

HEBREWS

HOLDING FAST TO JESUS IN THE WILDERNESS

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NAME: _____

HEBREWS: HOLDING FAST TO JESUS IN THE WILDERNESS

The hearers of Hebrews were at a crossroads. Years ago, they left everything to follow Jesus and suffered great losses with joy. The fruit of their transformation had been evident. **Now?** Decades have passed. They continued bearing the shame of following Jesus. And they were like the Israelites who left Egypt — struggling to endure in the desert on the way to the promised land. Hope and energy began to fade and they became sluggish, distracted, and dull of hearing. The promised rest across the Jordan was hard to see. Was it really worth it? The pleasures of Egypt behind them held real sway. The danger of their apathy accelerating into bitterness and unbelief was serious. Would they persevere and inherit the promises with their fathers in faith, or fall in the wilderness like those who left Egypt?

The writer of Hebrews urges these tired and at risk Christians to look to Jesus. He demonstrates the power of Jesus to deliver them through the wilderness by comparing what Jesus provides to what the tabernacle system provided. Jesus has already blazed the trail and trial they are walking in — his suffering and exaltation has given them access to all they need to stay the course.

Hebrews is often read as a letter to exclusively Jewish Christians who were contemplating a return to Judaism due to suffering and a lack of theological understanding, but some have argued that this reading is at best incomplete and at worst incorrect (to be discussed in class). Thus, we will explore *the possibility* of a simpler, broader explanation: for various reasons these Christians were sluggish and in danger of falling away altogether (not *necessarily* in danger of returning to the old sacrificial system). Regardless, our aim is clear: gain a deeper appreciation of the superior Jesus so we too might hold fast to Jesus and our hope while we journey through the desert of sorrow and sin to the heavenly land of Sabbath rest.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

1. Hebrews Read-through
2. Hebrews Structure; Introduce Situation, Message, Purpose
3. The Function of the OT in Hebrews; The Power of Story
4. CH. 1:1-4
5. CH. 1:5-2:4
6. CH. 2:5-18 (two classes)
7. CH. 3:1-6; Introduce Psalm 95/Exodus 17/Numbers 20
8. CH. 3:7-4:13 (two classes)
9. CH. 4:14-5:10 (two classes)
10. CH. 5:11-6:20
11. CH. 7
12. CH. 8:1-9:10; Platonism?; The Most Holy Place in the Age to Come (two classes)
13. CH. 9:11-28
14. CH. 10:1-18
15. CH. 10:19-39
16. CH. 11:1-12:3 (two classes)
17. CH. 12:3-17
18. CH. 12:18-29
19. CH. 13 (two classes)

#1 HEBREWS READ-THROUGH

CH. 1:1-2:18 (GOD HAS SPOKEN IN AN ETERNAL, INCARNATE, NOW EXALTED SON)

CH. 3:1-4:13 (ENDURE TO OBTAIN SABBATH REST)

CH. 4:14-10:39 (JESUS' BETTER PRIESTHOOD FORTIFIES US TO ENDURE)

CH. 11:1-12:29 (LOOKING TO PROMISES AND REMAINING FAITHFUL)

CH. 13 (INSTRUCTIONS FOR A LIFE OF GRATITUDE AND GODLY FEAR)

#2a HEBREWS STRUCTURE (working from McClister; Cockerill)

I. 1:1-2:18 GOD HAS SPOKEN IN AN ETERNAL, INCARNATE, NOW EXALTED SON

- A. 1:1-2:4 _____
- B. 2:5-18 _____

II. 3:1-4:13 ENDURING TO OBTAIN SABBATH REST

- A. 3:1-6 _____
- B. 3:7-4:13 _____
 - 1. 3:7-19 _____
 - 2. 4:1-13 _____

III. 4:14-10:39 JESUS' BETTER PRIESTHOOD FORTIFIES US TO ENDURE

- A. 4:14-5:10 _____
- B. 5:11-6:20 _____
- C. 7:1-28 _____
- D. 8:1-10:18 _____
- E. 10:19-10:39 _____

IV. 11:1-12:29 LOOKING TO PROMISES AND REMAINING FAITHFUL

- A. 11:1-40 _____
- B. 12:1-13 _____
- C. 12:14-29 _____

V. 13:1-25 INSTRUCTIONS FOR A LIFE OF GRATITUDE AND GODLY FEAR

- A. 13:1-6 _____
- B. 13:7-19 _____
- C. 13:20-25 _____

(PART B ON THE NEXT PAGE)

#2b HEBREWS SITUATION, MESSAGE, PURPOSE

AUTHOR. Despite nearly two millennia of wondering, we simply do not know who wrote Hebrews. Some are dogmatic that it is Paul, but Hebrews 2:3-4 may cast doubt on this (*cf.* Gal. 1:12; Eph. 3:3). Other suggestions such as Luke, Silas, Apollos, Barnabas, etc. have been offered. Origen (AD 200s) leaned towards it sounding like Paul's thoughts, but not at all Paul's writing, before concluding, "But who wrote the epistle, in truth, God knows."

