember that God's promises to you are safe and secure, confirmed by an oath from Him – if only you hang onto your faith firmly until the end.*

It is time to move on from basic teachings and press on to spiritual maturity. Don't you remember the teaching of repentance? But you have turned back to your prior behavior. Don't you remember the teaching of faith unto salvation? But you are acting just as faithlessly as the exodus generation. Don't you remember the teaching of baptisms, how that Spirit baptism is the baptism of the Church? But you are reverting to the ritual baptisms of the Law. Don't you remember the teaching of the resurrection of believers and the last judgment of unbelievers? But you are acting as those who are determined to be part of the latter rather than the former.

It is not possible for you who have stumbled – you who were once led to the light of the truth and given the Holy Spirit, enlightened by the truth and given to see exceptional miracles – to be



restored to your previous status of spirituality while you are right in the middle of putting Jesus Christ to open shame by participating again now in the rituals of the Law – which amounts to crucifying Him all over again. If we bless land that produces a good crop but set on fire land which is producing thorns, consider how dangerous this crop of brambles and briars is which you are presently producing.

You have forced me to put things this way, but I do have confidence that you will turn around and be saved in the end. God will not forget the good things you have done in the past for Christ and your fellow believers in service which continues up until the present time – as long as you don't fall away entirely. You need to rekindle that confidence in your eternal reward and hold onto it firmly until the end, not becoming lazy in your approach but rather imitating the great believers of the past who through faith, patience and perseverance came into the full inheritance of the things God has promised to those who belong to Him. If we are walking with Christ, we have every right to be confident about that inheritance. Didn't God Himself make that promise of eternal inheritance to our forefather Abraham? And God also swore by Himself as He could swear by no other to make it so. And Abraham received the pledge of that promise by believing it, waiting patiently for it, and following through in faith. God swore this to him in addition to His promise to him so that there would be no doubt about the matter. That is why men swear, after all, and there is no greater oath of confirmation than one invoked by God Himself by Himself. That oath-confirmed promise of salvation and reward for proving faithful in this life is our heavenly anchor, given to us by God Himself who has always told us nothing but the truth. It securely and solidly binds us who have taken refuge in that future hope of the wonderful things to come just like an anchor in this life reaching into heaven, right into the true holy of holies where Father and Son reside. That is the very place into which Jesus has led the way for us, pioneering it, so to speak. As our true, unique High Priest – priest and king, just like Melchizedek – Jesus is the One who has passed behind the veil to open up the way into heaven on our behalf.

**Chapter 7:** *Melchizedek was a type of Christ. His royal priesthood illuminates our Lord's dual position of King of Kings and High Priest. This change of priesthood likewise demonstrates that the Law has now been replaced by something better.*

What I have been trying to explain to you by these references to Melchizedek (Heb.5:10; 6:20) is this. Melchizedek was, uniquely, both a king and a priest: king of Salem (Jerusalem) and priest of God Most High, 'El-'Elyon, or God the only true God. In his capacity as priest Melchizedek blessed Abraham and Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek in that capacity. Now there is no genealogy of Melchizedek in scripture nor any mention of his birth or death. That makes him a perfect "type" to represent the Son of God in, e.g., Psalm 110:4, since Christ's priesthood is actually eternal, the point that is represented and foreshadowed by what scripture says about Melchizedek. By analogy then, Christ is greater than Abraham because Melchizedek, a type of Christ, received tithes from Abraham rather than the other way around. And also by analogy then, Christ is greater than Abraham because Melchizedek, a type of Christ, blessed Abraham rather than the other way around. And the fact that the Levites are all offspring of Abraham, means, in effect, that they also paid tithes to Melchizedek and were blessed by him, the lesser by the greater in both cases, symbolizing further that Christ's high priesthood is superior in every way to that of the Law which the Levites administer and from whom the priests of the Law

derive.

After all, if the priesthood of the Law of Moses could bring about actual salvation, why would scripture even mention the need for another priest "in the order of Melchizedek"? Changing the priesthood, which is precisely what Christ's sacrifice of Himself on the cross as our true High Priest brought about, of necessity occasions also a change in law – from that of Moses to that of the Spirit (Rom.8:2; 2Cor.3:6). According to the Law of Moses, all priests must be Levites, but Christ in His human nature was of the tribe of Judah. More than that, this new High Priest serves not on the basis of a temporary, hereditary commission but through the power of eternal life, just as the scripture says: "You shall be a priest *forever*" (Psalm 110:4). It is for this very reason that the Law has been set aside, namely, because it could not itself bring about salvation; it merely gave us hope through foreshadowing it of the coming of the One who would take away our sins and open up the door of life eternal for us – it is through this hope that we actually draw close to God.

