

# An Isagogical Study Of Hebrews

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## **Who Wrote It?**

The Epistle to the Hebrews remains an anonymous letter to us. The original readers of Hebrews knew the one responsible for it. Various names have been suggested by the church. Among the possible authors the following names have the most backing: Barnabas, Luke, Silvanus, Philip, Aquila and Priscilla, Clement, Paul, and Apollos of Alexandria. Luther felt that the statement made in chapter 2, verse 3, would exclude any of the apostles as the author. There we read, "Which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him." All the apostles, including Paul, heard Jesus directly. They did not have the message confirmed to them by ones who actually listened to the Lord. They had heard themselves. Since the Greek is quite eloquent, Luther felt it was Apollos. Calvin thought the style was too dissimilar to Paul to be his work. We will remember that Paul claims himself as author of each of thirteen epistles ascribed to him. There is no such claim in Hebrews. Finally, we must confess that we have no absolute answer to authorship. We are certain of its canonicity. When God chooses not to reveal the author of a book of the Bible it ought not alarm or trouble us. Much has been written trying to prove one person or another as the writer. Let us simply say, "We don't know."

## **When Was It Written?**

This epistle deals extensively with the teaching that the Old Testament ceremonial system was no longer in force. The temple was the center of much of this ceremony. We know that it was destroyed when Jerusalem fell in 70 A.D. Since no mention is made of the temple destruction, it is assumed the book was penned prior to 70 A.D. If the temple no longer stood surely the author would have used its demise as a proof of the temporary nature of the ceremonial law. There is evidence that the letter was written later in the Apostolic Era. In 5:12 the readers are told that they have reached the stage when they ought to be teachers. These were not novices who received the epistle. There is mention of persecution. Many feel this is the persecution of Nero which peaked in 64 A.D. There is no reference to the Jewish civil wars which preceded the destruction of Jerusalem. They began in about 66 or 67 A.D. The writer may have said something about them if they had begun. When we take all these factors into consideration, we can make a general conclusion that the writing was done between 60 and 70 A.D. To be more specific, we could say about 64 or 65 A.D.

## **Where Was It Written?**

The epistle itself gives no indication to the place of writing. One location often felt to be the spot is Alexandria. This Egyptian city had been the site of the Septuagint translation. It had a large Jewish population. The Septuagint is used frequently in the quotes.

## **To Whom Was It Written?**

The recipients of this epistle were Jewish Christians. The writer had in mind a specific congregation. (5:11,12; 6:10,11; 13:19) Where this congregation is located is another of those uncertain matters. Cities which have been suggested include Jerusalem, Caesarea, Ephesus, Antioch, and Rome. Clement of Rome quoted from Hebrews as early as 95 A.D. in a letter to the Corinthians. In 13:24 we read, "they of Italy salute you." This could mean that those Italians living near the writer wished to convey their greetings to Rome. Or it could mean that the epistle originated in Rome and sent greetings to fellow Christians. It is doubtful that these people lived

in Jerusalem. There is mention made (6:10) of their help for the needy. The people at Jerusalem were so needy that other believers around the Mediterranean collected for them. Some feel that the recipients of Hebrews lived in the Lycus Valley because of the emphasis in the writing on the superiority of Christ to angels. There was a problem with angel worship in the area of Colosse (Col. 2:18). Many people seem to prefer Rome as the place to which the epistle was sent, but we have no definite word of Scripture on this point.

### **Why Was It Written?**

The writer wants to warn against falling away from true faith (6:4ff.; 10:26-31; 12:14-19). He reminds them of their need for spiritual maturity. The supremacy and divinity of Christ is stressed since these Jewish Christians were leaning toward a return to Old Testament ceremonies. Because the letter is written to Jewish people, there are many proof passages drawn from the Old Testament. The following are the passages quoted from the Old Testament: 3 from Genesis, 3 from Exodus, 5 from Deuteronomy, 1 from II Samuel, 16 from the Psalms, 2 from Proverbs, 2 from Isaiah, 3 from Jeremiah, 1 from Habakkuk, and 1 from Haggai.