AUDIENCE. The title "To the Hebrews" has stuck around since the end of the second century. Most suggest that, because of the book is heavy in Old Testament references and in a Jewish worldview, the audience was Jewish (though, likely Hellenistic Jews since it is written in Greek). Personally, while I understand the thinking — appealing to Scripture in the way Hebrews does may truly appeal more to Jews than to Gentiles — this explanation troubles me since the expectation has always been that both Jews and Gentiles would be steeped in the Scriptures of Israel (understanding that most Jews would have a head-start). The Gospels of Mark and Luke and the letters to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Revelation are all thought to be written to predominantly Gentile audiences, and yet they are all **rich** with echoes, allusions, and quotations of the Scriptures of Israel. Hebrews may be written to a mostly Jewish audience (see 1:1), but the mere presence of many Old Testament allusions and quotations is not at all a good reason to support this conclusion. It may be possible, however, that exploring *in what way* these allusions and quotations are used could lead to such a conclusion.

As you read the letter, what all is apparent about the situation of those being written to? What's the good? The bad? If possible, construct a narrative and, where possible, relate their situation to ours. Write down the chapters-verses your conclusions are based on so we can follow you.

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Thinking "big picture" — what are the key messages and themes in Hebrews? Explain how each of these key messages addresses their situation and can have significance for us today.

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NOTE ON INTERPRETATION. I may be wrong, but at the moment I agree with David McClister (among some others) that Hebrews is likely **not** written primarily to stop these Christians from wholesale rejecting Jesus *for* Judaism or the old sacrificial system. I currently don't see any evidence for this.

#3 IN THE WILDERNESS: THE FUNCTION OF THE OT IN HEBREWS AND THE POWER OF STORY

THE TYPES OF OT REFERENCES

- Full Quotation
 - *One-offs* (e.g. 10:37-38; 13:6, etc.)
 - *String of quotations* (e.g. 1:5-13; 2:12-13)
 - *Expositions of varying lengths* (e.g. Ps. 95 in ch. 3-4; Jer. 31 in ch. 8, etc.)
- Allusions and Echoes
 - *To stories without a full quotation* (e.g. Israel's failure at Kadesh Barnea in ch. 3-4; Melchizedek and Abraham in ch. 7)
 - *A couple words or a phrase briefly allude to/echo an OT text* (e.g. Deut. 29:18 in 12:15)

Authors can make a point without OT citations, but their quotation insinuates that their point is *emphatic* (credit: McClister). Note that it is often quite helpful to understand the context of the quotation, allusion, or echo.

THE FUNCTION OF OT QUOTATIONS, ALLUSIONS, ECHOES IN HEBREWS

- To compare Jesus with others — usually establishing his superiority and the superiority of the blessings he offers (one exception: Melchizedek).
 - Angels (ch. 1)
 - Moses (ch. 3a)
 - Joshua (ch. 4b)
 - Former priests, covenant, tabernacle, sacrifices (ch. 4-10)
- To use past believers/unbelievers to both warn and encourage/inspire (you are part of the same body)

Note that quotations and allusions are commonly *to the wilderness situation or to situations and people outside the promised land*. He never references Solomon or the temple but rather Moses and the tabernacle. Even in chapter 11, most everything is outside the land of promise. This drives home the implicit picture that we too are wandering through the wilderness and led not by Moses or Aaron, but by Jesus, on our way to the promised heavenly land of rest. (We mustn't look with a longing eye back to Egypt lest we fall in the wilderness by the same sort of disobedience!)

WHY ENCOURAGE AND WARN IN THIS "MEATY" WAY?

The Hebrew writer warns his audience of the danger of unbelief, hard-heartedness, immaturity, fruitlessness, weights, sins, sexual immorality, the love of money, etc. Yet, these exhortations are rather short while his "complex" argumentation from OT Scriptures is extensive. *Why doesn't he spend more time talking about greed and sexual immorality? Why not talk about the psychology behind burn out? Why not get right to the point? "You need to be more steadfast and faithful." Why not just get right to the application and the life change? (We could also ask why all the epistles — except James — are similar to Hebrews in this respect, but this is beyond our scope.)*

Consider the challenges the readers appear to be facing: discipline from God, persecution, exclusion, shame, loss, and the resulting discouragement. He warns them of the danger of hard-heartedness and unbelief. They may be tempted by various sins — the love of money and sexual immorality. They are immature and not bearing the fruit they once did (ch. 5-6; 10). In my

opinion, if they are tempted to go back to the synagogue/temple at all, this appears to not be a major concern. He appears to warn them of the risk of falling away from the living God even by the standards of Judaism pre-Jesus.

In short, we could say they are dealing with challenges and dangers that all believers in all times must deal with (see ch. 3-4, etc.), but they appear to not currently be handling these challenges as well as they had in the past. *Why aren't they handling these pressures, challenges, and dangers well?* More can and should be said, but, based on **chapters 5:11-6:12**, we could say part of the problem is that they are immature and malnourished. They are facing adult-level challenges — persecution and temptations to sin — and in need of solid food for the challenge, but they are unable to do anything but drink milk. The writer is offering solid food — explaining Psalm 8, 95, and 110 and exploring the similarity of Christ's priesthood to Melchizedek's priesthood in order to address their needs — but it is hard to explain to because they are “dull of hearing,” “unskilled in the word of righteousness,” and in need of “basic principles” from the oracles of God (milk). In hindsight, we could say they have a hard time actually grasping the New Testament because they are unskilled in the Old Testament.