And since Christ received His high priesthood not by physical birth like the Levites but by direct commission from the Father, verified by His oath (Psalm 110:4), for that very reason He has also become the Guarantor of a covenant, a testament, a promise which is better than the old one, a New Covenant of eternal life through faith in Him and what He did for us on the cross. The Levites served only as long as they lived, but Christ's high priesthood whereby He saved us and through which He intercedes for us always is eternal just as He is. Jesus is therefore able to save all who come to Him for salvation and to intercede always on behalf of all of us who have been saved by putting our faith in Him. That is the kind of High Priest we need, not a sinful human being who can only perform ritual actions but One who can actually provide salvation and help for those who belong to Him. He is holy, without fault, without imperfection, completely separated from sinners, and has ascended higher than the heavens into the presence of the Father. Unlike the human priests, Jesus has no need of making sacrifice day by day, first on behalf of His own sins (since He never sinned), and then for the sins of the people. For this latter He did once and for all when He offered Himself as a sinless sacrifice on the cross to take away the sins of the world once and for all. The Mosaic Law appoint high priests who were mere human beings, but the Son of God who comes after the Law which has now been replaced was appointed by the Father's oath to serve as the true High Priest forever – and He has accomplished the perfect salvation which the Law never could.

**Chapter 8:** *Jesus Christ is the genuine High Priest, the One who offered the efficacious sacrifice necessary for us to be saved. It is on that basis that we now have the New Covenant, because He fulfilled the Old one.*

What all this means is that Jesus Christ is the genuine High Priest, the One who offered the efficacious sacrifice necessary for us to be saved. He did not enter the earthly temple in order to perform a mere ritual sacrifice, but the actual holy of holies in heaven above where His session at the Father's right hand confirms that sacrifice's acceptability. All priests must offer sacrifices, and so Jesus Christ did as well: His own blood (that is, His spiritual death for all sin on the cross). Had our Lord been an earthly priest, then indeed He would have offered the ritual sacrifices of the Law which merely foreshadowed that great atonement for sin He was destined to

and has since made for us. Those earthly priests serve at a sanctuary which is a mere replica of the actual heavenly abode of the Father where our Lord has entered. After all, Moses was told to construct the earthly sanctuary after the heavenly *pattern* (Ex.25:40). But the sacrifice made by our Lord was infinitely better than the ritual ones made by earthly priests because it accomplished what they could not in taking away our sins. Jesus has therefore empowered for us a new and better covenant, a new and better conferring of God's blessings upon us, one which is based upon promises which are better: resurrection, eternal life and inheritance through faith in Him.

After all, God had already prophesied through Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:34) that He was going to replace the Old Covenant with a New one, finding fault, one may say, with the Old one, since the people of Israel were never able to abide by it – and that, after all, was the point: the Old Covenant demonstrates our need for a Savior. Under the New Covenant, that passage informs us, God would write the truth, rather than on stone, on the very hearts of those who believed, and He would forgive all their sins. This is the New Covenant Jesus has validated with His own blood, having fulfilled the old one and all of its stipulations which we sinful human beings never could do. Mark my words carefully: by calling this covenant "New", hasn't the Father rendered the Old Covenant, the Law of Moses, obsolete? Indeed He has, and everything that is obsolete and has been replaced in this way is on the verge of disappearing altogether. And rightly so, because its purpose has been fulfilled – Jesus has now come and died for the sins of the world. So why are you determined to turn back to what will soon have vanished entirely?

**Chapter 9:** *The tabernacle and its rites were shadows representing Christ's actual sacrifice, and the high priest's entrance into the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement was a picture of Christ's entrance into the Father's presence after His victory on the cross. The blood which saves us is not animal blood but the blood of Christ, His spiritual death for us in being judged for our sins.*

The Law prescribed the rituals associated with the tabernacle which was also given the specific equipment you all know well, both for the first part, the holy place, and also for the second part, the holy of holies. Other priests entered into the first part every day to carry out the prescribed rituals, but only the high priest entered into the second part and only on the Day of Atonement in order to make atonement for the sins of the whole people and for his own as well – and never without the blood of a sacrifice. This is the Spirit's way of showing us that the way into the presence of the Father had not yet been opened up – as it could not be by mere symbolic sacrifices of the sort that are associated with the tabernacle and the present temple as well. That is because the rituals were – and are – incapable of cleansing anyone's heart or conscience since they are merely symbols and do not actually satisfy God the Father's justice in regard to sins. These sacrifices were only shadows, rites, rituals, which looked forward to the time when God would provide the only efficacious Sacrifice for Sin, His own dear Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Jesus, the true High Priest, never entered the earthly holy of holies in the temple – that would have been pointless. He entered the *actual* Holy of Holies in heaven when He ascended, the very throne room of God the Father. There His work on the cross was approved by the Father, not the

spilling of any literal blood but the actual atonement for our sins for which He died and paid the entire penalty with His spiritual death once and for all in the darkness on the cross. If animal blood was effective for ritual purification, how much more do you not think that the actual spiritual death of our Lord, the blood of Christ, the One whose offering was enabled by the Holy Spirit, will not produce the actual cleansing of our hearts and consciences from those other dead works of the Law to which you have reverted? Faith in Christ and faithful following of Him is thus the only true way to serve the Living God.

