

# **Notes on The Letter to the Hebrews**

## **Style:**

The work is structured as a treatise, making essentially one main argument throughout the book. The Greek is difficult, and it seems as though Greek was a second language to the author. The author occasionally cites the Septuagint, indicating at least a decent reading knowledge of the language.

## **Date of Composition:**

It is generally agreed upon that the treatise was written prior to the fall of the temple in Jerusalem, and the writing itself alludes to a coming destruction. The date can be narrowed down further, however. Timotheos (13:23) is mentioned apart from Paulus, placing the early end of the possible date of composition at c.54 CE. But this work was written early enough that it could be confused by first century Christians with the writings of Paulus himself. Further, there is no mention of Neronian persecution. The attacks on Jewish Christians by their fellow Jews were largely social in nature. These pale by comparison to the persecution started by Nero. Given the aforementioned considerations, the treatise was probably written during the period 54 - 64 CE.

## **Authorship:**

Unlike the works of Paulus, this treatise is unsigned. The author's use of the language and his/her theology appear slightly different from those of Paulus. Throughout the past 150 years, several names have been suggested, most notably: Apollos, an Alexandrian Jew (Acts 18:24) seems to have had the background fitting the profile of the author. Just as John the Baptizer's focus was on the Messiah bringing an end to the former covenant (including temple worship), there appears to be some anxiety on the part of the author on account of these coming events. Harnack, however, conjectured that Priscilla may have written the work, assisted by her husband Akila (Acts 18:1f.). Both were Jewish, friends of Paulus, and they had taught Apollos about Jesus. Further, if the work were written by a woman, this would explain the apparent anonymity of the work.

## **Setting:**

The setting of the work is closely tied to its purpose. Certain Jewish followers of Jesus were experiencing pressure from their fellow Jews. The exact nature of this pressure is alluded to in the book--most likely involving social shunning, the severing of friendships and relationships, and banning from the Jewish gatherings (synagogues). This pressure had one purpose in mind: to get the recipients of the treatise to denounce Jesus as Anointed One and return to the Judaism of the priests and rabbis. The author, wishing to prevent this from happening, wrote the work to serve as a reminder of the place of Jesus the Anointed One in Judaism. Looking ahead to the

coming destruction of the temple, the author urges the readers to band together and listen to those inspired individuals who had taught them about Jesus.

## Commentary:

*In ancient times, in many parts and in many ways, God spoke to our ancestors by the prophets. At the last of these days, he has spoken to us by a son, whom he placed to be Heir of All Things, through whom he made the ages, who was the shining brightness of his glory and the sculpture of his basic self, and who carries all things by the declaration of power.*

The author starts out by sketching out God's plan. God has been speaking to humanity since the beginning. In days gone by, he spoke to "our ancestors"--a link to the author's shared lineage with the readers. Recently, though, God has spoken to "us"--this time via Jesus. The comparison is intentional. The author sets up Jesus among the prophets and will later compare him to certain figures in Jewish history.

Jesus is given a title: Heir of All Things. Jesus is not only a son but an heir to everything God has--which is everything. The author states without support (yet!) that God's plan centers around Jesus, for the Anointed One was central to God's having created everything. Jesus is called the "brightness" of God's "glory." Glory is brightness in and of itself, and so the connotation we are to gain from this is that God sees Jesus as a jewel--in hyperbole, he is the best of the best. He is a sculpture of God. The author deliberately steps away from claiming Jesus to be God. Instead, he is a sculpture of God's very being. This is a poetic form of what Jesus himself says: that he always did everything God wanted him to do. This entitles Jesus to be a person worthy of inspection. We can understand the uncreated God by looking at the life, teachings, and deeds of the human Jesus.

The phrase, "and who carries all things" is rough. Is this connected to Jesus' heirship, or is it God who carries all things? I prefer the former explanation, with God having granted Jesus power.

*After making a cleansing of sins by means of himself, he sat down at the right side of the majesty in high places, having become as much greater than messengers as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. For to which of the messengers did he ever say, "You are my son. Today I have fathered you?" And again, "I will be a father for him, and he will be a son for me."*

Now, Jesus' activities are mentioned explicitly for the first time, instead of merely his close relationship to God. Jesus "made a cleansing of sins." This is an unusual construction, one that will have to be explained later on in the treatise. For now, all the author says is that Jesus himself effected "a cleansing." After doing this, he "sat down at the right side"--an expression indicating something not too dissimilar from the expression (carried over into English) "someone's right hand man." Jesus' relationship to God is so close that in the heavenly "court," Jesus (allegorically) sits at God's right side.

The author implies (but does not state) that it is on account of this "cleansing of sins by means of himself" that Jesus has "become greater than messengers." The author then simply reminds us that, after all, Jesus is a SON. A citation is made of Psalm 2:7.

This (Psalm 2) is a scene of coronation, and v.2 mentions that this is the coronation of God's Anointed One (Messiah). The formula is similar to a formula of adoption (q.v., 2 Sam 7:14, in the first person). Early Christians applied this "adoption ceremony" to Jesus' baptism, with a variant manuscript in Luke citing Psa 2:7 exactly. The writer of Hebrews points out that, as God's anointed, Jesus had a more excellent station than the messengers in God's eyes. The next passage quoted is the statement of adoption previously mentioned (2 Sam 7:14). Historically, neither the dynasty of David was not everlasting. The promise made to David here is generally understood to point to a descendant of David as an anointed (messianic) son, whose kingdom would be "established forever."

*1:6 Now when again he led the first born into the habitation, he said, "And all of God's messengers should bow down to him." And to the messengers, he says, "He is the one who makes winds his messengers and who makes fiery flame his religious servants." But to the son: "Your throne is God for ever and ever, and the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of his kingdom. You loved right and hated lawlessness. On account of this, God, your God, anointed you with oil of exaltation beyond your companions." And, "At first, you O Yahweh, founded the land, and the skies are works of your hands. They will be destroyed, but you continue. And all they all will become old like a garment, and you will fold them like a cloak. And they will be changed" like a garment, "but you are the same, and your years will not cease." But to which of the messengers did he ever say, "Sit at my right side until I place your enemies as a footstool for your feet?" Aren't all of them spirits doing religious service, sent forth for service on account of those who are about to inherit salvation?*

Continuing the comparison of Jesus to the messengers of God, the writer cites the LXX rendering of Dt 32:43; Psa 97:7. The "him" here is GOD, not Jesus. God's messengers are bound to obey their God. To support this idea, the author quotes Psa 104:4, stating that everything is subject to God.

But God says of the Anointed One that he has been given a scepter (symbol of rulership) of God's kingdom. Furthermore, God elevated Jesus beyond others. This is a citation from Psa 45:6, part of an ode for the royal wedding of God's anointed king, identified by the writer of Hebrews as the Anointed One. Reinforcing this idea, the author cites another passage (from Psa 45) to indicate that what God says, goes; God is unchanging.

The author then asks, rhetorically, "to which of the messengers did God ever say he would be seated at God's right side?" The situation is cited from Psa 110:1, a Davidic psalm that is important to the Hebrew writer's case. The psalm is messianic in scope (see vv.5-6), and the author of the treatise will quote nearly all of it before the letter is complete. The implication is that since God elevated the Anointed One (Jesus) this way, and not the messengers, the readers ought to continue to follow Jesus, just as they might follow a messenger of God.

The final rhetorical question completes the thought: "Didn't God send the messengers serve on account of us?"

*2:1 On this account, it is necessary for us to be abundant in attending to the things which we heard, lest we should drift away. For if the message spoken by messengers became firm, and if every deviation and bad hearing received a just reward, how will we escape if we have neglected such great salvation? This was first received through the Lord to be spoken by those*

***who heard, and it was confirmed for us, with the co-testifying of God both by signs and wonders, and by various powers, and by distributions of holy breath, according to what he wants.***

Having made this comparison between the Anointed One and the messengers, the writer urges the readers to "attend to the things we heard"--i.e., to call to remembrance the things they learned about Jesus. After all, the author adds, if the messengers' message was made firm (by God), what about the message that came through Jesus? That message was confirmed by miracles, too, as having been from God.

***5 For under messengers he did not arrange the habitation to come, about which we are speaking. But someone somewhere testified, saying, "Who is a human being, that you remember him? Or the mortal one, that you oversee him? You made him slightly less than messengers; you crowned him with glory and honor." "You arranged all things beneath his feet."***

***For in the subjection of all things, he left nothing that is not arranged under him. But now, we don't yet see all things arranged under him. But we can see Jesus, who was made slightly less than messengers, and who was crowned with glory and honor on account of the suffering of his death, so that by God's generosity he would taste death on behalf of all people.***

The author makes further comparison to firm up the point, and perhaps this is the passage that provoked the comparison in the author's mind. Psalm 8:4-6 in the LXX renders "*elohim*" as "messengers" (in the same vein as the sons of the gods in Genesis 6), rather than "God" or "gods." The writer uses this comparison between messengers and humans to indicate that although Jesus was human (slightly less than a messenger), as a human he was given dominion. God "put all things under his feet."

