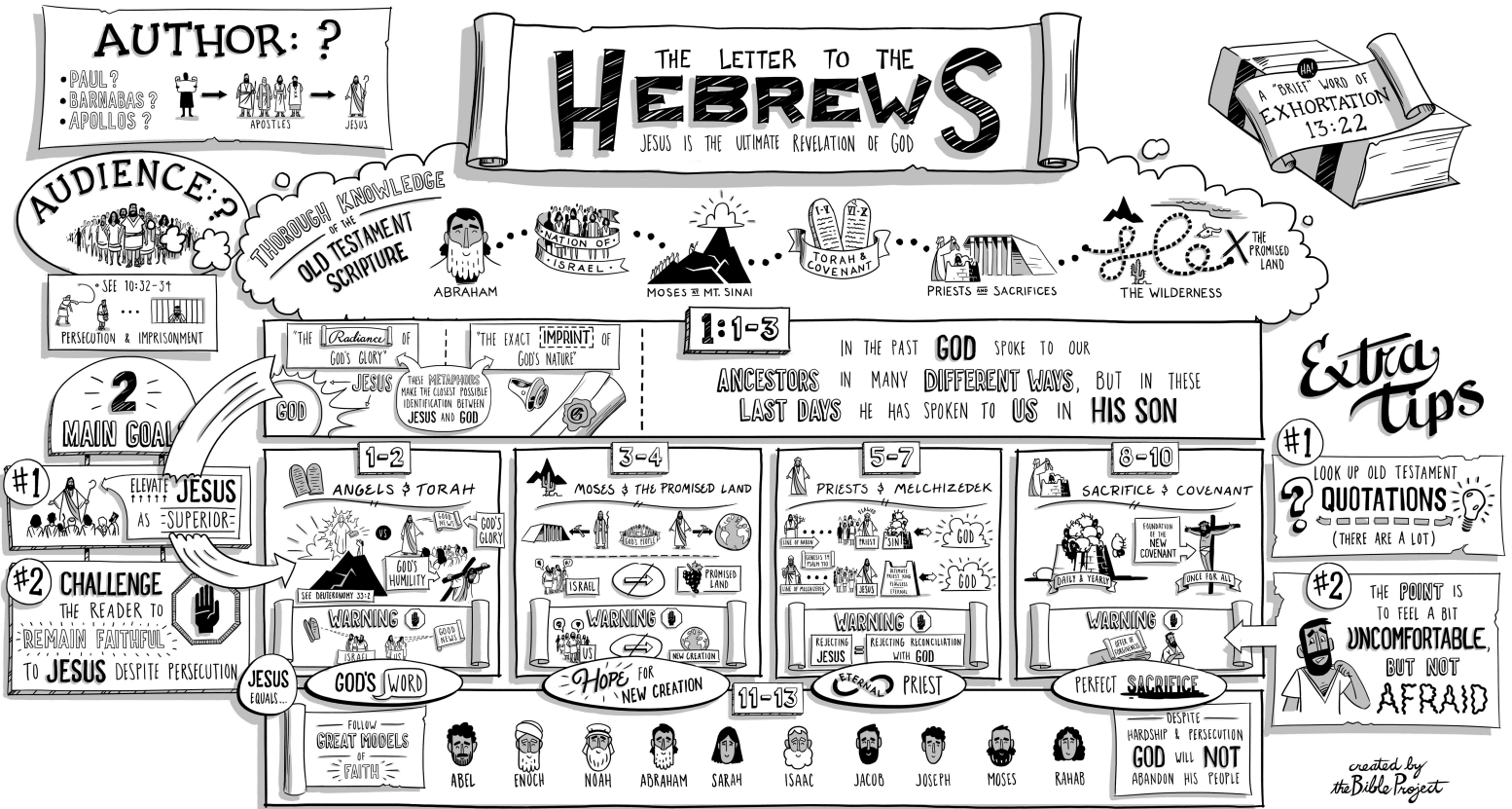


# The Letter to the Hebrews



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→ APOSTLES → JESUS

# THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

JESUS IS THE ULTIMATE REVELATION OF GOD

"FORGET" WORD OF EXHORTATION 13:22

**AUDIENCE: ?**

THROUGH KNOWLEDGE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE

• SEE 10:32-37 PERSECUTION & IMPRISONMENT



**1:1-3** IN THE PAST GOD SPOKE TO OUR ANCESTORS IN MANY DIFFERENT WAYS, BUT IN THESE LAST DAYS HE HAS SPOKEN TO US IN HIS SON