### **What Is Its Value For Us?**

This is a canonical book and since all Scripture is profitable Hebrews has merit and power in every Word. There are, however, certain truths here which are gems of practicality and potency for our teaching, preaching, and counseling. For the skeptic Christ is displayed as True God and True Man. For ourselves the power and inspiration of God's Word are affirmed. Tribulation's inevitability and divine purpose are revealed and this information can be used with suffering people today. The delinquent member can be directed to passages which ought to aim him toward the pew where he belongs. Hebrews offers these and many other very practical segments for today's ministry.

The Epistle to the Hebrews contains 13 chapters, 303 verses, and approximately 6,913 words in English translations. Since God is not the author of confusion, various topical and logical divisions can be made of this material. In this study we offer a sixteen part split of Hebrews. Each section takes as its heading key words recorded in that division.

### **1:1-2:4**

#### **God Spoke By The Prophets**

The Jewish Christians who received this epistle had a problem. It seems they were subjected to pressures and temptations to return to Old Testament-ceremonies and even to reject Christ as the promised Messiah. To combat this problem the writer turns them to the Old Testament itself. "God spoke by the prophets." The 39 books comprising the Old Testament are verbally inspired. Men, the prophets, were the ones through whom God spoke. These Jewish Christians accepted the veracity of the claim that God spoke by the prophets. This statement ought to have jogged their memories.

Now they ought to turn their attention to Jesus Christ. His advent, life, and death prove Him to be the perfect fulfillment of what God spoke by the prophets. The ceremonies which pointed to Him were binding no longer. The Bible-believer of this New Testament era would want to give attention to the body, not the shadow. The remainder of chapter one, after the first verse, establishes the divinity and supremacy of the Son of God. "By whom also He made the worlds." He is the Creator. "The brightness of his glory and express image of his person." He is True God. "Let all the angels of God worship him." He is worthy of praise and worship and only God is deserving of that (Rev. 22:9). He is at God's right hand and His enemies are His footstool just as the Psalmist predicted (110:1).

Quite a few of the words of chapter one are written about angels. They hold a prominent place in the kingdom of God. They are God's ministering spirits. Angels are encamped around believers according to the Psalmist. They delivered Lot and family and closed the mouths of the lions for Daniel. The person who believed the Old Testament accepted angels and their importance. But Jesus is one whom the angels worship (verse 6).

He is better than the angels (verse 4). He is to be the object of attention directly for New Testament believers. They are not to try to look to Him through foreshadowing ceremonies.

The writer warns at the onset of chapter two neither to let these things slip nor to neglect so great a salvation. God bore record about Jesus by miracles. The things written about His miracles in the Scripture were written that people might believe that Jesus is the Christ. The apostles did many of the same works because God was confirming their message. God has spoken by the prophets. He has fulfilled their prophecies in Christ. He has confirmed Christ and His apostles with signs. Instead of slipping, they ought to give more earnest heed to the things they had heard. God had spoken to them about His Son through the prophets. He had confirmed that Son and His immediate followers with signs. How should they escape if they neglected so great a salvation? God spake by the prophets.

Before moving to the next section let's take note of something of importance for us in this first division. "God spake by the prophets." This is an obvious reference to the Old Testament. Of course, we are not bound to follow the temporary ceremonies of that era. And these events happened at least 400 years prior to the New Testament age. But God did speak by the prophets. We would do well to let Him continue to speak to His people through them. All Scripture is profitable. Could that be given more consideration in our ministries? Do we include an Old Testament reading in our regular Sunday services? How often do we preach on an Old Testament text? How many Old Testament books have we studied in Bible Class? God did speak by the prophets. The supremacy and need for Christ can be shown by God's setting the stage for Him, by His predictions about Him, by His guidance of history, and by the story of the origin of the universe and its inhabitants.

## **2:5-18**

### **Partaker Of Flesh And Blood**

These verses hold before us both the exaltation and the humiliation of our Savior. Again we hear that He is greater than angels. Everything and everyone is subject to Him. For Him and by Him are all things. He is the exalted God.