It is exactly because of this victory, the spiritual death of Christ for our sins which the first covenant could only reveal but not cleanse, that Jesus has become our Mediator producing actual peace between us and the Father – for all of us, that is, who have been called to the promise of an eternal inheritance, one far better than anything which the Law merely symbolized. No covenant or testament comes into effect without the death of the testator and is only considered valid thereafter. That is why animal blood was ever-present in the rituals of the Law, namely because it represented the death of Christ to come which would empower the promises behind it. This is why it is called "the blood of the Covenant", why everything was sprinkled with blood by Moses, why everything having to do with the Law is cleansed by blood – and why without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin, ritual forgiveness only under the Law, but foreshadowing the actual and efficacious forgiveness that the blood of Christ would provide.

For this reason, while the earthly tabernacle and temple had to be purified with animal blood which was merely symbolic, the genuine heavenly abode of the Father required a sacrifice which was superior in every way. After all, it was not into the earthly temple that Christ ascended, a mere replica of heavenly things, but into the actual presence of the Father on high – for us. And Christ did this once and for all, having no need to do so every year as the earthly high priest does – He would then have had to suffer from the beginning of time until the end if His sacrifice were merely a ritual and not an efficacious one. But now, at the very conjunction of the ages, the pivotal point in the entire plan of God on which all depends, Christ has accomplished eternal redemption from sin for us all through His great sacrifice on the cross in dying for every human sin. All human beings face physical death and then judgment before God thereafter. In an analogous way, Christ faced spiritual death for us all and will appear again to judge the world on our behalf, we who are patiently awaiting His return and deliverance. So place your hopes for safety and help in Him, and not in compromising with the world.

**Chapter 10:** *The spiritual death of Christ is what the Father required. The Law merely foreshadowed that death on our behalf which is now a completed reality. That is the hope in which you were saved, so hold fast to it. Trading this confidence of yours for the pottage of a temporary respite from persecution through returning to the Law (or a contemporary Gnostic counterfeit of it) and thus offending Christ will result in God's judgment unless you repent.*

The Law of Moses foreshadowed Christ and the salvation we would receive through His death on our behalf, but it effected nothing itself regarding that salvation. If it had, then the very sacrifices it commands would have ceased to be offered since those offering them would then have had confidence of possessing eternal life. As it is, these sacrifices remind those who make them of their sinfulness, the very purpose of the Law (Rom.3:20; 7:13; cf. Rom.4:15). Animal blood

does not save. This is why scripture predicted the need for a Savior, One who would come into this world as a man to do the Father's will in providing salvation through the sacrifice of His own body (Psalm 40:7-8), for the Father's justice could not be satisfied by mere animal sacrifices (Psalm 40:6). By declaring this, we see that scripture itself removes the Old Covenant of shadows and literal blood and replaces it with the New Covenant of actual salvation through the body and blood of Jesus Christ. That is how we are sanctified, made holy, rescued from this world and saved: through Christ's offering of Himself on the cross on our behalf – when we believe it, if we hold fast to it.

Under the Old Covenant, the priests continually offered animal sacrifices which cannot save. But our High Priest offered Himself – by which sacrifice we *are* saved – and the effectiveness of His sacrifice is confirmed by the approval inherent in His session at the Father's right hand. Now we are merely waiting for His return – and should be doing so in confidence and faithfulness, not in compromise and spiritual regression. In contrast to the many ineffective animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant, our High Priest saved us through one sacrifice – once and for all, just as scripture says when it affirms that under the New Covenant our sins will be forgiven (Jeremiah 31:33-34). And where there is an efficacious forgiveness of sins, obviously there remains no more need for any sacrificing for them – and you should know this.

We have now been completely cleansed of our sins by the blood of Christ – His work in dying for our sins – and not by ineffective animal blood. We ought, therefore, to have confidence to draw closer to the Lord, encouraged by the fact that the way has been opened up into the true holy of holies in heaven for us who belong to Him, His "house", by means of the sacrifice of our true High Priest for us on the cross. We can and we should have absolute confidence in our salvation now since we have been sprinkled not by animal blood and not by physical water but by the blood of Christ (His paying of the penalty of our sins) and by the Water of the Word (the gospel which we have believed) – that is what has cleansed our consciences, NOT the sacrifices of the Law. We need to hold fast to what we have confessed and believed in the absolute confidence of eternal life through Jesus Christ – God has never proved untrue to His promises . . . for those who persevere in faith. And we should also be reminding others who are falling by the wayside of the need to maintain their Christian love and the ministry it inspires – the lack of which is an indication of drifting away (as I mentioned before: Heb.2:1). To accomplish the above, we need to avoid the habit of some who are avoiding having anything to do with other believers out of fear and lassitude; rather we should be encouraging each other to stand fast in the truth, ministering to each other through the truth (something which is impossible if we avoid having contact with each other for all the wrong reasons). After all, Christ will return soon and we should be living in anticipation of that blessed hope (Tit.2:13; cf. Matt.24:43-51).

We have already proven that the sacrifices of the Law are now defunct and were never of any true effect. What, then, can anyone who willfully ignores these truths and turns back to the now replaced Law for all the wrong reasons reasonably expect except a terrible judgment for such cowardly lack of faith? After all, it is not as if you can offer an animal sacrifice for this sin since continuing to sacrifice animals now that the cross has happened is in fact *the sin itself!* Remember, you who wish to remain under the Old Covenant, that violating the inferior and now replaced Law resulted in summary judgment of the most severe sort. So how much more drastic

do you not think the punishment will be for anyone who – in effect – is trampling Christ and His sacrifice underfoot by going back to those weak things which merely foreshadowed what He was going to do for us, especially since by doing that you are suggesting that what Jesus did for us must have been ineffective! This is the same as considering the cross a profanity even though this is what saved you! This is insulting the Holy Spirit and the grace of God after the fact – when we know that those who reject His message in the first place are headed to the lake of fire (Matt.12:31)!