**1-2** ANGELS & TORAH

**3-4** MOSES & THE PROMISED LAND

**5-7** PRIESTS & MELCHIZEDEK

**8-10** SACRIFICE & COVENANT

**11-13** HOPE FOR NEW CREATION

**JESUS EQUALS...**

- ABEL
- ENOCH
- NOAH
- ABRAHAM
- SARAH
- ISRAH
- JACOB
- JOSEPH
- MOSES
- RAHAB

**THE [Resonance] OF GOD'S GLORY**

**"THE EXACT [IMPRINT] OF GOD'S NATURE"**

**JESUS MAKE THE CLOSEST POSSIBLE IDENTIFICATION BETWEEN JESUS AND GOD**

**THE [Resonance] OF GOD'S GLORY**

**ANGELS & TORAH**

**SEE DETERMINATION 3:32**

**WARNING**

**GODS HUMILITY**

**GODS GLORY**

**GODS WORD**

**FOLLOW GREAT MODELS OF FAITH**

**1-2**

**3-4**

**5-7**

**8-10**

**11-13**

**JESUS EQUALS...**

**WARNING**

**REJECTING JESUS**

**REJECTING RECONCILIATION WITH GOD**

**ETERNAL PRIEST**

**WARNING**

**REJECTING RECONCILIATION WITH GOD**

**PERFECT SACRIFICE**

**WARNING**

**PERFECT SACRIFICE**

**WARNING**

**PERFECT SACRIFICE**

**DESPISE HARSHNESS & PERSECUTION GOD WILL NOT ABANDON HIS PEOPLE**

**Extra Tips**

- #1** LOOK UP OLD TESTAMENT QUOTATIONS (THERE ARE A LOT)
- #2** THE POINT IS TO FEEL A BIT UNCOMFORTABLE, BUT NOT AFRAID

created by the Bible Project

## Introduction to the Letter<sup>1</sup>

### Author, Audience, and Title

The author of Hebrews neither names himself nor clearly designates his audience. The traditional title “to the Hebrews” reflects the ancient assumption that the original recipients were Jewish Christians.

The author’s identity has been a matter of significant conjecture throughout church history. In antiquity, authorship was attributed to figures such as Barnabas or especially Paul. However, several of the most astute church fathers recognized considerable differences in style and method of argument between this book and Paul’s named writings. Scholars have suggested other possible authors, such as Clement, Luke, or Apollos. However, most today concede that this author remains anonymous. It seems that the judgment expressed by Origen (d. c. A.D. 254) remains correct: “Who actually wrote the epistle, only God knows” (cited in Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 6.25.14). The author clearly knew his recipients and longed to be reunited with them (Heb. 13:19). They had a mutual friend in Timothy (13:23), and probably this was the same Timothy who ministered alongside Paul. The author was presumably male, since he refers to himself using a masculine participle (see 11:32: “would fail me to tell”). Since “us” included the author in 2:3 (the salvation “attested to us by those who heard”; also 2:1), it appears that he was not an eyewitness of Jesus. The author passed on the greetings of those “from Italy” (13:24). Scholars debate whether he was in Italy writing to the church elsewhere or was outside Italy (though accompanied by Italians) and writing back to an audience in Italy (possibly at Rome).

The audience’s social situation can be inferred from commands to “remember those who are in prison” and who are “mistreated” (13:3). Timothy himself had just been set free (13:23). Indeed, the author of Hebrews commended his audience for their former endurance of persecution, for their compassion on those in prison, and for having “joyfully accepted the plundering of your property” (10:32–34).

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<sup>1</sup> Taken with permission from the ESV Study Bible



The author warned against “strange teachings” in the church (13:9), and these teachings may have been related to the use of ritual foods (13:9–10). Moreover, he repeatedly called his audience to persevere in the faith and cautioned them about the danger of leaving the Christian communion, as he sought to show the superiority of Christ to Mosaic sacrifices and rituals (chs. 3–10). Hence the early church was likely correct to assert that Jewish Christians (as well as Gentiles who had previously been drawn to the Jewish religion) were the intended audience for this book (see “our fathers,” 1:1). Furthermore, such an audience would have well understood the book’s many citations and allusions to the OT (and would have shared in the writer’s frequent use of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the OT).