The writer also applies the things found here to the Anointed One. Borrowing language from the psalm, Jesus was "crowned with glory and honor" not merely because he was "a mortal" but also because of "the suffering of his death." The writer, expanding upon the theme found in the psalm, claims now that Jesus' greater station is a result of his willingness to follow God to the point of self-sacrifice. Otherwise (apparently, in the author's eyes), he would have remained "slightly less than messengers."

***For it was proper for God, on account of whom all things are and through whom all things are, in leading many sons into glory, to make complete through sufferings the initiator of their salvation. For both the one who makes holy and those who are made holy are all from one. On account of this reason, he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, "I will announce your name to my brothers, in the midst of an assembly I will sing praise to you."***

Jesus, who was formerly called a son of God, is now called "the initiator of the salvation of many sons." The nature of this salvation has not yet been mentioned; it will be examined in its proper context when the time comes. The point of the text here is that it was well and good for God to bring one son to suffer on behalf of his other children. Why? They are all "from one"--members of the same family. And so, naturally, Jesus (though he has elevated status) is not ashamed to call them [us] brothers. Psalm 22, spoken by David as the Anointed One, is cited here for support: the Anointed One sees the rest of us as brothers.

***And again, "I will be persuaded by him."***

***And again, "Look at me and at the children that God gave me." Therefore, since the children have been sharing blood and flesh, in the same way also he partook of those things, so that through death he might deprive of energy the one who has the strength of death--that is, the Accuser--and might free them, as many as were held in slavery throughout all of their lives by fear of death.***

This is a brief citation from Isaiah 8, which more fully reads, "Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching among my students. I will wait for Yahweh, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will be persuaded by him. Look at me and the children whom Yahweh has given me: signs and wonders in Israel from Yahweh of Hosts, who lives on Mount Zion."

Here, God may seem far away from his people, but the author will wait for his action. Most translations read, "I will trust in him," but the sense of the Greek is certainly "be persuaded." The meanings are similar, however. In citing this passage, the author of Hebrews again indicates that the Anointed One is God's son. "The children whom Yahweh has given me" should be understood in light of God's people, and not physical children. The Messiah is patiently waiting for God's action, standing together with his siblings, whom God gave him.

That the author understands the passage this way can be discerned from the follow-up. Since God's children are human beings, Jesus was made as a human being. Humans die. Jesus came not only to die but to rob the Accuser (i.e., the Enemy) of the power of death. Here, the Enemy is portrayed in his traditional role of the Accuser of God's people.

The latter clause, "and might free them..." is referring to the Jews living under the Torah. The "fear of death" comes upon those who are bound to a code of actions. What is death to fear? But guilt of transgressing a code brings with it an inherent fear of death. Jesus came to remove that fear.

***16 For surely the fear of death does not take hold of messengers, but it takes hold of Abraham's seed. Consequently, in all things he was bound to be made like his brothers, so that he would become a merciful and trustworthy high priest regarding things which lead toward God, to the point of making atonement for the sins of the people. For since he himself was tested, he is able to provide help to those who are being tested with what he has suffered.***

Now the application is this: that the messengers, not bound to a code, don't experience the fear of death. But Jews (Abraham's seed) DO experience it. Jesus therefore had to be a Jew, a human being, a person like any other person. This would make him a "merciful and trustworthy high priest"--merciful because he was experiencing anything that they experience in life, and trustworthy because he was following Yahweh God completely. Therefore, he could make legitimate atonement for the sins of the people--a requirement of the high priest. In light of the priestly system, which required acts of atonement, Jesus would (metaphorically) make an act of atonement. Although sacrifice is not yet mentioned here, just as sacrifices were required by God (of various types and varieties), Jesus too (as antitype of the priesthood) would make a sacrifice. The only point here is that Jesus was and had to be a human being. A messenger would not have sufficed as God's Anointed One.

***3:1 Consequently, holy brothers, partakers of a heavenly calling: set your minds on Jesus, the envoy and high priest of what we acknowledge. He is trustworthy to the one who made him,***

*just as Moses also was trustworthy in God's household. For he is regarded worthy of more glory than Moses, by as much as the builder has more honor than the house. For every house was built by someone, but God is the builder of all things. And indeed, "Moses was trustworthy in his whole household, as is a healer," for a testimony of the things which were to be spoken. But the Anointed One is trustworthy as a son over God's household, whose household we are if indeed we hold firmly to the freedom of speech and the boasting of the hope.*

Knowing the things established in the first two chapters, the readers should "set their minds on Jesus." Jesus is the envoy: he is the one whom God sent to the Jewish people. He is the high priest: the one to fulfill the Levitical code once and for all. Jesus is "trustworthy to the one who made him"--to God--just like Moses. For the first time, Jesus has been compared to Moses. This will happen more later. At first, he is like Moses, but in the following sentence, Jesus deserves more glory than Moses. Why? Because the builder has more honor than the house.

What does this mean? Moses was trustworthy as part of God's household, but Jesus is a son over God's household, over the readers. The author has attempted to establish that God called aside a people and gave them the Torah, all with his Anointed One in mind. As God's son, the one for whom these things were done, Jesus is greater than Moses.

Another part of this passage bears notice, however. The author reminds the readers that we are God's household IF we "hold firmly to the freedom of speech and the boasting of the hope." The freedom of speech and boasting are important. The readers need to remember that Jesus is who he is, yes. But they also need not to be silent about it. They should speak freely and boast about "the hope." Terrible times are ahead for the Jews, but the followers of the Anointed One have hope. As Jesus himself put it, their kingdom is "not of this world." They need not fear what the Romans will do.

*So, just as the holy Spirit says, "Today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at the place of embitterment, at the day of testing in the desert. Didn't your ancestors test me with examination, and they had seen my work? So, for forty years I loathed this generation, and I said, 'They are always strays in their hearts; now they do not know my ways.' As I swore in my anger, they will not enter into my rest."*

This is an important section for the author, and so, we will piece through it slowly. The author invokes the holy Spirit, that is, the medium of revelation. "This is inspired," the author is saying. The passage being cited is the latter half of the 95th psalm.

The psalm itself begins with traditional statements of praise (vv.1-7c). We should worship God because he is who he is, and we are who we are, writes the psalmist. The rest of the psalm, vv. 7d-11, are both a warning against going astray and a reflection on the Israelites' wandering in the desert. The reference to the 40 years of wandering appears in Numbers 14 and is something that would be familiar to the readers.

The author starts with "today, if you will hear his voice." This is the call to turn to God. Years ago, when the Israelites reached the promised land, the people of Israel (in general) would not listen to God, who told them to take the land. Instead, they listened to a bad report given by ten of the twelve men who were sent to spy out the land. God had promised them something, but the people would not take hold of it, on account of their fear. Therefore, God sent them to wander in the wilderness for forty years, until all those who had doubted God were dead.

The final line of the psalm is very important to the present writer. "As I swore in my anger, they will not enter into my rest." This speaks of God's rest. What rest? What does it mean to enter this rest? Why would they not enter? The author will address these issues.

***12 Brothers, watch out, lest there be in any of you an evil, untrusting heart, which stands away from the living God. On the contrary, advise one another every day, until it is not called "today," so that none of you would be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. For we have become partakers of the Anointed One, if indeed we hold firmly to the beginning of the basis until the end.***

A necessary admonition for the reader follows. Don't have an evil, untrusting heart. What does the author mean? The Jews who did not trust God in the desert were made to wander for 40 years. They did not enter God's rest. The present readers, also Jews, would become antitypes of those Jews, failing to enter God's rest unless they trust God. Remember, the readers know who Jesus is. They are familiar with the miraculous signs and with his teachings. God gave them a hope beyond the earthly nation of Israel. If they refuse to trust God, they too will fail to enter the rest. Therefore, the author urges the readers to keep reminding one another of who they are. Being hardened by "sin's deceitfulness" in this context is convincing one's self that God will not mind if they forget his Anointed One. But "we have become partakers of the Anointed One, if indeed we hold firmly to the beginning of the basis". The basis, the foundation, for the new covenant is Jesus. The readers need to hold on to Jesus if they are to share in the promises.

***In what was said, "Today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at the place of embitterment," who embittered God after they heard? But didn't all of those who came from Egypt through Moses? Now whom did he loathe for forty years? Wasn't it those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the desert? Now to whom did he swear not to enter into his rest, if not to those who were unpersuaded? And we see that they were unable to enter on account of distrust.***

***4:1 Therefore, with a promise to enter into his rest being left behind, we should be afraid, lest ever someone from among you should seem to have failed. For also we were addressed by a good message, just as they were also. But the message of their hearing did not profit them, since it did not mix with the trust of those who heard.***

The author goes through the passage piece by piece. Who embittered God? The answer: all those who rejected what he told them. Didn't they all come from Egypt? The answer: yes, but they rejected God. Who then "did not enter his rest"? The answer: the ones who were not persuaded by God. They didn't listen. They distrusted, and they were unable to enter the promised rest or the promised land.

***For we who have trusted are entering into the rest, just as he said, "As I swore in my anger, they will not enter into my rest," although the deeds from the laying down of creation were done. For it was said somewhere about the seventh day in this manner: "And God rested on the during the seventh day from all of his deeds." And again, in this saying, "They will not enter into my rest."***

Now the author asserts that the ones who DO trust God ARE entering "the rest." What rest? Is the psalm merely speaking of the land of Israel, which is nowhere called a "rest"? No, the author wrote about the peace that comes with rest. After taking the land, the Israelites would have had the rest, but as it was, they had no rest. Just as God rested after doing something good (creating everything), the people would have rested. But, "they will not enter into my rest," God told them.