But He is depicted in another state here also. He is a little lower than the angels. He has humbled himself for the most noble cause. God wants His estranged creatures, fallen men, restored to His family. "Bringing sons unto glory" is the way the author of Hebrews puts it. To assemble God's family He must taste of and conquer death. Death is the power of the devil. To crush that power he must die. To die He must become incarnate. To shed blood He must have veins through which it flows. He must be a partaker of flesh and blood since the ones for whom He lives and dies are flesh and blood. He becomes a "brother." He does it not for angels, but for the human race.

Thus He works a reconciliation of God and sinners. Wayward sons and daughters are family. This wonderous adoption can only take place because Jesus became a partaker of flesh and blood. This fellow partaker of flesh and blood suffered and was tempted. He can help His brothers who are yet in the world subject to temptation and suffering. He won't give them more than they can resist and He will strengthen them to do all things. They can come to Him and receive help because He understands as one who had partaken of flesh and blood.

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? Certainly, we have our trials. There are trials when the Word seems at worst powerless, at best falling on deaf ears in our ministries. We have troubles. Entering the ministry does not grant immunity to pastor and family from sickness, strife, and depression. These vexations come with the territory for flesh and blood creatures. When the trials, temptations, and troubles come we have one who understands. We have one who can help. We have one who will help. It is the one who partook of flesh and blood. It is the one whose concern was so great that He himself became the captain of our salvation. We partakers of flesh and blood will want to go to the Savior who partook of flesh and blood for answers, strength, and deliverance.

### **3:1-19**

#### **Harden Not Your Hearts**

The first and second chapters had established the superiority of Christ to angels. Recall, angels were accepted as God's agents by these Jewish Christians. Now another basic person of the Old Testament appears. It is Moses. Moses was a great and honored man (cf. Transfiguration). He was great "in his house." He was a prominent servant in God's kingdom. He brought God's messages. He was faithful. But Christ is "over his own house." He is the king of Kings. Moses was a subject of the King. Moses lived in the house as a member of the family of God. Christ built the house. He is the head of the house.

Everyone who enters that house ought to want to remain in that family. So the writer issues an admonition. "Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end."

To support this idea of holding to the convictions about Christ we find the 95th Psalm verses 7-11 quoted. In citing this Psalm the writer makes another powerful assertion of verbal inspiration. "As the Holy Ghost saith." He credits the 95th Psalm not to a man, but to God. From this Psalm we take the theme of this section. "Harden not your hearts."

So that the thoughts of not hardening versus Christ would carry greater impact, the Old Testament is utilized. We need to remember that these were Jewish Christians. The Psalm and the author of Hebrews refer to Moses and the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. Those Israelites' hearts became hardened against God in the face of so much evidence about His presence and goodness. The recipients, the Hebrews, were the physical descendants of those people who had dropped in the wilderness. God here warns them that they ought not be spiritual descendants of the ones who died in the wilderness. Those who did not enter the temporal Promised Land failed to enter because of unbelief (verse 19). These readers of this epistle were in danger of not entering the eternal Promised Land. If they entered not it would be the result of unbelief. "Harden not your hearts."

### **4:1-13**

#### **A Rest Remains For The People Of God**

A rest awaited the Israelites who entered their Promised Land. There would be rest from slavery and making bricks. There would be rest from oppression. After ridding the land of the heathen there would be the rest of a normal life. But there is another rest which remains for the people of God. It is the rest from sin. It is rest from sorrow. It is rest from all the unpleasantness of the world. It is uninterrupted rest. This rest which remains is eternal rest in heaven. The goal of the readers of Hebrews from every age is this single statement. "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief."

The solution to entering that rest is found in the popular verse 12. It is the Word of God. It is quick and powerful. It is sharper than any two-edged sword. Jesus promised that it would be the standard of judgment (John 12:48b). "The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." The Word will lay bare how the heart reacted to Christ. Was the Word believed or rejected? God will remain the one "with whom we have to do." To give account which will stand on the Great Day they needed to go to the Word. It tells of Christ. It works conviction about Him for faith comes by the Word of God. The Word about Christ heard and, by God's grace, believed brings to the rest which remains for the people of God.