Here we find a perennial problem. Spiritual children who are in deep trouble, danger, affliction, anxiety, and temptation often want more milk that will temporarily soothe their hunger — keep rehashing elementary basics like repentance, baptism, eternal judgment, etc. Milk is essential, but it doesn't give children the nutrients one needs to grow up and handle adult-level dangers.

Today, many desire Christ-like application and transformation without the OT story and information needed for the transformation. (To be clear, his audience wasn't desiring “NT teaching” as opposed to “OT teaching” — they did not have a “New Testament.”) We must remember that Christ's church is built on the foundation of the apostles **and** the prophets (*cf.* Eph. 2:20). If the writer of Hebrews — or any other NT writer, teacher, or preacher — aims to know or teach Jesus and to experience Christian transformation without the prophets (or the OT in general), they would be building a house on an incomplete foundation. The New Testament is literally reflects what has happened with Jesus and the church in light of the Old Testament: the old promises are being fulfilled and the old story has finally reached its climax. The writer of Hebrews doesn't get right to the application but instead works through the old because they need the solid food offered by an ancient perspective. They need to see they are part of the same assembly as those of old (e.g., 11:40) on the way to the same rest and facing the same dangers. They need to appreciate how Jesus has equipped them to face those dangers, but this appreciation

Judaism versus Christianity? Sometimes we may paint the struggle of the readers of Hebrews as “Judaism versus Christianity,” but they wouldn't have talked like this as if they were two completely separate religions — at least not in the way we may today (see Matthew 5, Luke 1-2, etc). Jewish Christians regularly went to the synagogue and the temple and even circumcised and made vows in accordance with the Law with no *inherit* harm to their faith — see Acts. This is not at all to say there were no dangers or pressures from the Jewish community — in John 9 and 12 there was the danger of confessing Jesus and being put out of the synagogue (*cf.* Heb. 13:10-14). Regardless, Christ did not come to overthrow what came before or to establish a “new religion” — but to bring the old it to its *telos*, end, or goal. In a sense, “Christianity” is everything Judaism always aimed to be. Obviously, because Christ brings what is old to its goal, some old practices must be left behind, but that would not have caused them to view their situation as a choice between two separate religions.

of their situation cannot be seen clearly apart from seeing the foreshadowing, the promises, the parallels, and the insufficiencies (of the priests and people) in the Old Testament.

In sum, we must recognize that if something seems difficult to us, we are either choking on milk or struggling to chew solid food that is essential for our growth to a maturity that can handle adult-level challenges that will certainly come. If a passage, concept, or book seems strange or difficult to us (or if we can only “understand it” within a more modern framework) it likely doesn’t fit within a worldview or interpretive lens that has just been revealed to be lacking. We also need to accept that solid food isn’t quickly and immediately digested — it’s not like milk. It doesn’t fill your hunger as quickly, it doesn’t seem as immediately relevant. But, once you chew on it and swallow it, and digest it, we will find it to be more hearty, delicious, and nutritious than milk.

THE POWER OF STORY IN HEBREWS

(The following observations are inspired in part by Jeff Wilson)

One thing to notice throughout Hebrews is the constant appeal to stories. The whole letter is set within the larger biblical story (“*Long ago... but in these last days...*”). The warning in chapter 2 to not neglect our salvation is founded by a crafted retelling of the incarnation and glorification of Jesus by use of Psalm 8. The encouragement in chapter 3 to hold fast to our confidence and hope is bolstered by use of Psalm 95 and the story of the failure of Israel in the wilderness. The greatness of Jesus and our ability to lean on him is demonstrated through the story of Abraham and Melchizedek. Time would fail us to discuss tell of the many other stories utilized in Hebrews (e.g., ch. 11). *Why is story such a significant part of Hebrews (and of the whole Bible)?*

Singular statements — commands, warnings, rebukes, etc. — are powerful, but usually only within a narrative context. “*Let us hold fast our confession*” (4:14) is a powerful command precisely because of the narrative setting on either side of it — (1) previous generations failed to hold fast in the wilderness and (2) Jesus has suffered and become a sympathetic and eternal high priest. *Stories often show us the “why” and give us motivation to obey.*

This is because **stories shape our moral reasoning by giving us examples.** The encouragement to not be sluggish (6:12) is informed by the example provided by “*those who through faith and patience inherit the promises*” (6:12) like “*Abraham*” (6:13).

This is also because **stories shape our vision of reality and give us a sense of place in the larger story of reality.** The encouragement to endure in 11:36 is powerful when set within the context of the story of their faith (“*recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings*”) and within the story of reality (“*Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay*”). The warning to not refuse God who speaks but to worship God with reverence and awe is made powerful when their location is set alongside Israel’s location: you have come not to Mount Sinai but to Mount Zion. None of this has power without understanding the Bible story. Hebrews gives us a strong sense of belonging and meaning: we are not orphans blazing a new trail, others have gone before us as pioneers (Israel failing, 4:11; Jesus succeeding, 2:10).