***6 Therefore, since it is left behind for some to enter into it, and since those who previously heard the good message did not enter on account of unpersuasion, he again fixes a certain day, today, saying by David (after such a long time) just as it had been said before: "Today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."***

***For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken about another day after that one. In conclusion, a sabbath is left behind for God's people. For the one who has entered into his rest also will rest himself from his deeds, just as God did from his own.***

This portion is a bit of logic. Let's follow the author's logic. God had intended for people to enter the rest, but those people then did not enter it. Why not? Because they did not listen to God. Much later, the psalmist ("David") wrote of "today." The rest is still available! After all, if the people who finally followed Joshua into the land of Israel had received the rest, "God would not have spoken about another day after that one." The author neatly concludes that God's people may still share in that "sabbath rest." Ah, a wonderful rest from work, still remaining for God's people--contextually, for those who listen to God.

***Therefore, we should try hard to enter into that rest, so that no one should fall in the same spectacle of distrust. For God's message is living and working and more sharp than every two-edged sword, and it cuts through to the point of separating life and breath, both joints and marrow, and it is able to judge the heart's reflections and thoughts. And no creature fails to be apparent in his presence, but all things are naked and laid open to his eyes. The message for us is directed toward him.***

Don't distrust, writes the author, but try hard to enter God's rest. By now, this makes sense. Listen to God by following his Anointed One. Why? Because the message about Jesus, God's message, is like a sword. It cuts, separates, and judges. It is supposed to direct Jews toward God. Anyone who rejects the one whom they know to be God's Anointed is doomed never to enter the sabbath rest.

***14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, God's son Jesus, we should lay hold of the acknowledgment. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to suffer together with us in our weaknesses, but he was tested in all things according to a likeness; he remained without sin. Therefore, we should come to the throne of Generosity with freedom of speech, so that we would receive mercy and would find favor for seasonable help.***

Now, the author pulls in the point (s)he was laying down in the first two chapters. Since Jesus is this antitypical high priest, God's Anointed One--remember, the readers never really doubt this--"lay hold of the acknowledgement": proclaim who he is. Admit it publically, even though you'll be persecuted for it. This high priest is human: he suffers along with us; he shares our



weaknesses; he was tested in ways similar to how we are tested. And he passed the test, so to speak. And God will provide the readers with whatever they need to endure the persecution by their countrymen if they ask him freely.

***5:1 For every high priest who was taken from among human beings is set down on behalf of human beings to do things that are directed toward God, so that he would offer both gifts and sacrifices on behalf of sins. He is able to suffer a measure with the ignorant ones and wanderers, since he himself is also surrounded by weakness. And on account of it, he is bound to offer gifts and sacrifices also on his own behalf, just as on behalf of the people. And no one takes the honor for himself, but he was called on by God, just as Aaron also was.***

Here, the humanity of Jesus is again emphasized. Every high priest is expected to do things that direct toward God, offering gifts and sacrifices. But the author twice mentions that the high priest is a human being who occupies his position on behalf of his fellow humans. He "is able to suffer" along with his fellow humans, even with the wanderers...those who depart from the Torah. Why? Because he too is human, and the high priest must therefore offer sacrifices on his own behalf. This is the author's examination of the priesthood of Aaron.

***Similarly also, the Anointed One did not glorify himself to become a high priest, but he glorified the one who spoke to him: "You are my son. Today I have fathered you," just as it says also in a different place, "You are a priest for the age, according to the order of Melchisedek."***

***In the days of his physical being, he offered up both supplications and petitions with shouts and tears to the one who is able to save him from death. And by his piety he was heard. Although he was a son, he learned from the things he suffered how to listen, and after being completed in death, he became a source of eternal salvation to all of those who listen to him, since he was designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchisedek.***

Now the author compares Jesus to the typical high priest. Jesus was humble, giving the glory to God, to whom it was due. In mentioning this, the author twice mentions the special nature of the priesthood of the Anointed One. First, the Anointed One is a son. Second, he is a priest for the age. Third, this priesthood is not of the order of Aaron, but of the order of Melchizedek. The author continues his comparison to the typical priest by noting that Jesus, too, offered up prayers on behalf of the people, and he was heard. He learned to listen to God, and in doing so, he became a source of salvation. Here, Jesus' example of following God is put up for others to follow. All those who follow Jesus' example of following God will be saved. This is true not only in Jesus' day and age but forever, since the Anointed One is a high priest of a different, everlasting, order.

***11 The message we have to say concerning him is long, and it is hard to explain, since you have become slow in hearing. For also, though you are bound to be teachers--on account of the time--again you have the need of someone to teach you the rudiments of the beginning of God's oracles. And you have become as having need of milk, and not of solid food. For each one who partakes of milk is unskilled in the message of right, for he is a baby. But solid food is for complete people, for those who (on account of practice) have well-exercised perceptions to distinguish both good and bad.***

The author recognizes the trouble that (s)he is having with concise communication. Apparently, (s)he would like the treatise to be short and to the point: that the readers know Jesus to have been the Anointed One, and that they should persevere despite persecution from their kinsmen. But the writer sees a need to continue in some detail, because the readers are forgetting what they have learned. Therefore, the author chastises them: "you have become as having need of milk." They have become babies again, "unskilled," and therefore need to be reminded of things that they already know.

*6:1 So, tossing away the beginning message of the Anointed One, we should carry on toward completion, not again laying down a foundation of mental change from dead deeds, and of trust in God, or again laying down teaching about ritual cleansings and of the laying on of hands, of both resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And if God permits, we will carry on.*

*4 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, who once tasted of the heavenly gift and became partakers of holy breath, and who tasted God's beautiful declaration (and the powers of an age about to come), and who fell away to renew again to the point of mental change, since they have crucified God's son anew for themselves and are making a spectacle of him. For land which has drunk rain that comes to it often and land which brings forth plant life which is useful to those on account of whom it was tilled receives praise from God. But that which yields stickers and thistles is not considered and is near to a curse, and in the end it is for scorching.*

But the readers SHOULD be carrying the message forward into "completion." Instead of having to explain to the readers that the traditional Jewish way of thinking about ritual acts is inaccurate (they are harshly called "dead deeds"), the people should be carrying on (i.e., knowing that their Anointed One has come). What will happen if they forget this? If they willfully neglect their Messiah, what argument can be made? What more can be said? They know about the miracles and the prophecies. The author says nothing could possibly change their minds, because they already know everything. These people have even shared in "the holy breath"--they've done miracles THEMSELVES. They KNOW the truth. If they go back now, they're doomed. The author urges them to drink, metaphorically, from the life-giving rain that the Messiah brought them. Otherwise, they will be cursed and scorched--they will forfeit the gift of life that God offers them.

*9 Now about you, beloved, though also we are speaking this way, we have been persuaded of better things, even things that have to do with salvation. For God is not unjust, that he would be forgetful of your work and love, which you displayed for his name by serving the holy ones--and you are serving them. But we strongly desire for each one of you to display the same diligence until the end toward the full confirmation of hope, so that you would not become sluggish, but so you would become imitators of those who are inheriting the promises, through trust and longsuffering.*

Having chastened the readers somewhat severely, the author steps back to remind them of his/her confidence in them. (S)he reminds them that God would not forget all the work that they've done, if only they wouldn't reject him. Continue through to the end, and there will be no need to worry about the anger to come (i.e., when Jerusalem is destroyed). The readers need to "not

become sluggish" but to imitate the ones who are following Jesus despite being persecuted. Then, the readers are reminded of a promise....

*For when God was making a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, "If praising, I will praise" you, and "if multiplying, I will multiply" you. And in this way, after suffering long, Abraham obtained the promise. For people swear according to what is greater, and the oath for confirmation is a terminator to every one of their contradictory statements.*

It was after Abraham suffered that he received a promise from God. Abraham waited 100 years for the birth of Isaac, only to seemingly have him taken away. But God provide a sacrifice (Gen 22, where the quote occurs), testing Abraham, and after the ordeal was over, God promised that Abraham's seed would be multiplied like the sands of the seashore or the stars in the sky. God promised this solemnly, swearing by the greatest One there was--himself.

*In the oath, God,  
who wished to show abundantly the unchanging nature of his plan to the heirs of the  
promise,*

*inserted an oath, so that  
through two unchangeable practices, in which God is not able to lie,*

*we who have fled away to lay hold of the hope set before us would have strong advice.*

*We have this as an anchor of the soul, both sure and firm, and one enters into the place within the veil, where Jesus our forerunner entered on our behalf, having become a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek for the age.*

Now comes the author's application. God's purpose in making the oath to Abraham was to set aside a guarantee to God's people, to the "heirs of the promise." Therefore, God provided hope to Abraham's descendants. This is an anchor, firm and secure. Now, "one enters into the place within the veil." In the new covenant, there is no barrier between the believer and God...not like the veil beyond which only the one offering a sacrifice could pass. Jesus entered beyond a metaphorical veil on our behalf, to remove the barrier forever. How forever? Because he is a high priest for the age.