Two things from this short division of the epistle find a practical place in our lives. First, we want to remember a rest remains for us. This life is tiring. We have hard work. We fight our Old Adam. We battle against the Old Adams of others. We are like the disciples whose flesh was weak. A rest remains for us. Rest in this life from the Word of God. Rest in the next life which is perfect and unending in Christ. Secondly, we have the most powerful thing in the world at our disposal. God's Word is living and powerful. Although it is powerful, its results are not always loud, immediate, and as dramatic as lesser powers like dynamite. And it can be resisted. But the Word is powerful. It does work. We often don't see the results in spectacular ways as at Pentecost. But there will be results for faithful teaching and preaching because God has invested His Word with power.

### **4:14-5:10** **Our High Priest**

Desired qualities of a priest and the responsibilities of his office are listed in these verses. He represents men before God. He makes offerings for sin. He is to deal gently with the ignorant and straying because he too is weak because of sin. This honor of the priesthood no one ought to appropriate for himself. God calls the man as He did Aaron. But each priest was afflicted with sin. He has to offer sacrifice for his own sins too.

Christ is the perfect high priest. He was tempted. So He can sympathize with us when we bring our needs. But in His temptations He didn't sin so He is our Savior. His task was assigned by the Father as was the priest's. He made intercession here on earth for people. He was passively obedient in His suffering. His sacrifice was himself. He is the author of salvation. He is a priest forever like Melchizedek. As such a priest He makes continuous intercession for us at God's right hand. Jewish Christians knew the priesthood and its functions. They knew the priests were imperfect. How striking these words would be to them about the ultimate high priest.

One thought of this portion of Hebrews can serve as a source of strength and comfort for us. We are in the office of the ministry. Sometimes the Old Adam gets the best of one or more people in our congregations. They decide we are in the wrong pastorate or, even worse, in the wrong profession. Perhaps, we are openly accused or privately judged to have accepted or declined calls entirely on human factors. Verse 4 of this chapter 5 speaks to us. "And no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron." We are priests of the High Priest. He has led us where we are. Where He leads us is where we belong.

### **5:11-6:12** **If They Shall Fall Away**

These readers of this epistle were not making the spiritual progress they should have been making. They were slow to learn. They had been in faith in Christ long enough to be teachers now. But they needed to be taught again the basics of God's truths. They were drinking milk from a baby bottle. They ought to have been eating meat with a fork. They were spiritually immature.

At this point the writer is not going back to basics with them. He is not presently to write of baptisms, laying of hands, resurrection, and judgment. He writes of the unforgiveable sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost. He speaks of the impossibility of repentance. The Montanists would use these words to argue against repentance for the 'lapsi.' However, we know that the sin against the Holy Ghost is not something ascribed to every individual who falls from faith or who denies the Christian faith for a period of time. It is wilfull, persistent, malicious blasphemy versus the office of the Holy Ghost. These readers of this divine message ought to take this as a warning. The consequences are almost unspeakable, if they should fall away.

The writer is confident that better things were in store for these people. They had displayed faith by provision for the saints. He desires to see continued what they have begun.

After considering these words we will want to ask ourselves something. What have we fed our people? Was it a steady diet of milk or have we distributed portions of meat too?- Certainly, we don't want to shun the basics. But we also know that God has a reason for every Word He recorded in Scripture. Election, free will, the unforgiveable sin, and other heavy subjects are fit material for Bible Class and for sermons, should they appear in our pericopes. Milk is good. But we don't want to give our people a limited diet. Let's give them some meat too.

### **6:13-20** **Confirmed By An Oath**

The previous verses had exhorted people to remain faithful to God. Here we are given the reason to be faithful to God. He has been faithful to them by keeping His promises. Men swear by greater things than themselves. God swears by himself. God kept His sworn promises to Abraham. It took a long time in human

terms of time. It was an amazing promise. God can not lie. His Word is immutable. Therefore the hope extended by His promises to human beings is a sure hope. It is an anchor for the soul amid life's storms. He entered into the inner sanctuary, heaven. We will go to the same place. "Because I live, ye shall live also." Sensible people want to go to heaven. God's oath confirms that heaven is ours through His Son. They could be certain. God cannot lie.