## **Date**

Hebrews was almost certainly written in the first century and probably before A.D. 70. Reasons for asserting a first-century date include the mention of Timothy (13:23), who was known to be active in the first century, and the influence of Hebrews (and its way of thinking) on 1 Clement (written c. A.D. 96).

The crucial issue in dating the book concerns whether the destruction of the Jerusalem temple (A.D. 70) had already occurred. Hebrews speaks of the Jewish sacrificial system as if it were a still-present reality (Heb. 7:27–28; 8:3–5; 9:7–8, 25; 10:1–3; 13:10–11), which does not seem likely after the cessation of the Jerusalem temple sacrifices in A.D. 70. Admittedly, Hebrews focuses on the Mosaic tabernacle rather than the Solomonic (or the Herodian) temple. Nonetheless, if the writer was attempting to convince his readers of the inferiority of the Mosaic system (and possibly dissuade church members from returning to Jewish practices), an obvious argument would have been to mention the cessation of the temple sacrifices, if they were in fact no longer taking place.

## **Theme**

Christ is greater than any angel, priest, or old covenant institution; thus each reader, rather than leaving such a great salvation, is summoned to hold on by faith to the true rest found in Christ and to encourage others in the church to persevere.

## Purpose, Occasion, and Background

The genre of Hebrews is unusual. The book is without an introduction or other early indications that it is a letter. Yet the final verses do pass on greetings and blessings (13:23–25), and the author speaks of having “written to you” (13:22). However, the author also identifies his work as a “word of exhortation” (13:22). The careful rhetorical progression of the book, along with its frequent practical exhortations, has led many to consider it a single sermon. Perhaps Hebrews is best understood as a sermon letter. Hebrews frequently encourages the audience to endure and warns against leaving Christ (2:1–4; 3:7–4:13; 5:11–6:12; 10:19–39; 12:1–29). These warning passages are interspersed throughout the book (see chart) and have noticeable structural similarities (esp. in terms of exhortation and threatened consequence). Around these passages the argument of the book progresses carefully. Moreover, these specific exhortations themselves flow out of the surrounding material. Thus the book is unified in both structure and intent. The warning passages exhort church participants to remain faithful. The more expository sections of the epistle show the superiority of Christ and his new covenant work to angels, Moses, the tabernacle priesthood, and the sacrificial system. The implication is that these are so inferior to Christ that it is futile to return to them (or to go anywhere else). Thus the book encourages the church to hold fast to its faith, because that faith is grounded in the most superior revelation.

The background of such exhortations must have been the audience’s need to continue enduring through persecution and the trials of life (e.g., ch. 12). They appear to have grown less attentive to Christian instruction (5:11–14); and some apparently have ceased regular attendance at their meetings (10:25). Nonetheless, the author reminds them of their past faithfulness and communal love in the midst of persecution (10:32–34). He encourages their faithfulness by careful exposition of the OT in light of the revelation in Jesus Christ.

The soteriology (salvation teaching) of Hebrews is rooted in its Christology—the Son of God became the heavenly high priest, who offered himself as a sacrifice once for all. Christ obtained salvation for all who approach in faith (6:1; 11:6; cf. 4:2), and such faith perseveres until it receives the promised eternal reward (6:12; 10:22, 38–39).