Doesn't the Father claim vengeance as His own prerogative? Doesn't He say that He will judge those who belong to Him – meaning you? Don't you understand what a terrifying prospect it is for those who are tempting Him in this way to fall under His judgment? This is not the way you behaved in the past. Previously, after you had first seen the light of Him who is the Light of the world, you endured all manner of suffering rather than compromise the truth. And I know that full well because I myself was the one who subjected many of you to persecution. You endured all manner of injury in a contest, so to speak, of suffering wherein you were put on display in trials, tribulation and slanderous reproaches, but you did not turn away from Christ – because you were looking forward to your resurrection and a reward which is better by far than anything on this temporary earth. And rightly did you do so. After *all that*, please don't throw away your confidence of salvation, forgetting what you have already endured and throwing everything away at this late date. Instead, you ought to persevere in your faith no matter what, so that you may receive the promised rewards and promised resurrection that once meant everything to you by doing what God wants you to do – which is NOT returning to the Law (or dabbling in mystic interpretations of it). It is just as the scripture says (Habakkuk 2:3-4): the wait for what we hope for is very short compared to eternity; the Lord will return, sooner than you think; we who have been made righteous through faith by that same faith will inherit eternal life – unless we draw back from our faith and force the Lord to disown us. But I am confident, brethren, that we are NOT of the number of those who retreat unto apostasy, but of those who persevere in faith to the preservation of our eternal lives.

**Chapter 11:** *Faith is the foundation of everything in the plan of God as demonstrated by the catalog of Old Testament heroes.*

We have established that faith is the key characteristic of those who persevere unto salvation. What then is faith? Faith is what gives us confidence in the inevitability of the things upon which we have set our hope: the resurrection and our eternal reward. Faith therefore "proves", so to speak, the reality in our eyes of those things which our eyes cannot yet see. The great believers of the Old Testament had their mettle tested and were approved by this very faith, because it is this trust – in God – which is what the Christian life is all about; and the greater the faith, belief, trust in Him no matter what, the greater the validation, approval, reward for those who exhibit it under the pressures of life. While the world doesn't believe it, we know by faith, because the Bible says so, that the entire universe was created by God – not natural forces – in the blink of an eye, supernaturally.

Abel's faith was demonstrated by his sacrifice of an animal showing that he understood the need for a Savior. He did as God commanded him, unlike Cain who did what he himself saw fit to do

irrespective of the will of God. The former is true righteousness, doing what God wants us to do, believing in Him and following what He says regardless of our own feelings or anything else – which is what you all should be doing in Jerusalem. That is the sort of trust, belief, faith, and faithful obedience which lasts beyond this life into life eternal and results in our coming reward as is the case with Abel – so stop being like Cain, doing things your way instead of God's way.

Enoch's faith resulted in his unique departure from this life which never happened before and will never happen again. If we please the Lord by trusting Him, all manner of wonderful things are possible because, after all, it is our faith-response that our Lord wants from us, to trust Him more than what we see and hear and feel, and to demonstrate that faith by following through in faithful response to Him in this life, trusting Him to bless us and protect us without compromising on the truly important spiritual matters (as you in Jerusalem are doing). The Lord rewards those who put their trust for deliverance in Him, both now in this life and also with an eternal reward beyond our present imagination. Believing those truths strengthens our faith to deal with everything else in this life in a virtuous and self-reinforcing cycle (as opposed the vicious circle of doubt, disbelief and disobedience).

Noah believed what the Lord warned him about even before he could see it with his own eyes. The result of his obedient faith was the reception of God's righteousness we all likewise possess through faith in Christ, resulting in his salvation in eternity and his deliverance (from the flood) in time – although the world which did not believe or respond to the truth was entirely condemned and destroyed (temporally then and eternally at the future judgment).

Abraham obeyed the Lord and left what he knew behind to venture into a strange place he knew little about – because he trusted the Lord: obedience and faith, trust and faithfulness always go hand in hand. He and his family after him were content to live as sojourners rather than putting down roots in this temporary world because he and they trusted that the Lord had something better: an eternal reward better than anything in this life.

Sarah likewise trusted the Lord that what He promised was true, and as a result received the son she and Abraham longed for even though they were both well past the age of this even being possible to human lights. As a result, from barrenness and infertility came an innumerable progeny.