Jeff Wilson sums up the message well. “We need more than just the moral quick-fix singular statements and propositional confrontation — what we also desperately need is the slow-cook spiritual formation through story-as-torah that leads to wisdom and maturity which becomes visible in moral courage, enduring hope, and faithful steadfastness.”

#4 HEBREWS 1:1-4

Schreiner (pg. 52) sees a chiasm in these four verses:

- A He has spoken to us by His Son
 - B God has appointed him the heir of all things
 - C He made the universe through Him
 - D The Son is the radiance of God's glory
 - D¹ He is the exact expression of His nature
 - C¹ Sustaining all things by His powerful word
 - B¹ After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high
- A¹ He became higher in rank than the angels, just as the name He inherited is superior to theirs

1. With each of the following statements, meditate on both its meaning and significance and jot down your thoughts. *Translation: ESV*

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...

whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom he also created the world.

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

2. Looking ahead, *if* the large, primary challenge of the original hearers of Hebrews was not necessarily a return to the old sacrificial system of Judaism, etc., why might the writer of Hebrews emphasize that Jesus is superior to what came before (as he does t/o the letter)?

#5 HEBREWS 1:5-2:4

This chart from McClister (p. 88) demonstrates the relationship between vs. 2-4 and vs. 5-13.

<i>Trait of the Son:</i>	<i>Demonstrated by:</i>
God appointed him heir of all things (v 2)	v 5: Psa 2:7 and 2 Sam 7:14 (son = heir)
God made the worlds through him (v 2)	v 10: Psa 102:25
He is the brightness of God's glory (v 3)	v 8: Psa 45:6 (his throne)
He is the image of God's essence (v 3)	v 9: Psa 45:7 (God's righteousness) vv 11-12: Psa 102:26f (his eternal nature)
He holds up all things by the word of his power (v 3)	v 12: Psa 102:26 (he has power over the heavens)
He sat down at God's right hand (v 3)	v 13: Psa 110:1
He has inherited a better name than the angels (v 4)	v 5: Psa 2:7 and 2 Sam 7:14 (Son) v 6: Psa 97:7 (angels worship him) v 9: Psa 45:7 (he is above his companions)

1. (1:4-14) Angels are impressive and important. Yet, the writer cites Psalm 2:7 (5), 2 Samuel 7:14 (5), Psalm 97:7 (6; or Deut. 32:43), Psalm 104:4 (7), Psalm 45:6-7 (8-9), Psalm 102:25-27 (10-12), and Psalm 110:1 (13) to emphasize the Son's superiority over angels. *What all stands out to you as significant here?* (Note: read citations in their original contexts — it is almost always rewarding)

2. (1:4-14) Outside of the explanation offered in 2:1-4, can you think of any possible explanations for why the writer is so emphatic that the Son is superior to angels?

3. (2:1-4) Note: however we are to explain it, the Law was delivered by angels (cf. Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19). Why all is it so important that we pay close attention and not drift from what we have heard? Why all might we drift and not pay close attention? How can that be helped?

#6 HEBREWS 2:5-18

1. (2:5-9) Consider Genesis 1:26-28 and Psalm 8 in their original contexts — *what is the message of these texts? What all is the meaning of Psalm 8:4-6 in the context of Hebrews 2:5-9 and what all do you learn as you reflect on this paragraph?*

2. (2:10) Look at different translations of verse 10 to get a sense of what is being stated here. *What is the meaning of “glory” and “salvation” in this context? What is the meaning of “founder” (ESV) or “pioneer” (NIV; NET; also “trailblazer”) here? There’s a lot here — anything else stand out?*

3. (2:10-18) It is confusing to many why the Son would become human, suffer, die, and be raised. *As you read this text, contemplate and answer why all is it indeed necessary that the pioneer of our salvation is incarnated, suffers, and dies? (there’s more than one answer in the text) Explain the significance of what you see.*

#7 HEBREWS 3:1-6; Intro to Wilderness Generation

1. (2:18-3:6) Are you tempted, tested (2:18)? Losing confidence, struggling to zealously boast in our hope (3:6)? How all does the writer encourage us here in light of these dangers? (comparing Jesus and Moses to past generations of priests can be helpful here too — i.e., 1 Samuel 2)

2. (Preparing for 3:7ff) Get familiar with the demeanor of the Israelites who left Egypt and were led by Moses in the wilderness by considering Exodus 17:1-3, 7; Numbers 14:1-4, 20-23; 20:2-5. Characterize the heart and attitude of the people from these instances.