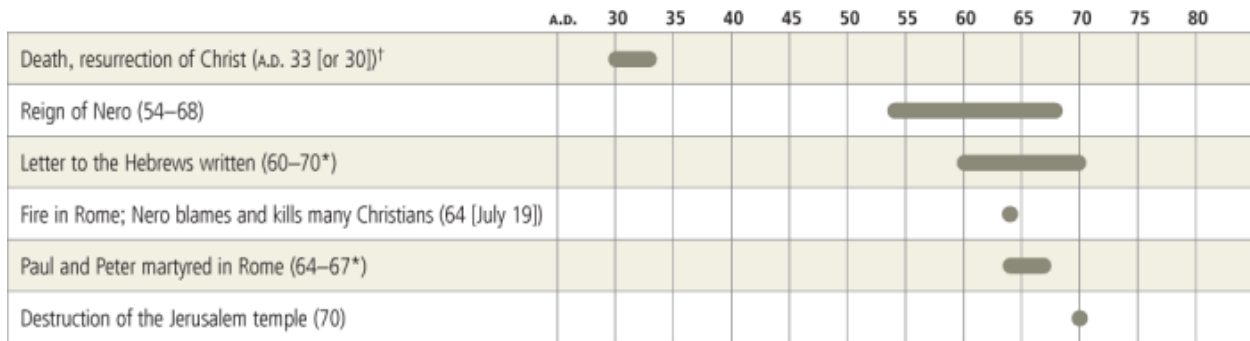
## **Key Themes**

1. Jesus is fully God and fully man (1:1-14; 2:5-18).
2. Jesus as Son of God reveals God the Father, is the agent of creation, and sustains all creation (1:1-14).
3. Jesus serves as the eternal high priest, who as a man sympathizes with human weaknesses, and yet who offered himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin (1:3; 2:10-18; 4:15-16; 9:11-10:19)
4. Jesus is superior to angels, to Moses and the Mosaic covenant, and to the earthly tabernacle and its priesthood (1:4-2:18; 3:1-6; 5:1-10; 7:1-10:18)
5. All humanity faces eternal judgment for sin (4:12-13; 9:27-28; 10:26-31)
6. Faith is necessary to please God and to participate in his eternal salvation promises. Faith requires conviction about the unseen realities of God and his promises. Such faith produces perseverance (4:2-3; 6:1, 12; 10:22, 38-39; 11:1-40)
7. Perseverance is necessary in the Christian life, and thus church participants are warned against a lack of endurance (2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39; 12:1-29)
8. God's promises are trustworthy, including his promise of eternal salvation (6:13-20)
9. With the advent of Jesus Christ, the last days have begun, though they await consummation at his return (1:2; 2:5; 4:9-11; 9:9-28; 12:22-29)

## **History of Salvation Summary**

Christ has accomplished final salvation, has brought the final word of God, and has become the final priest and the one atoning sacrifice to which the OT pointed. (For an explanation of the "History of Salvation," see the Overview of the Bible.)

## Timeline



\* denotes approximate date; / signifies either/or; † see *The Date of Jesus' Crucifixion*, pp. 1809–1810

## Literary Features

As noted above (see Purpose, Occasion, and Background), the book of Hebrews has affinities with the genres of both the epistle and the sermon. The first 12 chapters conduct a sustained theological argument about the superiority of Christ over a number of rivals and about the need to persevere in following this vastly superior Messiah. While following many ancient customs of rhetorical argumentation, these chapters can remind the modern reader of an essay with a thesis, a series of subordinate generalizations, and supporting proof consisting of data and commentary on that data.

The book of Hebrews is one of the most stylistically polished books in the NT. The writer is a master of imagery and metaphor, allusions to the OT, comparison and analogy, contrast, and long, flowing sentences that build to a climax and often use parallel construction of clauses.

The rhetoric of the book is partly argumentative, as the author conducts a sustained theological exposition such as modern readers might expect in a debate or in a theology book. The persuasive strategy adheres to one of the classical ways of arguing a thesis, which is to repeat the main idea often and from a variety of angles. In addition to the rhetoric of argument and debate, readers will find in the book of Hebrews a persuasive rhetoric of exhortation in which the writer appeals to his readers not to abandon their faith.

The central motif of the book is the formula “better,” with the cluster of words “better,” “more,” and “greater” appearing a combined total of 25 times. The comparative motif, in which one thing is declared superior to another thing, is the main rhetorical strategy of the book. A common rhetorical form by which the comparison is conducted is analogy, with something in the OT being declared similar to the person and work of Christ. But the analogies are not between two equal things; rather, the author argues from the lesser to the greater.

## **Outline**

- I. Jesus Is Superior to Angelic Beings (1:1–2:18)
  - A. The supremacy of God’s Son (1:1–14)
    - 1. Introduction: summary of the Son’s person and work (1:1–4)
    - 2. Evidence of his status as Son (1:5–14)
  - B. Warning against neglecting salvation (2:1–4)
  - C. The founder of salvation (2:5–18)
- II. Jesus Is Superior to the Mosaic Law (3:1–10:18)
  - A. Jesus is greater than Moses (3:1–6)
  - B. Warning: a rest for the people of God (3:7–4:13)
    - 1. The failure of the exodus generation (3:7–19)
    - 2. Entering God’s rest (4:1–13)
  - C. The high priesthood of Jesus (4:14–10:18)
    - 1. Jesus the great high priest (4:14–5:10)
    - 2. Pause in the argument: warning against apostasy (5:11–6:12)
    - 3. The certainty of God’s promise (6:13–20)
    - 4. Return to main argument: the priestly order of Melchizedek (7:1–10)
    - 5. Jesus compared to Melchizedek (7:11–28)
    - 6. Jesus, high priest of a better covenant (8:1–13)
    - 7. The earthly holy place (9:1–10)
    - 8. Redemption through the blood of Christ (9:11–28)
    - 9. Christ’s sacrifice once for all (10:1–18)
- III. Call to Faith and Endurance (10:19–12:29)
  - A. The full assurance of faith (10:19–39)
    - 1. Exhortation to draw near (10:19–25)
    - 2. Warnings against shrinking back (10:26–39)