These great believers serve as examples we should follow: they were looking forward to the resurrection and their eternal rewards just as we should be, and they ended their lives without either coming to pass – yet. But they did see them – with the eyes of faith – and greeted them, so to speak, even though still a long way off, making it clear by their trust in God, that the Lord could and that the Lord would at the proper time bring both about in spite of their intervening physical deaths. They all had the sojourner mind-set: they all recognized and demonstrated by their actions, by their faith and faithful behavior, that this present life meant nothing to them, that they were instead looking forward to their resurrection and eternal reward. They accepted that they were strangers and aliens here in the devil's world. Instead of compromising with it, seeing this world as the place of happiness, they were looking forward instead to the inheritance that God would provide, the inheritance, the land, the country, the city that is going to come down

from heaven. If that were not the case, they could have easily retreated back to the places they had come from, back to the old – just as YOU are going back instead of persevering in marching forward with the Lord. But *those* believers pleased God and He is not ashamed of them – as you are tempting the Lord to be ashamed of *you* – and He has indeed prepared a wonderful habitation for them with "many mansions" (Jn.14:2), the New Jerusalem – and for us too, if we do not grow weary of this fight so as to give up.

Abraham showed us the power of faith by trusting and obeying God when commanded to sacrifice the son he loved so much, the very son upon whom all the promises made to Abraham depended. He trusted that somehow, since God commanded it, God would work it out for good (Rom.8:28; cf. Gen.50:20), even if it meant that He had to raise Isaac from the dead – which in a manner of speaking is just what God did in sparing the boy's life at the last moment. Isaac represented Christ and what our Savior would do in dying for us – and now that Christ has died for us, what are you doing making sacrifices meant to look forward to that victory already won by our Lord on the cross? Instead, like Abraham, we all ought to trust the Lord "no matter what" – for we see in this example both the goodness of God and also the benefit of trusting Him, even when eyes and ears and emotions and anxious thoughts . . . and people . . . tell us not to.

Isaac, in spite of the prophecy about the elder serving the younger (Gen.25:23; cf. Rom.9:12), was so absolutely sure that God's promise which he had been given about his blessing of his sons was solid that he tried to put Esau whom he preferred over Jacob, knowing in faith that God's Word would stand – as it in fact did.

Likewise, Jacob had absolute faith that what he had been given by God to prophesy about his children would come true, and thus rallied his strength at the end of his life to pay tribute to the Lord as he did so.

Likewise, Joseph was absolutely convinced about God's prophecies regarding the coming deliverance of Israel from Egypt that he gave explicit orders for his burial there to be temporary, intending to give the Israelites a sign and a symbol of their future inheritance of the land of promise.

Likewise, Moses' parents had enough confidence and faith in the Lord's goodness and mercy to protect their innocent child, having been given to see that God had plans for him and believing that this was so, doing what was right and trusting God in spite of the danger of doing so.

Moses chose the Lord and the things that cannot be seen over a life of security, wealth and power. He had and kept his eyes on the Lord, not on this world, and trusted Him through thick and thin. Moses did as God commanded and precisely so, trusting in godly fear that what He said was true, with the result that the firstborn of Israel were spared while those of the Egyptians all perished at the first Passover.

The Israelites had sufficient faith in God to cross through the opening God had made in the Red Sea, while the Egyptians who had none were destroyed in the same attempt – but after the crisis was over, our ancestors soon turned back to Egypt in their hearts . . . as you are apparently doing



as well, in spite of the suffering you also successfully endured previously. The next generation had enough faith in God to do precisely what He told them to do in marching around Jericho seven times, even though there was no obvious worldly reason to do so, and as a result the most powerful defenses in the land fell before them without any effort on their part. They kept marching around and nothing happened for seven days . . . until it did. You too need to have sufficient faith to persevere in this same way, regardless of how things appear to your fleshly eyes. If you do, God will act on your behalf in His good and perfect time (seven representing the perfect timing of God).

Rahab shows us that God is no respecter of persons: anyone who puts their trust in Him will not be disappointed. Rahab saved not only her own life by her faith in Him but also those of her entire family.

I could go on at great length about all the wonderful believers of the past, about all of the wonderful feats they accomplished by trusting the Lord, about all that they suffered – as you have suffered – and yet still did not relinquish their faith one bit. I wish I could say the same about you. Yes, they suffered even more grievously than you, demonstrating that they were better than this world and deserved better than this world. And yet, they left this world behind without receiving what they hoped for, what they knew by faith was their divine inheritance, their resurrection and reward. They did not receive it because, if they had, we would have been denied ours. God is waiting until the entire Bride of Christ has been formed until Christ returns to collect His Church, and at that time they and we and all the believers to come until that time will rise together to meet the Lord in the air, together as one Body of Christ forever. That is definitely "something better", much better than the mess of pottage for which some of you are bartering away your eternal inheritance.

**Chapter 12:** *Divine discipline is not to be despised but responded to. The disaster occasioned by failure to respond is exemplified by the difference between the grace and mercy of the New Covenant and the terrifying penalties of the Old. Better to prefer the heavenly Mount Zion and the Kingdom of Heaven which can never be shaken.*

No doubt you are being disciplined for your lack of faith shown by your failure to walk in the footsteps of the great believers of the past. And no doubt it is hard for you to admit that this pain is your fault for the wrong actions you have taken. Do not react in that way! The whole point of divine discipline is to turn you around to repentance and to motivate you to return to the faith and trust and obedience you once had. So you need to rethink how you are responding to God's reproof of you and have some humility instead. So be pleased to follow the example of all the great believers in the past who are watching us, put aside this sin that you have fallen into (of returning to the Law on the one hand and of pursuing Gnostic fantasies on the other), and instead make every effort to get back onto the course so as to win the race (cf. 1Cor.9:24-27).