*7:1 For this "Melchizedek, king of Shaleim, high priest of the Highest God," the one "who met Abraham when he was returning from the defeat of the kings, and he praised him. To him also Abraham" apportioned "a tenth from all his things." Indeed, his name is first translated "King of Right." Now then, it is also, "King of Shaleim," that is, King of Peace. He was fatherless, motherless, without lineage, having neither a beginning of days nor an end of life, but having been like God's son, he continues as high priest for the perpetual time. But view with wonder how large this one was, to whom also Abraham the Patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils. And indeed, those who were from the sons of Levi, who take the priesthood, have a precept to take a tenth from the people, that is, their brothers, although they have come out of Abraham's loins. But the one who does not have a lineage from them took a tenth from*

***Abraham, and he praised the one who had the promises.***

***Now without any contradiction, the lesser one is praised by the greater one. And here indeed, dying people receive tenths, but there one person receives a tenth who lives, as it has been testified. And so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, the one who receives tenths, has had a tenth taken. For he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met with him.***

The author has mentioned Melchizedek several times, and without explanation. An explanation is due. What little we know about Melchizedek from Abraham's encounter with him is reproduced here. First, he was King of the city of Shaleim, which some modern scholars have identified with Jerusalem. The author translates the word as peace, similar to the modern "shalom" (or Arabic "salaam"). The author also translates his name, Melchizedek as melech + zadok, King of Right. Here, it is evident that the readers speak Greek but have some knowledge of Hebrew, for no further explanation is required.

Thus, what we know about this man is that he was "King of Right" and "King of Peace." We know one other thing: that Abraham gave him an offering of the traditional one tenth of his goods. From that, the author discerns that of the two, Abraham was the lesser. After all, the greater person doesn't offer tribute to the lesser, but the other way around. Because his history is not given, though, this man was "fatherless, motherless, without lineage." He existed in a point in history, and nothing more is said about him. It was popularly known that the Anointed One was supposed to arise from out of nowhere, and therefore the author compares this to the advent of the Messiah.

Now, the author compares the priesthood of Melchizedek (and Jesus) to that of Aaron. First, Abraham gave a tenth of his goods to Melchizedek. Conclusion: Melchizedek was greater than Abraham. Second, Abraham was the revered ancestor of Levi, but the priestly class takes a tenth of the goods of Abraham's descendants. They themselves (the priestly class) are Abraham's descendants, too, "brothers" to the ones from whom they take a tenth. Melchizedek was not on par with Abraham; he was greater. Therefore, his priesthood is greater, because the goods flow from the lesser to the greater.

But praises or blessings are bestowed upon the lesser by the greater. And Melchizedek blessed Abraham, again indicating that he was greater. Here, now, with the Levitical priesthood still intact, "dying people receive tenths." But Jesus is alive forever (by virtue of his resurrection). He is the one person who lives on, who is entitled to receive tenths. Through Abraham, says the author, even Levi donated a tenth of his goods to Melchizedek, who is the author of Jesus' greater priesthood. The author is talking about a Messianic change from a lesser priesthood (that of Aaron and the current priests) to a greater priesthood (that of Melchizedek and Jesus).

***11 Therefore, if indeed completion were through the Levitical priesthood (for with it the people received a code), what need was there for still another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek and to not be named according to the order of Aaron?***

***When the priesthood changes, it becomes necessary also for the code to change. For the one about whom these things are spoken has partaken of another tribe, from which no one has held the altar. For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah. Moses said nothing about priesthood for that tribe. And this is abundantly evident if another priest rises up according to the likeness of Melchizedek, one who has not become a priest according to a code of physical precepts, but according to power of a life that cannot be dissolved. For it is testified that, "You are a priest for the age according to the order of Melchisedek."***

***For the setting aside of a preceding precept happens on account of its weakness and unprofitable nature; for the Torah made nothing complete, but it was an introduction of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.***

Now the author asks a rhetorical question: why would a second priesthood be assigned if the first one would bring the people to completion? It wouldn't. The priesthood needed to change to bring about the complete teaching from God.

But when the priesthood changes, the code must change. That is, the Torah is being completed along with the priesthood. What kind of new code? Well, it is not a code which passes the priesthood by physical lineage. The author says we know this because the Anointed One's greater priesthood itself was not based on physical lineage. And a physical lineage can be dissolved, if the people are killed or become unable to trace their lineage, but the Melchizedek priesthood continues forever. It is not based on physical lineage. Interestingly, after the time of the First Revolt, when the temple was destroyed, it gradually became impossible for Jews to trace their lineage back to their patriarchal ancestors.

The author said that this priestly replacement had to happen because the old one was designed with a weakness. It was made to be replaced. "The Torah made nothing complete." This is a strong statement. But the point that the author is making is that this was not the intent of the Torah. Instead, it served as "an introduction of a better hope." The Torah was a teaching tool of preparation. Its purpose was to get the Jewish people ready for their Messiah, and for the "better hope" that he would bring--freedom from guilt and shame.

***20 And inasmuch as it was not without an oath--for indeed they became priests without an oath, but the one who became a priest with an oath did so through the one who said to him: "Yahweh swore and will not change, 'You are a priest for the age.'"--according to so much Jesus has become a guarantee of a better covenant. And indeed, many are those who have become priests on account of being prevented by death from continuing on, but this one has an unchangeable priesthood, on account of his continuing for the age. And consequently, for the complete age he is able to save those who come near to God through him, always living for the appeal on their behalf.***

***For also, such a high priest was appropriate for us--godly, lacking badness, undefiled, separated from sinners and becoming higher than the heavens, one who does not have the daily necessity like the high priests to offer first on behalf of his own sins, then for those of the people. For he did this once by offering himself. For the Torah, having a weakness, sets down people to be high priests, but the message of that oath that was fulfilled after the Torah, sets down a son, who has been made complete for the age.***

Another comparison is made. The Levitical priesthood was founded without God swearing an oath to anyone. But God swore an oath to Melchizedek that his priesthood would be eternal, and Jesus is part of this priesthood started with an oath from God. He has become the guarantee of a better covenant than the first. Why? Because the new covenant is not hindered by death, Jesus lives forever to metaphorically appeal on everyone's behalf (metaphorically in the same way that the Aaronic priest appealed for the people while he lived). Everything here is in analogy to the functions of a priest.

The author continues his comparison of Jesus to the high priest archetype. A high priest was expected to follow the Levitical code, being a cut above the rest, so to speak. Jesus is therefore

appropriate, as he was godly and undefiled. But Jesus, since he went without sin, has no need to keep offering sacrifices for himself and for the people. Being undefiled, it was only necessary for him to offer a sacrifice once. The Torah called for a succession of high priests, because the high priesthood was weak--people died, and the priests were not sinless. But the second covenant is strong, putting God's son (i.e., the Messiah) in that position. The author does not say what the sacrifices accomplish. Rather, (s)he assumes that the reader will know that the sacrifices (both Jesus' and those made by the high priests) represent and accomplish roughly the same thing.

***8:1 But now, the point of what was said is this: that we have such a high priest, who is seated at the right side of the throne of majesty in the heavens, a religious servant of the holy things and of the true tent (which the Lord, not a human being, pitched). For every high priest is set down in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Consequently, it is a necessity for him to have something that he might offer. Therefore, if indeed he were of the earth, he could not even be a priest, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Torah. These ones provide religious service as an example and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned when he was about to finish the tent: for he says "See that you do all things according to the type that was shown to you in the mountain." But now he has obtained a religious service that makes sense, as much as also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been codified on better promises.***

The author summarizes briefly, and summary is certainly needed. We have the perfect antitype of a high priest in Jesus. The former high priests served in a literal tent (tabernacle), a temple made by humans. Jesus metaphorically serves in the true tent, in the presence of God himself. The author then gives a short argument as to why it is necessary for the high priest of the new covenant to be in God's presence rather than on earth: to offer gifts directly to God and to provide religious service directly to God, instead of on earth (which is but a "shadow of the heavenly things"). What was shown to Moses was a type to be imitated on earth. Now Jesus is the mediator of a true and better covenant, enacted with a promise--the oath sworn to Melchizedek. We will later read of other promises. The author has now made a very strong case for the disappearance of the former covenant, to be replaced by a better one. He continues:

***7 For if that first one were faultless, a place would not be sought for a second. For finding fault, he says to them:***

***"Look! Days are coming," says Yahweh, "when I will complete a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be according to the covenant that I made with their ancestors in the day of my taking their hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, because they did not continue in my covenant, and I did not care for them," says Yahweh.***

***"Because this is the covenant that I will covenant with the house of Israel after those days," says Yahweh. "Giving my codes into their minds, I will also write them on their hearts. And I will be to them for a god, and they will be to me for a people.***

***"And by no means will each one teach his fellow citizen and each one his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," because all will know me, from the smallest even to the greatest of them. Because I will be merciful to their wrong, and I will by no means still remember their sins." In saying "new," he has aged the first one. Now the one which is aging and growing old is near to disappearing.***

A logical statement starts this section: the first covenant would not have been replaced if it had been perfect. But God did find fault with it, because he replaced it. The passage quoted is from Jeremiah 31:31-34. Here, the new covenant is described, and various attributes are important to the writer's discussion.