#8 HEBREWS 3:7-4:13

1. Read Psalm 95. *What is the message of this Psalm as a whole?*

2. (3:7-4:2) *What is the author trying to impress on his readers? What stands out to you as significant or instructive from his warning here?*

3. (4:1-11) *Compare this section with Joshua 23:14-16. How ought we today think of God's rest in the beginning? How ought we to think of Israel's story?*

4. (4:1-11) *What is the author's point here?*

5. (4:11-13) *Explain the meaning and significance of this paragraph in the context.*

#9 HEBREWS 4:14-5:10

1. Here we begin a new section that runs roughly from 4:14 to 10:39. *Below, compare 4:14-16 and 10:19-23 and note their similarities — they “bookend” this section. Based on this comparison, briefly sum up the message and intended impact of this section.*

2. This section assumes we understand our need for a priest at all. This can be challenging in any generation, and maybe more so today since hierarchy tends to carry strong negative connotations. *Consider Leviticus 10:1-3, Numbers 16:1-7, and Hebrews 5:1 (and any other passages that come to mind) and briefly explain why we need a high priest — let alone priests (even today — 1 Pet 2:9; Rev. 20:4-6).*

3. (4:14-5:2) *What all may the author mean by “our confession?” What does it look like to “hold fast our confession?” Why should we, according to the author, hold fast our confession?*

4. (5:1-10) *Though the writer’s thoughts here will be fleshed out more in ch. 7, how all do his words here encourage us to “hold fast our confession” and “draw near to the throne” for help?*

#10 HEBREWS 5:11-6:20

1. (5:11-6:3) The author needs to demonstrate the efficacy of Jesus' priesthood so his hearers can both worship Jesus and properly seek help from him to remain steadfast, yet he finds it hard to explain to these hearers. *Why? Where are they in contrast to where they should be?*

2. (5:11-6:3) *In light of this (above), what must be done? What all should this look like?*

3. (6:3-12) *Why all is it so vital to press on to maturity?*

4. (6:13-20) *How all did God encourage Abraham (and now us) to not be sluggish but to hold fast to our hope in God and his promises?*

#11 HEBREWS 7

1. The writer has said Jesus has become “a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (cf. Gen. 14:17-20). This promise originates from Psalm 110. Read and briefly summarize the message of Psalm 110.

2. (7:1-10) Since Jesus has become a high priest after the order of Melchizedek, the writer demonstrates how great Melchizedek is so he can show how he resembles the Son of God and thus demonstrates Jesus’ greatness. What all is so great about Melchizedek? (Note: the Hebrew writer does *not* use Melchizedek to demonstrate Jesus’ greatness because his hearers are well acquainted with the OT; in fact he has said they are unskilled in it — see 5:11-14)

3. (7:11-19) According to the author, why all is there a need for a change in the priesthood and law?

4. (7:20-28) Why all is it so great, so fitting, that we have Jesus as our high priest? How does this encourage us to endure and not grow weary or hard-hearted?

#12 HEBREWS 8:1-9:10

1. (8:1-5) *What here is so different between Jesus and priests who serve according to the law?*

2. (8:6-13) *What all is so great about the better covenant that Jesus mediates?*

3. (9:1-10) The author is laying groundwork for the rest of chapter 9 and 10. *What is his point here?*

Is the Hebrew Writer Teaching Platonism?

Platonism teaches “*that physical objects are impermanent representations of unchanging Ideas, and that the Ideas alone give true knowledge as they are known by the mind,*” ([dictionary.com](https://www.dictionary.com)). Platonism de-emphasizes the goodness of seen creation by insisting that it is only a lowly material world which carries symbolic representations of eternal, substantive, rationally understood Ideas. Most have never read Plato and certainly wouldn’t directly accept all his ideas, but his philosophy has long impacted how the West imagines reality to be. From early days, Christians have continually sounded the alarm that Platonism (and the related Gnosticism) can dangerously impact how we perceive and live in reality. Specifically, this philosophy has led to highly Platonized (or, by some definitions, “spiritualized”) interpretations of the Bible: Bible stories are often stand-ins for moral teachings, not also a progression of redemptive history; God’s Kingdom is simply when Jesus is king over a person’s soul, not also over all creation; resurrection is reworked as an escape from the body, not the redemption of it; the heavens are only an ethereal place we will fly away to when Jesus comes — unrelated to this creation and not the kingdom Jesus will bring here (with those who are asleep) to restore all things. Because of this, Christians often struggle to have a healthy view of creation — feeling unspiritual for enjoying life, pleasure, and work in the world. Others often struggle to coherently explain *why* God says we should enjoy pleasure and work in the world.

Throughout the years, some biblical interpreters have accused the writer of Hebrews of being influenced by Platonism. They say his teaching that *the tabernacle on earth is a shadow and copy of heavenly things* is one example. But this is not a careful read of Hebrews. The author does not teach that the tabernacle is a representation of an eternal, unchanging Idea; rather, the tabernacle is a copy of an actual heavenly place (which is not static). He believes there is a heavenly tabernacle outside of our time and space reality that, because of Jesus, we *actually* draw near to. It is not a spiritual idea to be merely rationally appreciated.