Keep your eyes on Jesus Christ, our prime example and the One because of whom we are saved and in whom we trust to be saved. Do what He did in keeping His eyes on the prize, ignoring everything extraneous. He endured the unendurable – the cross – and has won the victory of victories as a result, a victory validated by His session at the Father's right hand. We are not

being asked to do anything even remotely approaching what He did, and, considering that He suffered and died for all of our sins, the least we can do is to follow Him in doing what He wants us to do in response. Keep in mind that also before the cross our Lord endured similar opposition to what you are facing – but far greater than we can presently understand. Resolve to follow in His footsteps so as not to grow weary and lose heart. You have not yet fought against this sin (of compromising with the Law and indulging in Gnostic excess) to that point of proper resistance. And you have allowed yourselves to become disheartened by the divine discipline you have received as a result. But that is because you have not repented and confessed. You have forgotten that this discipline is all for your benefit, to turn you back to the right path, just as scripture affirms (Proverbs 3:11-12).

So bear up under this discipline you are receiving in the right and godly way, accepting it, confessing and repenting, and remembering that you are receiving the correction that all good fathers give to their sons. That is just how our heavenly Father is treating you – disciplining you for your own good. Only the fatherless lack fatherly discipline, and if we received correction from our earthly fathers even though they were imperfect and only doing the best they knew how to do in punishing us, how much more should we not be willing to accept and respond aright to the perfect discipline meted out by our perfect heavenly Father – correction that rescues us from death (the sin unto death and/or apostasy) – if we do respond to it in the right way? For such godly response will lead to us being sanctified, set apart from sin and evil, and restored to fellowship with Him and with our Savior (1Jn.1:1-10).

All correction received aright and with the proper attitude and leading to genuine reform produces wonderful and necessary results, especially in the spiritual realm – even though, at the time we are receiving it, it is not pleasant to experience. So get back into the race, doing what is necessary to repair the injuries which sidelined you rather than making them worse by failing to correct your course. And along with all of your brother and sister Christians around the world, seek out day by day that moment by moment peace of fellowship with Jesus Christ (i.e., taking up your cross: your spiritual offense), along with holiness/sanctification (i.e., denying yourselves: your spiritual defense), setting aside and having nothing to do with sin and evil – because without turning away from these compromises (with the Law) and indulgences (in Gnostic excess), apostasy or the sin unto death may well result: only believers are saved and will rejoice to see the Lord face to face on His return.

All of you take pains to embrace God's grace in this matter, His love and forgiveness, by turning back to Him. The alternative is laid out very clearly in the obsolete Law you have been preferring: a bitter root of idolatry which defiles many even though it may spring from just one man (Deut.29:17-19) – and what you are doing is essentially making an idol of the defunct Law and/or the angels who merely mediated it. Stay far away from all sexual sin in particular for obvious reasons; you certainly cannot be sanctified/holy and be involved in any of that (cf. 1Cor.6:18; 1Thes.4:3-8). That indulging in Gnostic excess is also idolatry. Don't trade everything you've struggled and suffered and sacrificed for in the past for a single mess of pottage the way Esau did, because without repentance – the repentance you are reluctant to embrace – it's impossible to get one's birthright back.

The mountain you have come to in Jesus Christ is *not* that terrifying Mt. Sinai – that was the frightful place identified with the Law, not with God's grace in our Savior, that was the place of the Old Covenant, not the New (cf. Gal.4:21-31). Why are you so eager to turn back to that fearful place which struck terror into the hearts not only of all the people at that time but even that of Moses? In Jesus, you have come to the heavenly Mount Zion and our eternal home, New Jerusalem, the place where the Father and Son dwell along with all the elect angels and all the saints who have gone before us – the Church of which you are still a part (even though you are turning your back on it at present). This is where our Lord is, Mount Zion in heaven, not Mt. Sinai on earth. He is the One who has mediated the New and better Covenant in which we now stand, the agreement God the Father made on our behalf to be saved by His grace and the sacrifice of His Son for us through faith. It is by that blood, the blood of Christ, not animal blood, by His work in dying for our sins on the cross with which we have been "sprinkled", so to speak, so as to be cleansed of our sins and saved. Literal blood, the kind shed in the sacrifices to which you have foolishly returned, does nothing (and neither does indulging in antinomian cult behavior termed "sacrifices" either). Christ's sacrifice is better in every way because it actually provided salvation, and is thus superior to every animal sacrifice in history, starting with that of Abel – and to an infinite degree.

So don't turn your back on the words of warning in this letter, nor the discipline you are receiving, nor the pangs of conscience which are convicting you through the Holy Spirit. You who want to be under the Law, however wrongly interpreted, remember that those who violated it and refused to repent as you are doing did not escape when given an earthly warning. But your warning is coming from the Word of God, written and living, Jesus Christ and His truth, a warning direct from heaven. Please do not think that you can escape if you continue to disregard Him.