- B. By faith (11:1–40)
  - C. Endurance until the kingdom fully comes (12:1–29)
    - 1. Jesus, founder and perfecter of faith (12:1–2)
    - 2. Do not grow weary (12:3–17)
    - 3. A kingdom that cannot be shaken (12:18–29)
- IV. Concluding Exhortations and Remarks (13:1–25)
- A. Sacrifices pleasing to God (13:1–19)
  - B. Benediction (13:20–21)
  - C. Final greetings (13:22–25)

## Getting a Sense of the Letter

Before doing anything else, please read through Hebrews in one sitting. This will help you get a crucial big picture view of the book. It should take you about 30-40 minutes. The writer says he has “written briefly” (13.22), so don’t be scared off by the 13 chapter divisions.

### 1. Comprehending the Message

- A. What are some key words that popped up over and over in your reading? Don’t worry about compiling an exhaustive list. Just note whatever you observed in a first reading.
  
- B. Using these repeating words as a guidepost, what’s your overall impression of the main message? Try not to rely on your previous study or phrases you’ve heard from others.

### II. Understanding the Author

- A. Despite abundant guesses about the identity of this book’s author, he remains a mystery. From the text of the book, explain what we do know about him.
  - a. 2.1-4
  
  - b. 13.18-25

### III. Putting ourselves in the shoes of the Hebrews

- A. What was it like to be one of the original readers?
  - a. What was their spiritual condition? Look at these Scriptures and explain.
    - i. 5.11-6.1
  
    - ii. 10.35-39

- b. What do we know about the past of these Christians? Use the passages to describe.
  - i. 10.32-34
  - ii. 12.4
- c. What were some currently dealing with at the time they received the letter?
  - i. 13.3, 23
  - ii. What are the implications of 10.36, 12.3, etc.?

## Chapter 1

**1** Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, **2** but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. **3** He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, **4** having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. **5** For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”? Or again, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son”? **6** And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, “Let all God’s angels worship him.” **7** Of the angels he says, “He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire.” **8** But of the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. **9** You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.” **10** And, “You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the



beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; **11** they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, **12** like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.” **13** And to which of the angels has he ever said, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”? **14** Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

### Guiding Questions

1. What are the differences between what happened “long ago” and what’s happened in “these last days”?
2. What is God’s Son like in vss. 2-4? What has He accomplished?
3. When the Hebrew writer quotes Old Testament Scripture (as he does frequently in vss. 5-13), he assumes his readers are familiar with the passages from which the quotations come. The following chart is an aid to discovering why these Scriptures are quoted.

Hebrews Passage	OT Quotation	Context of Quote	Why Hebrews Quotes It
1.5	Psalm 2.7		
1.5	2 Samuel 7.14		
1.6	Psalm 97.7 (probable location)		
1.7	Psalm 104.4		

Hebrews Passage	OT Quotation	Context of Quote	Why Hebrews Quotes It
1.8-9	Psalms 45.6-7		
1.10	Psalms 102.25-27		
1.13	Psalms 110.1		

4. Overall, what does this chapter teach us about Jesus?

## Chapter 2

**1** Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. **2** For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, **3** how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, **4** while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. **5** For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. **6** It has been testified somewhere, “What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? **7** You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, **8** putting everything in subjection under his feet.” Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. **9** But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. **10** For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. **11**

For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, **12** saying, “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.” **13** And again, “I will put my trust in him.” And again, “Behold, I and the children God has given me.” **14** Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, **15** and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. **16** For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. **17** Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. **18** For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

### Guiding Questions

1. Look carefully at the first warning section (vss. 1-4)
  - A. What danger is the Hebrew writer helping Christians avoid?
  
  - B. How can Christians avoid that danger?
  
  - C. Why should Christians take “what we have heard” so seriously?
  