This fits well into the larger Scriptural narrative of God’s dwelling place. In the beginning, God dwelled perceptibly in our world in Eden — the garden-mountain of God. God instructed Adam and Eve to fill the earth and subdue it (filling the earth with God’s image and Edenic presence). But Adam and Eve brought sin and defilement into this sanctuary and were cast from it (*cf.* parallel in Ezek. 28:11-19). The tabernacle in the midst of Israel’s camp copied this heavenly place and foreshadowed the day when God’s would dwell (tabernacle) with his people again. But this tabernacle was made by human hands. When Jesus *tabernacled* among us, he said his *body* was a temple (John 1:14; 2:19-22). After Jesus was glorified, God’s tabernacle-filling presence filled Jesus’ followers through the Holy Spirit. Today, the Spirit-filled church is filling the earth with living temples. Scripture also demonstrates that when we “fall asleep” and wait for resurrection to indestructible heavenly bodies, we go — apart from the body — to be at home with the Lord in the heavenly tabernacle (*cf.* 2 Cor. 5:1-10; Rev. 7, 14-15, 20). But, that’s not the end of the story: in the fullness of time, the heavenly city, tabernacle and throne, won’t stay in heaven but rather it will come *down out of heaven* into a new heavens and earth. Heaven and earth will be united in Jesus (Eph. 1:10). Most relevant to Hebrews (though not *directly* addressed): in Revelation 21-22 the New Jerusalem is a cube, just like the Most Holy Place. All seen creation is filled by God’s Most Holy Place (though, in the end, there is no actual temple outside of God and the Lamb).

The author of Hebrews does *not* believe that what is seen is a mere representation of eternal Ideas rationally known; rather, he says we *now* share in the Holy Spirit and taste the very powers that will define the age and world to come. Thus, as we endure afflictions, we remember what we see is transient; but since we have experienced in this world the heavenly power and presence of the age to come, we continue looking to the unseen and eternal God who will complete the work he started and fulfill our hope beyond all understanding or imagination.

#13 HEBREWS 9:11-28

1. (9:11-14) *How is Jesus' priesthood/sacrifice superior to the previous sacrificial system here?*

2. (9:15-23) *Why was Jesus death necessary? Why was death needed at all in the first covenant?* (See note on the following page regarding covenants)

3. (9:23-28) *What all has Jesus' sacrifice and priesthood allowed him to accomplish?*

HEBREWS 9:15-23 (NASB)

¹⁵ For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the violations that were *committed* under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. ¹⁶ For where there is a covenant, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. ¹⁷ For a covenant is valid *only* when *people are* dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives. ¹⁸ Therefore even the first *covenant* was not inaugurated without blood. ¹⁹ For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, ²⁰ saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you." ²¹ And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood. ²² And almost all things are cleansed with blood, according to the Law, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. ²³ Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these things, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

NOTE ON COVENANTS FROM 9:15-23

Vv. 16-23 explains v. 15: why Jesus' death was needed to redeem people from transgressions committed in the first covenant. Here's the answer in short: the first covenant was ratified by blood (a strong warning which prefigured the deaths of those who might break covenant); thus, Jesus has born the deaths of those who broke the covenant so God's covenant with people can remain intact and find expression in a new, unbroken covenant.

In the ancient world, a strong nation might come to a weaker one and insist that they make a treaty or covenant. Both sides would have stipulations: the greater party may offer protection, while the weaker party might pay tribute. We inaugurate covenants with vows, signatures, and rings; they founded covenants with vows and blood rituals — animals were slaughtered to prefigure the death of anyone who might break the covenant (*cf.* Gen. 15:10; Jer. 34:18-19; see also: treaty of Ashurnirari V and Mati'ilu). If, for example, the weaker party broke covenant, the consequence of death was carried out (likely on the king — *cf.* Ezek. 17:13-15) in order for the covenant to remain intact.

Vv. 16-23 is difficult to interpret because *diatheke* can be translated as either *covenant* or *will*. Except for the NASB, major translations have decided to translate *diatheke* as *covenant* everywhere except verses 16-17 (translated as *will*). However, I think *covenant* is preferred here.

Author Scott Hahn summarizes 16-17 like this: "A broken covenant demands the death of the covenant maker and is not enforced while the covenant maker remains alive" ("A Broken Covenant and the Curse of Death: A Study of Hebrews 9:15-22", 435). The covenant "is not *in force* until it is *enforced*." (Hahn, 434) He demonstrates the relationship between 16-17 and 18-22 as follows: "A broken covenant requires the death of the covenant maker (vv. 16-17); hence, the first covenant prefigured the death of the covenant maker by extensive self-maledictory blood rituals (vv. 18-21). In fact, nearly everything about the first covenant was covered in blood, prefiguring the necessity of death for the forgiveness of transgressions of the covenant." (Hahn, 435)

On the basis of Hahn's work, I'll offer an interpretive paraphrase of vs. 15-18. ¹⁵ *This means Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant. Now those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance: because Jesus' death redeems them from transgressions committed under the first covenant.* ¹⁶ *Since they did indeed have a covenant with God, the deaths of covenant makers-and-breakers must be born (cf. 9:28; Isa. 53).* ¹⁷ *A transgressed covenant is only confirmed to still be intact when the dead bodies of covenant-makers-and breakers are produced — since the covenant is clearly not in force if the covenant-makers-and-breakers are still alive.* ¹⁸ *This is the case with the first covenant, for, as we know, not even it was inaugurated without [self-maledictory] blood rituals."*

We as the church have a covenant with God by Jesus' blood. Covenants are inaugurated by blood to set people apart for the covenant and to prefigure the deaths of covenant breakers. If a covenant is broken, the covenant maker must die for the covenant to remain intact; in the Old Covenant, animal sacrifices were accepted to cleanse and carry the death required by law-breakers. Jesus' death is powerful in part because his death once for all time and has efficacy in many ways. As far as I understand Hebrews, his death (1) has cleansed the heavenly tabernacle (9:23-24), (2) redeemed us from our past transgressions to set us apart for a new covenant with God (9:14), (3) prefigured the deaths of any who might rebel against the covenant (Heb. 10:29), and (4) hereafter cleanses us in the case of unintentional transgressions (see 1 John 1:7-2:2).