Our task is to confirm God's oath, as recorded in His Word, that sins are forgiven. We can carry out that precious privilege with confidence. We are speaking God's Word. It can't be wrong. He does not lie. It can't change. We approach the pulpit, the lectern, the classroom, the hospital, the home with confidence. That confidence stems from having the Word. The reliability of the Word is confirmed because it is the oath of God.

### **7:1-28** **Melchizedek**

The priest and king of Salem, Melchizedek, appears in only three places in the Bible. First, he comes in the historical setting of Genesis 14:18. Then he is mentioned in Psalm 110:4. And in Hebrews chapter 5-7 we find him again.

Melchizedek is a type of the Savior. He is the king of Salem (peace). Jesus, who made peace with the blood of His cross, is the King of Peace. Melchizedek is a priest forever. Christ functions as a priest forever at the throne of God.

Melchizedek is shown as superior to Levitical priests. "Consider how great this man was." He received tithes from Abraham even though he was not a Levite. Levites normally collected the tithes. He blessed Abraham, father of Levites, and father of all Israel. And the epistle says, "The less is blessed of the better." In fact, one could say that Levi paid a tithe to Melchizedek because Abraham was the great-grandfather of Levi.

The imperfection of the Levitical priesthood and Mosaic system is also noted. Psalm 110:4 predicts another priest like Melchizedek. This one too would not be from among the Levites. Jesus' ancestry was of Judah. If the Levitical priesthood was sufficient, why did one need to come from outside the tribe? Christ is the perfect high priest. These Jewish Christians can be sure. The Lord swore it and won't change. "By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament."

How much better Christ's priesthood is! Other priests—die and cease functioning for the people. "He (Jesus) is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." This High Priest is holy. He is not a sinner. He does not sacrifice for His own sins, but He does it for the sins of others. He is a priest forever like Melchizedek. There is no beginning or end recorded of either Christ's or Melchizedek's priesthoods.

### **8:1-13** **High Priest Of A New Covenant**

The concept of Christ as a priest continues in this chapter. The first readers of this letter knew of Melchizedek whose priesthood is said to be forever. The resume of the matter was presented in a simple statement which struck out at any doubts the readers might have held. "We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens."

Melchizedek was a special priest. How much more special Christ the priest is. Other priests offer sacrifices as shadows of things to come. If Christ did that, He would not be set apart. But He offers realities. He is the priest of a better covenant. If the first covenant was sufficient, there would have been no place for a second.

However, God promised a second covenant. The source quoted about His promise is Jeremiah 31:31-34. The ceremonies were the old covenant. Their time was past. Now God says, "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." Forgiveness had been symbolized beautifully under the old covenant. It was an even more beautiful reality under the new covenant.

Again these people who had an Old Testament background were directed to turn to those writings to support what the New Testament says. The covenant to which they were returning or considering returning was only a picture of what was to come. The new covenant would “make the first old.” If these people became entangled once more with the old covenant, they would be acting against the better knowledge God had given them in this chapter and in the Old Testament.

### **9:1-28** **By His Own Blood**

Christianity has been called ‘blood theology.’ This assertion is made often in a derogatory way. But it is a true statement. The old covenant foreshadowed it. The writer gives a brief summary of the temple and its worship procedures and supplies. There was the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. That Holy of Holies could be entered once per year by the high priest. He must make a blood offering of an animal for himself and for the people. These were ceremonies “imposed upon them until the time of reformation.” They displayed the need for purity to stand before God.

Christ was a very different priest. He did not come to make outwardly, Levitically clean. He came “to purge your conscience.” He came offering blood far more precious than that of an animal. He entered “by his own blood.” The ceremonial offerings needed to be repeated. They were “figures” of what lay in the future. Christ made the non-recurrent and real sacrifice. It is effective as we read. “So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto to them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.”