1. The new covenant is not like the old one.
2. The people did not keep the old covenant.
3. The new covenant will be in the people's minds and hearts (i.e., not on stone or leather).
4. The new covenant will signify personal relationship with God.
5. The new covenant will open direct access to God for everyone, not just a priestly class.

The author concludes in summary by saying that the trappings of the old covenant were about to be done away with. All of this would happen imminently...within 30 years.

***9:1 So indeed, the first covenant had right deeds of religious service and the holy adornment. For a tent was prepared: the first place was called the holy things, in which indeed were both a lampstand and the table, and where the putting out of the loaves took place; but behind the second veil was a tent which was called the holiest of things, which had a golden censer and the ark of the covenant, which was covered on all sides with gold and in which there was a golden pot which held the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tablets of the covenant. Now over the top of it were the Cherubim of Glory, overshadowing the place of atonement.***

***Now it is not for us to speak about these things part by part. But when these things were prepared in this way, the priests indeed always enter into the first tent to complete the religious services. But into the second tent, the high priest enters alone once a year, not without blood, which he offers on behalf of himself and for the ignorances of the people.***

Notice how the author has left (temporarily) comparing Jesus to the prophets and priests of the old system; now, (s)he is comparing the covenants themselves. The first covenant "had right deeds of religious service." That is, the first covenant had rituals; the new one does not. The first had a physical place of worship; the second does not. The writer describes this place of worship, including the areas into which only certain people could enter. The priests enter the holy place to perform religious duties, but the most holy place was only entered once per year--on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement--by the high priest. On that day also, the high priest would speak the name of Yahweh. On other days, no one spoke the name, for fear of accidentally profaning the Name. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest made the annual sacrifice on behalf of himself, and then on behalf of the people.

***8 The holy Spirit is pointing this out: that the way to the holy places was not made apparent while the first tent was still standing. It was an analog for the season which was standing. According to this, both gifts and sacrifices were offered which were not able to make complete (consciencewise) the one who performed the religious service. It was only laid down until a season of correction, being physical right deeds regarding foods and drinks and different ritual cleansings. But when the Anointed One, a high priest of the good things which are about to come, happened by (through the greater and more complete tent which was not handmade; that is, not of this creation), he entered once and for all into the holy places,***

*finding eternal redemption (indeed not through the blood of goats and bulls but through his own blood).*

*For if the blood of goats and bulls and a heifer's ashes, sprinkling those who were defiled, purify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much rather will the blood of the Anointed One--the one who offered himself spotless to God through an eternal spirit--cleanse your consciences away from deeds of death and toward religious service to a living God?*

In that earlier season, when the first covenant was in effect, the true way to the holy places was restricted. Only certain people could enter. The rituals and sacrifices that were performed were "not able to make complete (consciencewise) the one who performed the ... service." The rituals only temporarily appeased a person's guilt. They made the Jewish people feel better, but only for a short time. This system of rituals "was only laid down until a season of correction"--until the new covenant would replace the old. When the Messiah came, he entered (metaphorically) the true holy places, his sacrifice completing the system of sacrifices, so that the sacrificial system is no longer necessary.

The old system called for blood and ashes to (metaphorically) purify the sinful nature. The spotless sacrifice of Jesus, then, is more powerful. I.e., it is powerful enough to complete the system and to "cleanse your consciences". The "deeds of death"--the rituals that served as a reminder of sin--are no longer necessary. Jews now should turn "toward religious service to a living God." Their consciences should be free of guilt forever; they should concentrate on doing what God wants them to do with their lives.

*15 And for this reason he is a mediator of a new covenant: so that when death happened under the first covenant for the washing away of wanderings, those who were called might receive the promise of an eternal inheritance. For where there is a covenant, it is a necessity to carry out the death of the one who made the covenant. For a covenant is firm on the dead, since it is never strong while the one who made the covenant lives. Consequently, neither was the first one inaugurated without blood.*

Now, the author returns to Jesus as the antitype of the Levitical high priest. The author appears to be stretching the point somewhat here, when (s)he writes, "where there is a covenant, it is a necessity to carry out the death of the one who made the covenant." Here, he is likening Jesus to the sacrifices THEMSELVES, although just mentioning the priestly role. The sacrifice in Ex. 24 was a ratification of the covenant. By making the inaugural sacrifice, Moses accepted the covenant. In that sense, the covenant required the death of the oxen.

*For when all the precept according to the Torah had been spoken by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of the calves with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and he sprinkled it both on the scroll and on all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant whose precept God gave to you." Now also he sprinkled the tent and all the vessels of religious service in a similar way with the blood. And almost all things are cleansed in blood according to the Torah, and without blood forgiveness does not occur.*

When Moses inaugurated the covenant at Sinai, he sprinkled the calves' blood, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant." (This appears in Exodus 24, and the quote is from v.8.) This was a part of the ceremony of covenant ratification. The readers, knowing the books of Moses, were



expected to remember that Moses had indeed said that the blood ratified the covenant, and so, the author's point is not so far-fetched.

Then the author mentions that many things are cleansed using blood (usually by dipping hyssop in blood and sprinkling) under the first covenant. The Day of Atonement, mentioned earlier, requires a blood sacrifice, and so the author adds that under the old covenant, sacrifices were necessary. The sacrifices indicated the keeping of the covenant between God and his people. Leviticus 16 gives the precepts for Yom Kippur. In part: "on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. You will be clean before Yahweh from all your sins" (v.30). That section of the Torah details that the sacrificing of animals was central to the ritual of atonement. God required it.

***Therefore, it was a necessity indeed for the examples of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves are cleansed with better sacrifices than these. For the Anointed One did not enter handmade holy places, which are antitypes of the true ones. On the contrary, he entered into heaven itself to appear now on our behalf in God's presence.***

Now, the author again lays out the typical nature of the former sacrifices. Those sacrifices were "examples of the things in the heavens." But "the heavenly things themselves are cleansed with better sacrifices than these." Something better is required to purify the genuine, spiritual, instruments of worship: the Anointed One's sacrifice. Again, this is all within the metaphor of the old system. The author is still making comparisons to illustrate why and how the first covenant would be replaced by a new one. After Jesus' death, he ascended into the true holy places, which were used as types for the ones on earth. I.e., Jesus entered God's presence on everyone's behalf, acting in his role as high priest.

***25 This is not so that he would offer himself often, just as the high priest enters into the holy places every year with other blood, since it was necessary for him to suffer from the laying down of creation. But now, once and for all, he has appeared at the conclusion of the ages for a removal of sin through his sacrifice. And just as it awaits people to die once and for all, but after this there is a judgment, so also the Anointed One was offered once and for all to carry away the sins of many people and will come into view (without sins) a second time for salvation by those who are expecting him.***

***10:1 For the Torah, which has a shadow of the good things to come and the image of the matters, is never able to make complete the ones who come to it, with the same sacrifices every year that they offer in perpetuity. Since, wouldn't they have ceased to be offered otherwise, on account of the ones who served religiously no longer still having a consciousness of sins, having been cleansed once and for all? But in these things there is a reminder of sins every year. For there is an inability for blood of goats and bulls to take away sins.***

Jesus need not act as high priest once a year. On the contrary, he did this once and for all, bringing to completion the sacrificial system. (S)he writes that just as a person's death is "once and for all," Jesus' sacrificial death was "once and for all." He completed the system established by the Torah, which was "a shadow of the good things to come". The Torah was never able to "complete" the Jewish people. That is, it was never intended to be the final say from God; a second covenant, a complete one, was always in view. The Torah required perpetual sacrifices

until the establishment of the new covenant, the covenant that is now here under Jesus. In the old sacrifices, "there is a reminder of sins every year." A reminder of sins, because it is a reminder, cannot remove the guilt. The sins are not "fully" gone, because the guilt remains. The author is intimating that what God wants is that people live without a consciousness of sin: that they merely focus on God and not their faults and mistakes. The old system pointed out mistakes, requiring atonement for each act of wandering. The new system concludes the rituals of atonement.

*So, coming into creation, he says, "You did not want sacrifice and offering, but you supplied a body for me. You did not delight in a whole burnt offering, even for sin.*

*"Then I said, 'Look I am coming, God, to do what you want. In a heading of a scroll it has been written about me.'"*

*At the top of this, he says that, "You did not want sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings, neither did you delight." These things are offered according to a code. Then he says, "Look, I am coming to do what you want." He takes away the first thing so that he may establish the second. In this will, we have been made holy through the offering of Anointed Jesus' body once and for all.*

*And indeed every priest stands every day performing religious service and offering the same sacrifices often, which are never able to take away sins. But after this one offered one sacrifice for perpetuity on behalf of sins, he sat down at God's right side. He has been waiting for the remaining time until his enemies are placed as a footstool for his feet. For with one offering he has made complete for perpetuity those who are being made holy.*

When Jesus came, God had said of him, "You did not want sacrifice and offering." This portion of Psalm 40 is part of a Messianic psalm, one which illustrates the Messiah's whole and unwavering devotion to God. The author of this treatise intensifies the devotion by replacing "an ear" with "a body." The sense is the same: that God's Anointed One always listens to him, but as the present author quotes it, the implication is there that Jesus followed God with his entire self. The quote also contains mention that God never really wanted the sacrifices. What he wanted was for people to serve him. The sacrifices "are offered according to a code"--according to the code of actions, the Torah, that had been given under the first covenant. When the passage says, "Look, I am coming to do what you want," the author applies this to include replacing the first covenant to establish the more complete one as part of "what God wants" for his Anointed. In other words, the completion of the old covenant was part of the Anointed One's mission. The sacrificial system was completed "through the offering of Anointed Jesus' body."