#14 HEBREWS 10:1-18

1. (9:27-28; 10:12-13) *Where are we in redemptive history?* (cf. 1 Cor. 15:23-28)

2. (10:1-4) *What all is seen here to be deficient with the law? Also: what value did the law have?*

The author explains here why Jesus' obedience and sacrifice is so necessary by means of Psalm 40 — a Psalm of David (he uses the LXX mostly, but the second line of verse 5 is his own verbiage as he reflects on Christ). Because God promised David his son would be the eternal king, it is fair game to interpret David's life and words from a Christological perspective — mapping Jesus' life and words onto David's since the ancestor foreshadows the son. Scripture can be *carefully* read in a new light that may even transcend its historical-grammatical meaning because it has a Divine author who intended to convey meaning that we would be able to perceive after the empty tomb (as the Hebrew writer has already done with Psalm 8 in ch. 2).

3. (10:5-10) *The above note understood, with Psalm 40:6-8 now put on the lips of Jesus at his incarnation — coming into the world — why was Jesus' offering of his body so necessary?*

4. (10:11-18) *What all is so tremendous about Jesus' sacrifice, priesthood, and the covenant he mediates in contrast with what came before?*

#15 HEBREWS 10:19-39

1. (10:19-25) Understanding all that has come before, *what all should we do now and why?*

2. (10:26-31) *How all does the author here demonstrate the absolute necessity of drawing near, holding fast, and stirring one another up?* (cf. Numbers 15:27-31; Deuteronomy 29:18-21)

3. (10:32-39) *How all does the author encourage his hearers here to be faithful?* (note: he is also preparing for and transitioning to the encouragement to faith/endurance in chapters 11-12)

#16 HEBREWS 11:1-12:3

Cockerill helpfully introduces ch. 11-12. Hebrews functions “like a grand mural, beginning with creation (11:3) and concluding with consummation at the final judgment (12:27).” “He accomplishes several objectives in this part of the story (ch. 11). First, the lives of the ancient faithful clarify the nature of the faith that the pastor would have his hearers emulate. Second, the perseverance of those who have gone before serves as motivation for perseverance in the present. Third, the faithful of old provide an alternate society that counters the baleful influence of the unbelieving world in which the hearers live.” Cockerill also offers a chiasmic diagram of Hebrews 3:1-12:3 (I have altered his formatting):

- (A¹) Keep Your Eyes on Jesus, Seated at God’s Right Hand (12:1-3)
- (B¹) Join the Company of the Faithful of Old (11:1-40)
- (C¹) Pursue the Blessing Promised the Faithful (10:32-39)
- (D¹) You Are More Accountable Because of This High Priest (10:26-31)
- (E¹) Avail Yourselves of This Great Priest (10:19-25)
- (F) *Christ’s All-Sufficient High Priesthood* (5:1-10:18)
- (E) Embrace This Great High Priest (4:14-16)
- (D) You Are Accountable before the Word of God (4:12-13)
- (C) Pursue the Blessing Lost by the Faithless Generation (4:1-11)
- (B) Avoid the Company of the Faithless Generation (3:7-19)
- (A) Consider Jesus, a Son over the House of God (3:1-6) (Cockerill, 515)

In a sermon at Alston Road in 2019, Nathan Quinn demonstrated **the results of faith** in Hebrews 11. I have amended and added to his wording, but his basic framework will organize our study.

1. Faith is the reality, substance, sign, proof, and evidence of things hoped for and not seen.

(The unseen is made to be visible by faith; faith is evidence of that which is not yet evident; by faith, what has not yet appeared is made substance. This is based on the KJV, CSB, NLT, and BBE translations — describing faith in *objective* terms. This is contrary to translations which describe faith in *subjective* terms: assurance, conviction, confidence) ***As you read chapter 11, how all do you see this point demonstrated? How all does this encourage us?***

2. By faith, people act (in part, because they know God rewards). ***As you read chapter 11, how all do you see this point demonstrated? How all does this encourage us?***

(#16 HEBREWS 11:1-12:3)

3. Faith brings both approval and disapproval (in relationships with God and others). *As you read chapter 11, how all do you see this point demonstrated? How all does this encourage us?*

4. Faith ultimately conquers death (penultimately, works great victories and/or experiences unspeakable horrors). *As you read chapter 11, how all do you see this point demonstrated? How all does this encourage us?*

5. In Hebrews 12:1-3, we see in Jesus — the founder and perfecter of faith — similar results:

1. *For the joy set before him* (he saw the unseen)
2. *He endured the cross* (faith in action)
3. *He despised the shame of the cross* (disapproval by world)
4. *He is seated at the right hand of God* (approval by God, conquered death)

Considering that Jesus is the perfecter and founder of faith who has results similar to those in chapter 11, read back over chapter 11 and note where you see types and shadows of Jesus. Note that in some places stories may be carefully worded to demonstrate them as shadows of Jesus' faith.