One verse of this chapter about Christ’s blood had to give the readers cause for pause. “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” One day every reader would have to meet His Maker. Would their plea in God’s court be the blood of beasts? Would they be able to win their cases with outward, Levitical purity? Or would they plead the reality which had happened and was foreshadowed in the Old Testament? Wouldn’t their trust be better placed in the one who “entered by his own blood?”

Let’s be sure to use blood theology in our work. It is proper. It is important. Think of the many hymns which emphasize it. Perhaps, someone will question such hymns and preaching. Particularly in Lent we could be subject to such accusations from well-meaning individuals. We have this chapter as one of the outstanding spots of Scripture to which to direct such critics. “He entered by his own blood.”

### **10:1-18** **No More Offering For Sin**

Once more the Holy Ghost has caused the writer to stress the insufficiency and repetition of the old Testament sacrifices. “For the law.... can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.”

The ceremonial law is termed a shadow in this section. Several times. the sacrifices are labeled impossible to take away sins. One of their merits mentioned here is that they serve as constant reminder of sin. Christ’s sacrifice reminds of sin, but it also forgives sins. The ceremonial law is demonstrated as inferior to the sacrifice of Christ because of its repetition.

The sacrifice of Christ on the cross has its own category. It is “once for all.” It makes perfect. “As by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” Another clear affirmation is made for verbal inspiration in this chapter. Verse 15 ascribes the succeeding quotes to the Holy Ghost. Verse 16 uses Jeremiah 31:33 as a proof passage. Verse 17 takes Jeremiah 31:34. The section ends with the reminder of Christ’s once for all sacrifice. “Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.”

We can never overemphasize this fact. There is no more offering for sin. It is finished. It is sufficient. Too often people feel if they do their part, then sin is forgiven. Their part can be repentance in the broad sense, contrition, restitution, apology, prayer, etc. In effect they feel that there is another offering for sin -- one they make. All is forgiven. There is no more offering for sin. All that remains is for the Holy Ghost to convince a person. He does it by the Word. And He's responsible for that Word as this epistle once more has affirmed.

**10:19-39**  
**Not Forsaking Assembling Together**

The greatest part of 10 chapters has established the superiority of the work and office of Christ. The heavenly Father is approachable through Him. There is remission in Him. "Their hearts are sprinkled from an evil conscience." In Christ they had it all spiritually. Therefore they ought to reject any idea of returning to the ceremonial law or rejecting the one to whom the ceremonies pointed. The divine directive for this is, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering."

The method of holding fast is the theme of this section. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is." They had opportunities to meet and hear about that work and office of Christ. The remedy for the spiritual illness afflicting this group was grouping around the Word.

The author adds a caution in this context. He speaks of persistent, wilful sinning and its cumulative effect. There may come a time when there is no more sacrifice for sins. They may become obdurate. Those who broke Moses' law were severely punished. Each Jewish Christian knew this. What greater punishment awaits the one who treads under foot the Son of God. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." He reminds them of their past bearing up under pressure and persecution and standing by those who were persecuted. They ought not allow the current situation to make them bend. The key is assembling together.

From time to time we encounter members who refuse to attend public worship services until everything is right in their lives. Here were people with grave problems. The solution was not to divorce themselves from public worship and hearing the Word until their problem was resolved. The best way to begin to resolve the problem is by "not forsaking the assembling together." Also we can offer verses 26-31 as food for thought to those who persist in sin and know better. They may be no more sacrifice for sin finally. Also they need to be encouraged to assemble together.

**11:1-40**  
**By Faith**

A good translation of the first verse of this chapter is rendered by the NIV. "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." First, they are to show that confidence in creation. No one saw it. Then they ought to be sure, sight unseen, of what they hope for -- eternal life. The writer takes the readers on a tour of the Old Testament hall of faith. The ones whose names are enshrined there are familiar to all Old Testament readers. It begins with Abel and Enoch and continues with the patriarchs and Moses. The roll call concludes with some lesser known heroes. We read of miraculous deeds and persecutions suffered. All of these people were justified by faith. All of them held up by faith.