At Sinai, God's voice shook the earth when warning the Israelites to obey Him (e.g., Ex.19:18); and later He said that the time would come when He would shake the heavens and the entire earth as well. That means this material world, a world which is passing away. That temporary world is what the Law pertained to. But we are looking forward to the new heavens and the new earth which can never be shaken. So we ought to accept the truth: we must worship Him in the right way of the Spirit, not the wrong way of the now replaced Law (Rom.8:2), or by attending to mere fantasies about angels. We need to turn away from the obsolete things of the past which only looked forward, accepting the truth with thanksgiving, serving Him properly in spiritual growth, progress and production with reverence and awe, focused on the present and future blessings which belong to us believers in Jesus Christ, and remembering that for everyone else – including those who turn back – only the fire of God's judgment remains.

**Chapter 13:** *Closing remarks reminding the Jerusalem believers to stay away from Gnosticism and its disreputable activities on the one hand, and to follow Christ, the One who has fulfilled the Law, instead of the shadows which only represented Him.*

Instead of continuing with your dangerous compromising, make every effort to love your brothers instead of associating with those who do not love Jesus. And as long as you are interested in angels, consider that in the past scripture tells us that some of those who welcomed

their brothers in need were actually entertaining *actual* elect angels. Do not forget about those who are in prison for our faith either, for this is another way in which you should be showing your love.

I am sorry to have to emphasize once more that sexual disobedience is particularly destructive to all spirituality (but the report I have received about you forces me to do so). So stay far, far away from what those Gnostics are telling you in this regard, justifying such sinful behavior with their lies. And do not allow your concern for your material security to trick you into compromising with the now obsolete Law. I realize that the hardships you have been facing by being shut out of society are a good part of the reason for your turning back (you need to consider that during the Tribulation this pressure will be even greater), but you must remember that God never lets us down, *if* we continue to trust Him and wait for His deliverance, just as the scripture says (Deuteronomy 31:6-8; Joshua 1:5). Believing this truth of God's absolute faithfulness towards those who trust Him, we can have confidence in this reality more than in what our eyes see: He is our Helper so that we have nothing to fear, just as scripture affirms (Psalm 118:6).

Remember also to obey rather than pressure, threaten and bully those who are teaching you these truths of the Word of God. Have faith as they did and do, remembering and observing how God blesses all those who follow Him as He has done with them. Jesus Christ is the truth behind the Old Covenant. Jesus Christ is the One who has mediated the New Covenant in which we now stand by faith. And Jesus Christ is the One before whom we must appear on that great day to come – this is the essence of all I have been saying to you. But in compromising the truth you are turning your back on Him who does not change (Jas.1:17), on Him who *is* the Truth (Jn.14:2).

After all, it is through the truth of the Word that we grow spiritually in our hearts, not through eating sacrificial meat from rituals with which we should now be having nothing to do, or by indulging in the illicit rites of what is falsely called "knowledge". So stay away from the now defunct rituals of the Law and also from those dangerous false doctrines with which some of you have dallied, listening to Gnostic teaching about angels and aeons. There is no profit to any of the above.

But there *is* great profit in our "eating from the altar" that Christ has provided us, namely, the truth of the Word which is "eaten", that is, received and believed in faith analogously to food. Compare our New Covenant with the Old one, the reality of the cross versus the mere shadows of the rituals to which you have reverted. Under the Old Covenant, the bodies of sacrifices were burned outside of the camp in the case of the sin offering whose blood makes atonement – in order to foreshadow the cross and the blood of Christ. That is why Jesus Christ suffered and died for us outside the city gate too, namely, to rescue us from our sins by dying for them, to make us holy so as to belong to Him and the Father, so as to be delivered from sin and death and judgment. That being the case, instead of compromising so as not to be ostracized, a temporary reprieve from trouble which brings small relief only in this world but at an eternal cost, we need to embrace the ostracism that faith in Christ may bring us, going "outside", away from the false fellowship and compromise within the camp/city/gate – because Jesus Christ is outside, not inside.

We are not of this world even though we are temporarily in it (Jn.17:14). We are looking forward to a better world, a city made by God which is not temporary as everything in this world is, but a lasting one, eternal in the heavens and destined to come to earth (Rev.21:1-2). Instead of ritual sacrifices, let us sacrifice true, real and genuinely spiritual sacrifices, praising God, giving thanks, sharing and ministering to our brothers and sisters in Christ – those are the sacrifices that please Him, **not** these animal sacrifices which have become obsolete and offensive to Him (nor any humanly devised Gnostic "sacrifices").

And I will say it again for emphasis: you have been bullying your teachers to keep them from telling you the truth. Instead, you must listen to them and accept and obey their teaching since they are trying to help you. That is the way to gain a good reward in eternity, namely, be engaging in genuine spiritual growth with their help. Your present approach will lead to loss of reward instead when they have to report on you negatively on the Day of Christ.

I also solicit your prayers. Regardless of what anyone may think, I have always sought to do what is right before the Lord. Keep me in your prayers so that I may be restored to your hearts as well – for that is profitable for you.