The author further expands his/her theme. The sacrificial system could never really remove the sin (because the guilt remained), although the high priests from Aaron through Fani (Phinneas, the last high priest, c.68-70 CE) continued to offer sacrifices. Yet Jesus came and abolished the guilt by completing the system of sacrifices. This he did through one sacrifice of his own. The closing statements of this section harken back to the Davidic statement, "Yahweh said to my Lord...." Thus, the Messiah is where he should be: waiting for the enemies to be made into a footstool.

*15 Now also, the holy Spirit testifies to us. For after the saying, "'Now this is the covenant that I will covenant" with them "after those days', says Yahweh. 'Giving my codes on their hearts, I will also write them on their mind," there is, "'And I would by no means still remember their*

***sins" and their acts of lawlessness.' Now where there is a forgiveness of these things, there is no longer an offering on behalf of sin.***

Here is the application. The writer tells us that after indicating that a new covenant would be laid down, ratified in blood just like the first, (s)he reminds the readers that the guilt is gone. The readers should reflect on the quotation (from Jeremiah 31) that in the new covenant, God will forget the misdeeds of the people. The sins are gone, the guilt is gone. There is no need for any more sacrifices. Having reflected on the past: the necessity for change (to a more complete covenant); the removal of guilt under the new covenant; and the superiority of the new one over the first one--the author may now advise the readers on how to proceed.

***Therefore, brothers, since we have freedom of speech by the blood of Jesus to the point of entering the holy places (by this blood he made new for us a recent and living way through the veil, that is, his flesh), and since we have a great priest over God's house, we should come near with a true heart, wearing our trust fully, having our hearts sprinkled from a consciousness of evil, and having our bodies washed in clean water, we should hold fast to the acknowledgment of hope without nodding our heads. For the one who promised is reliable. We should also bear one another in mind out of a stimulation of love and nice deeds and not abandon gathering together (as it is the custom of some people). On the contrary, we should comfort one another, and rather a lot, as you see the day drawing near.***

Since the metaphorical barrier between the non-priest and God is now broken, since Jesus (the "great high priest" came), we should approach God "with a true heart." We should trust God fully. The reference to the sprinkling of hearts hearkens back to the Jewish rituals of purification. Here, our hearts have been sprinkled--cleansed. From what? From a consciousness of evil--i.e., from the guilt accompanying our sins. The washing of bodies is a reference to the OT cleansings and probably also to Christian baptism, which separate the Jews who had accepted Jesus as God's Anointed from those who did not.

The author reminds the readers of the dependability of God: "God is reliable." Why? Because the promises belong to the reader who will accept them. More will follow later on this topic. What should the readers do, then? "We should draw near" was the first thing. "We should hold fast" is the second. Hold fast to what? To "the acknowledgement of hope"; that is, to the fact that Jesus is who he is and that he brought an end to the former system. Do this "without nodding our heads"--without any wavering of any kind. Third, "We should bear one another in mind." In other words, times are rough. Others around you may be stumbling. They too may be prepared to give up what they know to be true in order to avoid persecution. Help them, so that they will not fall away. Get together with people. Don't abandon them, because we Christian Jews all need one another now--for strength.

"Comfort one another." Why? Because there is persecution from your own (Jewish) people, maybe even from your own relatives. And you will need comfort, especially "as you see the day drawing near"--the closer we get to the time of the destruction of the Temple and siege on Jerusalem and Masada. Next, the author sketches out the unpleasant alternative.

***26 If by choice we sin after taking recognition of the truth, no sacrifice on behalf of sin is left any longer. But there is some fearful expectation of judgment and fiery jealousy which is about to consume the ones who are against him. Anyone who set aside Moses' Torah "dies"***

*without compassion "at the testimony of two or three witnesses." How much worse a punishment do you think he will be worthy of: the one who has trampled on God's son and who has regarded the blood of the covenant in which he was made holy to be a common thing, and who as insulted the spirit of generosity? For we know the one who says:*

*"Vindication is mine. I will repay." And again,*

*"Yahweh will judge his people." It is a fright to fall into the hands of a living God!*

If "we" -- and the author is really pointing at the readers -- reject Jesus as Messiah although we know he really is, then what can we do? We are rejecting God's covenant knowingly. All that remains for us is to be judged and destroyed by God. The writer likens this to "dying under the testimony of two or three witnesses." It's worse, (s)he reckons, to knowingly reject God's son (i.e., the Messiah). This is "trampling" on him. It is "regarding the blood of the covenant [as] a common thing."

There were generally three classifications into which an item could fall. A holy item was consecrated for sacred use--dedicated to God. The blood of the covenant was therefore a holy thing. An unholy thing was something used for defilement or for an evil purpose. (No such things are mentioned here.) Everything else was "common." Anyone could touch, handle, or use it, because it had no special purpose. Here, the author equates knowingly rejecting Jesus (to gain public favor) as treating the blood of the covenant as a common thing. It is an insult to God, to the spirit of generosity. God will exact vengeance on such a person.

And so the quotes from Deuteronomy. These words come from the Song of Moses (32:35-6), sung as Moses was preparing to die--after the whole Torah had been given. Here, the author likens the Jews who reject their Messiah to the gentiles who opposed the Torah. God will protect his people from these individuals. In between the quoted portions lies, "the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom is coming swiftly." The author likens the destruction of Jerusalem (and the Jews who rejected him) to the corrupt nations that would be overthrown under Joshua.

*31 Now remember the earlier days, during which, after being enlightened, you underwent a large contest of sufferings. Indeed, in this you were put on a stage, in both reproaches and afflictions. Now in this you became partners of those who were overturned in same way. For indeed, you suffered together with the bonds, and you accepted the plunder of your possessions with joy, knowing that you have for yourselves better and lasting property. Therefore, do not cast away your freedom of speech, which has a great reward. For you have a need of endurance, so that, having done what God wants, you would obtain the promise. For in but "a very very little time," "what is coming will come and will not delay...But my just one, out of trust, will live." And "if he should shrink back, my soul does not delight in him." But we are not ones who shrink back into destruction. On the contrary, we live in trust, to the point of the soul's preservation.*

The letter again takes a more positive turn, calling to mind the things that the readers have already endured. This is almost to say, "What is coming is only like what you've ALREADY gone through." So stand up for yourselves, for Jesus. Keep speaking about him freely. The readers are close to obtaining "the rest".

Another summary follows. There are two choices. First, God is going to accomplish these things soon, and "my just one will live." Second, the one who shrinks back is doomed. One quote comes from the LXX text of Isa 26:20, and the other from Hab 2:3-4. Isaiah forecasts God

punishing the ungodly, but the good people need not fear. Habbakkuk promises vindication, "the one whose soul is not upright within him will fail, but my just one, out of trust, will live." Trusting God will save the readers from what the author sees as a situation similar to that predicted by Habakkuk. The prophet himself may have doubted that God was going to vindicate his people, but Habakkuk is promised that "it is coming and will not delay." Similarly, the author of the treatise to the Hebrews assures the readers that God will accomplish what he set out to do, and that those who follow their convictions, without shrinking back due to social pressures, these people will have the promised rest. Finally, (s)he assures the readers that (s)he knows that they are not going to shrink back and be destroyed. Instead, they will be preserved because they trust God.

***12:1 Now trust is a basis of what things are being hoped for, a reproof of practices that are unseen. For by it the older people have been testifying. By trust, we think that the ages have been supplied by God's declaration, so that what is seen has not happened out of the things which are apparent.***

This is not a definition of trust but a characterization of what comes from trusting God. Trust is a basis--a foundation--for the things we hope for (the rest, our vindication, etc.). It is a reproof of practices that are unseen. That is, when someone presents an example of trust (through hardship), that example is a reproof to those who are considering "shrinking back." Some may try to claim that their suffering is too great, but an example of someone enduring through suffering proves that person wrong. You CAN endure! Here are some examples of trust: By trust, "we think that the ages have been supplied by God's declaration." We didn't hear God speak creation into existence. We weren't there when he set aside the ages (the times and seasons in which things happen). But "we trust." "What is seen has not happened out of the things which are apparent." In other words, we know God created everything, even though we weren't there. We know this by trust.

***4 By trust, Abel offered a better sacrifice to God than Cain, through which it was testified that he was just, with God testifying about his gifts. And through it, though dead, he still speaks.***

Abel lived by trust. He offered the firstfruits of his flock. He gave the BEST for God, although his brother was jealous and hated him for it. His brother eventually killed him for it. It is through his trust that "he still speaks."

***By trust Enoch was changed so as to not see death. And he was not found, because God had changed him. For, before the change, he was attested to have well-pleased God. But without trust, he would have been unable to have well pleased. For it is necessary for the one who comes to God to trust that he is and that he will become a rewarder of those who seek him out.***

Enoch lived by trust. He "walked with God." He was pleasing to God, and this required trust in God. Enoch's trust was rewarded, and the implication of the final statement about Enoch is that all trust is eventually rewarded.