These were all Old Testament people. They were great human beings in God's plan. All were right with God by faith, not works or ceremony. That faith was placed in God's promise of a coming Messiah. This should have impressed mightily the readers who were so enamored with Old Testament ceremony. Ceremony won't give them entrance to heaven. Only faith works as it did for these greats who had lived when sacrifice and ceremony were binding as shadows of Christ. The readers of the Epistle to the Hebrews had an even more privileged place in history than the greats of the past. They lived in a time when they could see prophecy fulfilled in Christ. And, they could examine and learn His actual life, not just the predictions. "God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." Faith -- faith in Christ. That was, is, and always will be essential.

**12:1-13**  
**Whom The Lord Loveth He Chasteneth**

The end of the faith chapter had listed some sufferings undergone by earlier believers. The greatest affliction which was suffered was by the Savior in His humility. They needed to look at the witnesses about



whom they just heard. They needed to look to Christ. Then they should “run with patience.” They had had a difficult time because of tribulation. But they had not yet “resisted unto blood.” Things could become worse as they took to heart this epistle and remained true to Christ.

Because afflictions were realities, the theme of this section is given. “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.” The heavenly Father is similar to earthly fathers in some ways. He disciplines. It is not pleasant for now, but it is useful in developing an individual. The development of the Christian under God’s discipline is “the peaceable fruit of righteousness.” Faith is strengthened. Humility grows. Pride in self diminishes. Yes, it is an act of love for these Hebrews to be disciplined. They would be better for it.

These verses are excellent material to share with those who suffer, especially those who suffer and despair or question. For the present it does not seem joyous. But it yields benefits to be in the sick bed, the front row at the funeral, or any other place of suffering. When someone has one tribulation after another, as it oftens seems to occur, then it would be appropriate to tell them that the Lord must love them very much. “Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.”

### **12:14-29** **Refuse Him Not**

One last time the topic of this epistle is restated. They have not come to God by the old covenant, Mount Sion. They have come unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem by a different means. It is by the new covenant. They are members of the invisible Church by virtue of Jesus’ “blood of sprinkling.” They teetered on the verge of going in another direction. Thus the writer warns, “See that ye refuse him not.” When the Holy Ghost had brought them to Christ their search was ended. It would be foolish to regress to the ceremonies and neglect or reject the final Word, Christ. “Refuse not him.”

### **13:1-25** **That Which Is Well-Pleasing**

The final chapter of Hebrews contains various exhortations to the readers. They are encouraged to do these things which are well-pleasing to God. Many of the verses (about 9 of them by my count) are used frequently as proof passages for things we teach. Verse 4 is about marriage and one we need to use often. Verse 17 is a good admonition to members of a congregation or to children. Verse 8 is the familiar declaration of Jesus’ eternity. The Hebrews needed to follow their duties. They needed to remember their obligation to the Word.

One verse may be notably practical for us. “Remember them who have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.” Many, perhaps all of us, have admired some pastor on our way to ministry. In the ministry there may be some veteran in God’s army who is the object of our admiration. We may have gone to Northwestern or the Seminary because of our feelings about them and their office. There may be an older pastor whose example and words uplifted us or even kept us in the ministry when we seemed ready to get out. We ought to remember that we are in the same position in respect to others. We are the ones who are to spread the Word and whose faith ought to be a model. Let’s remember that we do exert a great influence on others by virtue of the office of the ministry. And let’s use the Word and prayer regularly and profitably so that our faith may be one that others can follow.

### **Conclusion**

The Epistle to the Hebrews holds a storehouse of useful passages. We will want to go to it for proof passages often. We will want to go to it for encouragement. We may wish to utilize it for a Bible Class. The subject of the Epistle is the superiority of Christ and His sacrifice to the Old Testament ceremonies. It also includes numerous exhortations not to fall away from Christ. All these thoughts will prove useful to our ministries. God not only spoke by the prophets, He also spoke by the Epistle to the Hebrews.

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This outline was taken from *The Bible Almanac* by Packer, Tenney, and White.