Remember whom it is we serve and love and what He did for us: the Father who called us to peace with Him (instead of the turmoil your behavior is forcing), who raised Jesus from the dead (and it is the resurrection that is our hope, not anything in this life – but your behavior is threatening your hold on that eternal life); and our dear Lord Himself who is our Shepherd – He will take care of us, if we follow Him. He is the One who has provided us with this New Covenant with all of its wonderful future promises, bought by His own body and blood given over unto death that we might be saved, and through which we now have eternal life by means of His actual sacrifice for us in the darkness on the cross. Remember these things so that God may help you grow spiritually and recover to where you were before and so that you may progress and produce in Jesus Christ a bountiful crop worthy of reward to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ forever.

This may seem to be a long letter, but in fact I have restrained myself as there was much more to say. Everything I have written is true and would be to your advantage to accept, even if it hurt your feelings at times.

Some news: Timothy has now been released, so he will be able to guide you to where I am being confined in Rome, if you arrive soon enough, that is. Greet your teachers (they receive first mention because you should be giving them proper respect). Greet all of the other believers (whom I will deliberately not mention by name here lest this letter be used to persecute them). Everyone here in Rome greets you as well (I must not mention them either for the same reason). I wish for you the favor of God – which is surely yours in principle and in practice too if you turn back to Him with all your heart. I firmly believe everything I've written to you.

### **Conclusion:**

In many regards, the challenges facing the Jerusalem believers at the time of writing of Hebrews

are similar to what believers today are facing. After the reception of this epistle in Jerusalem, it would not be many years hence until Judea was invaded by Roman armies (in response to the province-wide rebellion) and Jerusalem surrounded, just as our Lord had prophesied (Lk.21:20-24). For the inhabitants of that province, many of who retreated to Jerusalem for safety in the early days of the conflict, things went from bad to worse as the siege intensified and provisions ran out. The end came in 70 A.D. after many months of warfare, and death by fire and sword ensued, followed by the enslavement of many if not most of the few survivors. What became of individual believers, those throughout Judea and in Jerusalem who may have read or had Paul's letter read to them, is unknown. But we can say for certain that the Lord deals differently with those who belong to Him and are carefully following Him than He does with those who do not and who are not.

The passage cited above (Lk.21:20-24), has a dual application to the Roman siege and also to antichrist's occupation of Jerusalem at the Tribulation's mid-point. Interestingly then, at time of original posting we stand at present in the waning days of Laodicea at about the same temporal remove from the analogous events as Paul's readers did when they first received his letter. Then as now, the people of God were, by and large, not behaving as Jesus Christ desired – with exceptions. Today, we see an analogous dual tendency in the church-visible of Laodicea towards abandoning anything which might be considered "deep teaching" in favor of returning to the rituals and formalities of the Roman Catholic church on the one hand (Law), or of indulging in the excesses of musical and emotional theater on the other (Gnosticism). This double trend, toward legalism on the one hand and antinomianism on the other, is eerily similar to the situation in Jerusalem which Paul addresses in this letter.

In both cases, the historical one and our situation today, both behaviors were and are inimical to spiritual growth, and thus were and are disposing believers to be completely unprepared for what happened then and what will shortly happen from our present point in time. One major difference today is that instead of a Roman invasion of a single country (giving the possibility for some of the Jewish believers in Palestine to have potentially escaped; cf. Lk.21:21), antichrist's rule will be worldwide, and there will be no safe haven (except for the Jewish believers in Israel who heed the warning to flee in a way analogous to those who fled before: Rev.12:13-16). We who are destined to experience the coming trouble will likewise face ostracism from everyone who is not committed to following Jesus Christ, not only, that is, from unbelievers, but from weak believers, backsliding believers, compromising believers, and believers-in-name-only – of which Laodicea is filled to overflowing. This pressure of being shunned, combined with the powerful draw of the beast's religion which will appeal to those naturally given to legalistic behavior and also to those who are entirely otherwise and intent on indulgence, will make it difficult in the extreme for any believer who is not spiritually mature and solid in their faith to endure until the end – and only those who endure until the end will be saved (Matt.24:13).

We cannot say whether or not the epistle to the Hebrews had its desired effect, and Paul, who had only a short time remaining to live, was not given to see the full result either – though he may have received some indication of reaction to it from those he exhorts to come to visit him before he departed from this life. What we can say is that this letter was a lifeline, a life-preserver for any and all whose heart it touched, designed to shake them back into spiritual consciousness and

turn around before it was too late, before, that is, the consequences of their poor choices in turning away from the Lord in one direction or the other came due. The same choice faces Laodicean Christians today. On the cusp of the Tribulation, then, the book of Hebrews provides an excellent "wake-up call" for all who are in need of it, for all who are willing to receive it – and is also most valuable for those of us who are determined to maintain our faith in Christ, come what may, "firm until the end" (Heb.3:6; 3:14).

And he said to me, "Do not seal up these words of this book's prophe[tic message], for the time is near. (11) Let the unrighteous continue to act unrighteously, and him who is filthy continue in his filthiness, and let the righteous continue to produce righteousness, and him who is sanctified continue in his sanctification". (12) "Behold", [says the Lord], "I am coming quickly, and I bring my wages with me for each to be repaid according to his work.

Revelation 22:10-12