***By trust Noah, who had been warned about the things that were not yet seen and since he was devout, built an ark for the salvation of his household. Through it, he condemned creation and became an heir of the justification according to trust.***

Despite the ridicule of all the people, Noah built an ark. He trusted God, rather than bowing to public pressure. And his trust was vindicated. In this, "he condemned creation." That is, their failure to turn to God was recognized as such, because Noah proved that people then COULD be living for God.

***By trust Abraham listened when he was called to go out into the place that he was about to receive for an inheritance. And he went out, without being familiar with the place he was going.***

***By trust he traveled into the land of the promise as a foreigner, having dwelt in tents with Isaac and Jacob the co-heirs of the same promise. For he was expecting the city which had foundations, of which God was the designer and architect.***

Abraham left the comfort of his familiar surroundings simply because God told him to. He lived by trust, "without being familiar with the place he was going." He lived in tents, looking forward to a promise: "the city which had foundations" (compared to the tents).

***By trust also barren Sarah herself received power for the laying down of seed since she regarded the one who promised to be trustworthy, and she was beyond the season of full age. So also, there was born from one person (who had died in these matters) a progeny just like the multitude of stars in the sky, and like that innumerable sand which is at the seashore.***

Sarah was living by trust when she accepted the fact that God would make her fertile. And from her, all of the Jewish people were born. Her trust was rewarded.

***13 According to trust, all of them died, not having received the promises but having seen them afar off and having greeted them, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and travelers on the land. For the ones who say such things make it apparent that they are seeking a country. And if indeed they were remembering that land from which they had come out, they would have had a season to return. But now they are longing for a better, that is, a heavenly land. So, of them God is not ashamed to be called on as their God. For he prepared a city for them.***

All but one of the people who have been mentioned thusfar endured hardship (like Abraham leaving his security or Abel suffering under the hands of his brother) or ridicule (pregnant Sarah and Noah). And all of them (including Henoah) had their trust in God rewarded. The inclusion of Henoah is important, because the gift he received for his trust was a type of the eternal life offered by God to those who trust him.

"All of them died." They never saw the Anointed One, who was (as we have seen) the end of God's plan all along. But they knew God had a plan, and so they looked ahead. They knew that where they really belonged was with God; i.e., they trusted him over the things of this world. When they left their selfish natures behind, they didn't look back. They looked ahead to God, living for him, trusting him.

*17 By trust, when he offered up Isaak (when he was tested), the one who had received the promises was also offering the unique one. To him it was said that, "Your seed will be called in Isaak." He offered him reasoning that God is even powerful enough to raise up people from among the dead, from which also (by analogy) he recovered him.*

*By trust also, concerning future things, Isaak praised Jacob and Esau.*

*By trust, while dying, Jacob praised each of Yosef's sons and "leaned down on the high point of his staff."*

*By trust, when becoming complete, he reminded the sons of Israel about the Departure, and he made arrangements about his bones.*

*23 By trust, when he was born, Moses was hidden for three months by his parents because they saw that the boy was handsome, and they did not fear the directive of the king.*

*By trust, when he became mature, Moses denied being called a son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to have badness together with God's people than to have the enjoyment of sin for a season. He had regarded the reproach of the Anointed One to be greater than the wealth of Egypt's treasures. For he was looking away toward the reward.*

*By trust, he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger. For he was as strong as though he saw the invisible one.*

*By trust, he did the passover and the pouring of the blood, so that the slayer of the first borns would not handle them.*

*By trust they passed through the Red Sea, like through dry land. When the Egyptians took this test, they were swallowed up.*

*By trust the walls of Jericho fell after being surrounded for seven days.*

*By trust Rahab the prostitute was not destroyed together with those who were unpersuaded, having received the spies with peace.*

Further examples of trusting people are given. Abraham again, offering up Isaac simply because God said so, trusting that Yahweh would provide. After all, God had made a promise to him, and Abraham dwelt on that. Isaak, Jacob, Moses' parents, Moses himself, the people who followed Moses through the desert, Joshua and his army, and Rahab all demonstrated acts that required trust. These people, therefore, are here to testify that whatever situation you live in, reader, you can live a life of trust. The references together are a partial history of (the Jewish) people.

*32 And what should I still say? For the time will fail me to declare to you about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Yefthah, both David and Samuel, and the prophets. Through trust, these ones subdued kingdoms, worked what is right, obtained promises, shut lions' mouths, quenched the power of fire, fled sword blades, were empowered from weakness, became strong in war, beat down foreigners' fortresses. Women received their dead from the resurrection; but others were beaten to death, not accepting release so that they might obtain a better resurrection. Now others received a trial of mockings and beatings, and further, bonds and jailing.*

*They were stoned. They were sawn in half. They died by the slaughter of a sword. They walked around in sheepskins, in goat skins. They lacked; they were afflicted; they were mistreated.*

*The creation was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains and caves and the holes in the ground. And none of these, who were attested through trust, recovered the Promise. God saw to something better concerning us, so that they would not be made complete without us.*

Not wishing to make the treatise longer, the author merely alludes to others who demonstrated trust in God at some point in their lives. These acts of trust enabled people to "subdue kingdoms" and do other great deeds. The author even points out that "others were beaten to death, not accepting release so that they might obtain a better resurrection." Those who were killed accepted their deaths because they were living for someone greater than this world. People were mocked, beaten, jailed, stoned, and slain. We have the impression that none of these things had (yet) happened to the readers. And so the trust of the famous people in Jewish history is "a reproof" to those who would "shrink back" and dump Jesus.

Yet, "none of these...recovered the promise." These people, of whom the world was not worthy, were looking ahead to the Messianic Era. The promised complete covenant and rest was not theirs, but it was offered to "us" -- those who were fortunate enough to be born during (and after) the coming of Jesus. Their trust is vindicated by the coming of the Anointed One. Their trust is made complete by the people who gladly accepted him.

***12:1 Consequently also, since we have such a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, we should lay aside every encumbrance and the sin that wraps around us. And through endurance, we should run the course that is laid out for us, looking away at Jesus, the one who starts and finishes our trust. In return for the joy that had been set in front of him, he endured a cross, not thinking about the shame. And he has sat down at the right side of God's throne.***

And so, this section of the treatise comes to a close. Since so many trusting people are cheering us on, go through the great race of your life. Don't look at those things that are all around you, but look ahead to Jesus. Jesus, too, lived a life of trust, and he looked ahead at "the joy that had been set in front of him." He "endured a cross, not thinking about the shame." And his trust, too, was rewarded.

***3 For consider intently such a person, who has endured speaking against him by sinners, so that you would not be wearied or your souls grow faint. You have not yet agonized to the point of blood in your resisting sin. And you have forgotten the advice which is discussing with you as sons: "O my son, do not make scarce Yahweh's training, nor faint when reproved by him. For Yahweh trains the one whom he loves. Now he chastises every son whom he accepts." If you are undergoing training, God is treating you as sons. For is there any son whose father does not train him? But if you are without training, of which all have become partakers, surely you are bastards and not sons. And if indeed we have physical fathers as trainers and we revere them, by how much more should we be submissive to the father of spirits, and we will live?***

***For indeed they trained us for a few days, according to what seemed right to them, but he trained us for what makes sense, in order to receive his holiness. But every time of training indeed as to the present doesn't seem to be joyous, but sorrowful. But afterwards, it yields peaceful fruit of right to those who have exercised with it. So, prop up your wearied hands and enfeebled knees, and make yourselves level paths for your feet, so that the lame would not be turned out but rather healed.***

Rather than leave the subject entirely, the author is compelled to make a statement about suffering and patience. In summary, it should be regarded as spiritual training--as a learning opportunity. Jesus suffered and died, but you readers haven't been shedding any blood.



("Resisting sin" here is not turning away from Jesus.) Their complaints of persecution prompt the author to accuse them of forgetting what God said. The quotation is Proverbs 3:11-12, which is rather universally applicable. The author applies it to their present situation, indicating that by allowing the readers to go through trials, God is training them. These trials are teaching tools, intended to strengthen them in the long run. Anyone who doesn't undergo training of some sort isn't really a son to his father. Undergo God's training, writes the author, as you would undergo your physical father's. Training may not be fun, but it's necessary. So, "prop up your wearied hands and enfeebled knees, and make yourselves level paths for your feet." Persevere. Keep moving forward.

***14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord, overseeing that no one fall back from God's favor, that "no root of bitterness spring to the top and disturb you"--and many be defiled through it, that there be no sexual sinner or a profane person like Esau (who gave away his birthrights in exchange for the eating of one meal). For you know that also afterwards when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he had not found any place for mental change, although he with tears he sought it out.***

Now, here's the first admonition to the readers, beyond that of perseverance. Pursue peace. After all, the ones who are fighting them are their own fellow Jews, their countrymen, and perhaps their relatives. Seek peace and holiness. In order to make sure that the readers don't compromise their beliefs, the author adds that "no one fall back from God's favor." Watch out for one another, so that you don't compromise and leave your Messiah. The "root of bitterness" is not the emotion that we call bitterness. The expression harkens back to Deut. 29:18, where a similar warning was given by Moses about idolatry: "Beware, lest there be among you a man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turns away from Yahweh our God to go and serve the gods of those [gentile] nations; lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit." To the writer, watching out, so that no one would abandon their Messiah is equivalent to making sure they don't turn away from God to idolatry, for rejecting what they knew to be true to have a socially acceptable, ritualistic, religion, is turning away from God--tantamount to idolatry. There should be no "sexual sinner"--this is the male word for "prostitute", a word commonly used in the OT for those who turn away from God, especially to idolatry.