6. Looking back over 11:1-12:3, what all is the writer of Hebrews accomplishing here? What else has stood out to you as significant and/or instructive in this section?

#17 HEBREWS 12:1-17

1. (12:1-11) *How all does the writer encourage his hearers to not grow weary here? Why and/or how all do you find this to be significant for you and for this church?*

2. (12:12-17) **In advance of his final injunctions in that conclude the letter (in chapter 13), the writer fires off numerous and varied impassioned pleas to his hearers — begging them to stay the course to the end. In so doing, he directly references a couple OT scriptures and may also echo a number of others (see below). *What all strikes you from the writer's injunctions here as impactful and/or instructive?***

POSSIBLE OT ALLUSIONS IN 12:12-17

- *Drooping hands, weak knees* — Isaiah 35:3-4
- *Straight paths* — Proverbs 3:6; 4:25-27; Jeremiah 31:9
- *Lame healed* — Isaiah 35:6; Jeremiah 31:9; Micah 4:6-7
- *Peace and holiness* — Psalm 34:14-15; topic also addressed in Isaiah 2:4; Proverbs 16:7
- *Root of bitterness defiling* — Deuteronomy 29:18ff; cf. what happens in Numbers 14:36-45
- *Esau selling birthright* — Genesis 25:29-35

#18 HEBREWS 12:18-29

1. (12:18-24) The writer has just encouraged his hearers to strengthen up and strive for peace and holiness — offering Esau as a negative example for why they must not [impulsively] trade their inheritance for the single pitiful meal sin offers. *How else does he continue to encourage them to enact this alertness, holiness, and proper conduct in verses 18-24? Pay careful attention — how all does the author contrast these two mountains? How all does this serve to motivate them to the conduct he calls them to?*

2. (12:25-29) Here, the writer weaves together numerous OT allusions (like Haggai 2, Deuteronomy 4:24, Isaiah 33:14, and more). *How all does he encourage them to not refuse Jesus who warns them from heaven? How all do his encouragements and warnings strike and impact you?*

#19 HEBREWS 13

As we conclude the letter, take care to not divorce these instructions from the writer's extensive theology of Jesus (or, Christology). These are not random applications to make this all feel relevant. As you perceive connections or a progression from what came before, note that.

1. (13:1-6) *What all strikes you as interesting, significant, and/or impactful from the instructions here? (Also, how would the rest of this letter help them obey these instructions)?*

2. (13:7-14) *Outside Israel's camp was all manner of sin and sickness, defilement and death. This is where people buried their excrement (Deut. 23:12-14), where bodies of animals were burned up (Lev. 16:27, etc.), and where the unclean went to wash and even to stay in some cases (Lev. 13:46; 14:8). How all does the writer use this image and what all is its significance in this section? Don't forget to relate this to verses 7-10.* (see note on the following page)

3. (13:15-19) *The writer concludes with a number of injunctions — what all strikes you here as significant and/or impacting?*

4. (13:20-21) *The writer concludes with a beautiful benediction (prayer for God's blessing). What impacts you about this prayer?*

Note on Shame from 13:7-14

It appears as if one of the challenges these Christians faced was the social ostracism that came from being Christians — potentially the shame of being outside the Jewish community and fellowship. Eating together connotes association and acceptance. They didn't share in the same sacrificial meals — in fact they shared in a different sacrificial meal altogether — and thus they were outsiders.

When Jesus died outside the city, he died as an unclean sinner does — or as an animal does who is taking away the uncleanness of the worshipper. And this is how the Jews viewed Jesus and his followers: Jesus was crucified as a criminal and all his followers are transgressors too. But, of course, we know Jesus was bearing our reproach, shame, and sin to sanctify us for the work and the presence of God in the city to come.

Here, we are told to embrace the shame, the reproach of Christ (Ps. 69:9) by going to him outside the camp. *Outside* the fellowship of unbelievers we actually find we are *in* the fellowship of Jesus and in the city of God to come. In fact, those who appear to be “in” (the camp) now — including those who serve the altar in Jerusalem — actually have no right to eat at the altar from which we eat the Lord's Supper.

So, it appears the encouragement of the writer here is this: don't for the sake of being on the in at their altar, their table, with their foods and community — don't for any of these forsake Jesus (who died outside the gate for you to carry away your reproach) or your leaders who spoke to you the word of God. Consider that the way of life of your past leaders has resulted in a glorious outcome (despite the clearly sharing in the reproach of Christ). The writer here appears to be doing something similar to what he did in chapter 11 summed up in 12:1-2: *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight... looking to Jesus... who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”* **As these Christians suffer as outsiders in their community, he is encouraging them to see they have a larger community** (who have similarly been rejected by those who are “in”).

In fact, he encourages them to not be led astray by any diverse or strange teachings. Jesus has always been the same and always will be (*by the way, who else can you say that about?!*). When new teachings come along that sway people, we ought to consider that if we follow them we may be going inside a camp and leaving Jesus (and our leaders) on the outside. But, in reality, Jesus (and those who spoke to us the word of God) are the ones inside the only camp and city and eating at the only altar that actually matters: the heavenly altar, tabernacle, and city of God that is to come.