Esau was "profane" when he sold his birthright. The readers would be "selling their birthright" if they left their Messiah at this point in their lives. The author warns that by the time they want to return to Jesus, it may be too late. This seems to point to the imminence of the destruction of Jerusalem.

***18 For you have not come to a place that was touched and burned with fire, and to a cloud, and to darkness, and to a storm, and to a trumpet's resounding, and to a voice of declarations which those who heard begged that not a word be added to them. For they did not carry out the statement, "If even a wild animal should touch the mountain, it will be stoned." And, so frightening was that which appeared that Moses said, "'I fear greatly" and tremble." On the contrary, you have come to Mount Zion and to a city of the living God, a heavenly Jerusalem, and to tens of thousands of messengers--a full gathering, and to an assembly of firstborns who have been enscribed in the heavens, and to God (judge of all), and to the spirits of just people who have been made complete, and to a mediator of a new covenant of Jesus and of the sprinkling of blood which says a better thing than Abel's blood.***

Here follows another comparison. When the Jews approached Sinai (Ex 19), they were told that no animal should even touch the mountain. They saw a mountain touched by God, with thunder and lightning showering from it. This was accompanied by a trumpet's blast and thunder (Ex 19:16). This so scared Moses that he trembled. But the readers have a metaphorical Zion in the heavens and a spiritual city of believers, all of whom are regarded now as first born children by their Father. You, readers, are approaching God directly. The people have now been made complete by the coming of the second covenant. Abel's blood called for vengeance (Gen 4:10), but Jesus' blood calls for leniency, for generosity.

***25 See that you not reject the one who is speaking. For if those people who reject the one who warned them on earth did not flee, how much rather are we turning away from him who is warning us from the heavens? His voice shook the earth then, but now it has been announced, saying, "Still once and for all I am shaking not only the earth but also heaven." Now this: "still once and for all" points out removal of the things that are shaken, as of the things that were made, so that the things that are not shaken would remain. So, receiving an unshaken kingdom, we should have joy, through which we may give religious service which is well-pleasing to God, with reverence and piety. For also, our "God is a consuming fire."***

Now, at last, the author is prepared to summarize and to turn away from the "doom and gloom" of what might happen if they reject the Anointed One now. The final admonition in this regard speaks of the covenants themselves. When the affliction of the First Revolt comes, God will remove the first covenant entirely--the "things that are shaken." And the second, the "things that are not shaken," will be all that remains in God's sight. But the readers are receiving the unshaken kingdom, and therefore they should not lament but be joyful. Don't forget the covenant, though, for (as in Deut 4:24) God is a consuming fire and a jealous god.

***13:1 Let brotherly affection continue. Do not neglect the affection toward strangers, for through this some have escaped, having entertained messengers. Remember the prisoners, as though you were bound together with them. Remember those who are being mistreated, as though you yourselves were in their bodies also. Marriage should be honored among all people, and the bed should be undefiled; but God will judge sexual sinners and adulterers. Love of money should not be your manner; be satisfied with what is present. For he has said, "I will by no means leave you, nor by any means will I forsake you." And so we should be confident to say, "Yahweh is my helper, and I will not be afraid. What can a human being do to me?"***

Parting admonitions fill the final sections, although remnants of the major argument ("don't leave Jesus") are still present. "Let brotherly affection continue" probably was directed at their attitudes toward their fellow Jews. "Do not neglect the affection toward strangers" may be similarly directed. The prisoners and ones who are being mistreated, these are chiefly the envoys (apostles), the ones who are being taken to court and imprisoned because they promote Jesus. Respect marital commitment. Treat your wives/husbands properly. Do not covet money. We don't know to what extent the readers had problems with greed or adultery, but apparently, they was enough of a problem for the author to mention. Be satisfied with what you have, writes the

author, citing God's statement to Joshua (Josh 1:5) and Psalm 118:6 as indicative of God's general attitude toward his children.

***7 Remember those who are leading you, the ones who spoke God's message to you. View the result of their conduct and imitate their trust. Anointed Jesus is the same yesterday and today, and for the ages: do not be carried away by different and strange teachings.***

***For it is a nice thing for the heart to be established by favor, not by foodstuffs; those who walked in them did not profit by them. We have an altar from which those who provide religious service in the tent do not have the authority to eat.***

***For the blood of animals is carried into the holy places by means of the high priest. The bodies of these animals are burned outside of the encampment.***

***So also Jesus suffered outside of the encampment, so that he might make the people holy through his own blood. Now then, we should come out to him, outside of the encampment, carrying his reproach.***

***For we do not have a city here that remains, but we are hunting the one which is about to come. Therefore, through him we should offer a sacrifice of praise to God throughout everything. This is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Now do not neglect the doing of good and the sharing. For God is well pleased with such sacrifices.***

***Be persuaded by those who are leading you, and yield. For they are watching on behalf of our souls as though they were going to give an account. Do it so that they may do this with joy, and not with groanings. For that would be a complete chain for you.***

There is a structure in this section that parallels certain portions of the text with one another. Those "who are leading you" (v.7, 17) are the inspired teachers, the envoys and prophets who first told them about Jesus--the "ones who spoke God's message to you." Listen to them. Look at the godly lives they lead, and imitate their godly example. The message of Jesus the Anointed One is not going to change, so continue in what they taught you. The teachings they taught you from God are the real food, not merely Jewish rituals. Food is used as a representative of the entire system of rituals. Real sacrifices are not rituals. This knowledge of God, coming from miraculous gifts from God himself, is the "altar" where the sacrifices are made (metaphorically), and the source of our spiritual food. The author continues the analogy by comparing the slaughtered animals to Jesus.

The author urges the readers to "leave the encampment"--the security of the Christian community and to not be afraid to say what God told them through the Christian prophets. Their "city" is not a physical city like Jerusalem, and so they need not fear losing anything of value here. This is paralleled to Jesus' having been crucified outside the city walls.

The two things not to be neglected have to do with relationships with fellow Christians. Do good things for one another, and continue "the sharing," a word that elsewhere means the communal lifestyle of taking care of all those who are in need. Love for one another is a "pleasing sacrifice" to God.

Finally, we are back where the section started. The readers should allow themselves to be persuaded by the envoys and prophets (from v.7). Listen to these people, because they really care. The feelings of the envoys are so strong toward the readers that they care so much--as though they were going to have to give an account to God! Of course, this is not a literal accounting to God on the part of the Christian prophets, but they care for the readers with that

attitude. Since their feelings are so strong, the readers are asked to listen for their sakes as well, so that the readers wouldn't break the hearts of these people who care so much.

***18 Pray on our behalf. For we are persuaded that we have a good conscience, in all things wanting to conduct ourselves well. Now I advise you abundantly to do this, so that I would be restored to you quickly.***

***20 Now I wish that the God of peace***

***the one who led up the shepherd of the sheep from among the dead,  
the shepherd who is great in the blood of an eternal covenant,  
our Lord Jesus,***

***knit you together in every good thing, for you to do what he wants, doing among us what is well-pleasing in his presence through Anointed Jesus, to whom is the glory for the ages. Amen.***

***22 Now I advise you, brothers: bear with the message of the advice. For also I sent it to you in brevity. You know that I will see you if our brother Timotheos, who has been released, comes quickly. Greet those who are leading you and all of the holy ones. Those who are from Italia greet you. Generosity be with all of you.***

At last, we have the close of the treatise, taking letter form. "Pray on our behalf"--this includes not only the author(s) but all of the Christian envoys and prophets who are taking the brunt of the persecution. The author is familiar with the readers and wants to be able to see them again. The benediction refers to God as the God of peace--a reminder not to quarrel and perhaps an indication of the coming doom. God was the one who resurrected Jesus, the shepherd--a reference to Ezekiel 34ff., wherein the Anointed One is a Davidic shepherd. May God keep you "through Anointed Jesus," says the author, again reminding them that their Messianic covenant has arrived.

Finally, keep this message of advice--heed the words of this treatise. Apparently, the author jotted it down quickly because it was so needed. Timotheos had just been freed from captivity, and the author wanted to go to see the readers personally as soon as Timotheos arrived.

And so, the treatise concludes on a personal note. What the readers are supposed to gain from the writing is a boost to their trust. They were wavering, perhaps openly talking about leaving their Messiah to avoid being socially outcast. The author has reminded them of what various people have endured for God, both in the written Bible and by the Christians around them. The author has reminded them that what they learned about Jesus, and what they saw from him and from those who knew him, is the truth, and they should adhere to it. (S)he has given them a "pep talk," hoping and praying that they will not abandon the principles that God has taught them, because the time would come soon when Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed, and priestly Judaism along with it. If it can be summarized quickly, the treatise urges them to "do what you know is right."