2. What is the “world to come” that the writer refers to in vs. 5?

3. In vss. 6-8, the writer quotes from Psalm 8. Please go back and read the Psalm to help you understand Hebrews 2.
  - A. Why is David so astonished as he wrote Psalm 8?
  
  - B. In the Psalm, what does David mean by “You have put all things under his feet”?
  
4. What’s the point in the contrast between vs. 8 (“we do NOT yet see everything in subjection...”) and vs. 9 (“But we see him...”)?
  
5. How was Jesus “made perfect” through the suffering He went through? How does that affect us?
  
6. Notice the cluster of Old Testament quotations in vss. 12-13 and fill in the chart.

Hebrews Passage	OT Quotation	Context of Quote	Why Hebrews Quotes It
2.12	Psalm 22.22		
2.13	Isaiah 8.17-18		

7. According to vss. 14-17, what did Jesus do to save us from “lifelong slavery” (notice the Exodus language)?
  
8. Why did He have to “share in flesh and blood” (vs. 14) and “be made like his brothers in every respect” (vs. 17)?
  
9. Vs. 17 introduces us to the idea that Jesus is our “high priest.” In order to capture the significance of this, let’s refresh our minds about the Old Testament priesthood.
  - A. Only the sons of Aaron could serve as priests in Israel (Exodus 28.1). What were other qualifications of the priests, besides having the correct ancestry? Read Leviticus 21.1, 4, 7, 17-23.
  
  - B. What were the general duties of the priests? Look at Numbers 18.1-7 and Leviticus 10.11, Deuteronomy 17.8-9.
  
  - C. Beginning with Aaron, the high priest of Israel was special in a number of ways.
    - a. What responsibilities did he have that other priests did not? Read Leviticus 16 and Hebrews 9.2-7.
  
    - b. How was the high priest designated by God? Look at Leviticus 21.10.
  
    - c. High priests had extra purity laws that went beyond the other priests. What were they? Read Leviticus 4.3, Exodus 28.35-36.

## Chapter 3

**1** Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, **2** who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. **3** For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. **4** (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) **5** Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, **6** but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. **7** Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, **8** do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, **9** where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. **10** Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.' **11** As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'" **12** Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. **13** But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. **14** For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. **15** As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." **16** For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? **17** And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? **18** And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? **19** So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

## Guiding Questions

1. In what sense is Jesus an “apostle and high priest of our confession”?
  
2. How is Jesus greater than Moses?
  
3. The second warning section (3.7-4.13) begins with a quote from Psalm 95.7-11.
  - A. What is Psalm 95 about as a whole?
  
  - B. What events in Israelite history does Psalm 95 reference?
  
  - C. What’s the danger in that Psalm that the Hebrew writer warns his readers about?
  
  - D. How can we recognize the beginnings of unbelief in our own hearts?
  
4. In the text, how should Christians help each other avoid these dangers?
  
5. Disobedience is linked to unbelief in vss. 18-19. Why?

## Chapter 4

**1** Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. **2** For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. **3** For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, “As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest,’” although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. **4** For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” **5** And again in this passage he said, “They shall not enter my rest.” **6** Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, **7** again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” **8** For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. **9** So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, **10** for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. **11** Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. **12** For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. **13** And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. **14** Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. **15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. **16** Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.



## Guiding Questions

1. In the first eleven verses, what prevents people from entering God's rest?
2. What is the "promised rest" that the Hebrew writer talks about in this chapter?
3. What was the Sabbath day rest supposed to mean to the Jews who celebrated it every Saturday? Consider Exodus 20.8-11, Deuteronomy 5.12-15, and Psalm 92.
4. By doing his healing work on the Sabbath, what did Jesus teach the Jews about how He connects to that special day? In other words, how was the Sabbath about Jesus? Think about Luke 13.10-17.
5. When the writer describes the God's Word in vs. 12 as "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword...", how does that connect to the context of this chapter?
6. How is our "great High Priest" better than the high priests of the Old Testament?
7. Why can we have confidence as we approach God?

## Chapter 5

**1** For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. **2** He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. **3** Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. **4** And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. **5** So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”; **6** as he says also in another place, “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.” **7** In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. **8** Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. **9** And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, **10** being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. **11** About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. **12** For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, **13** for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. **14** But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

### Guiding Questions

1. What are the characteristics of high priests who are “chosen from among men”?
2. How does Jesus compare to those high priests?

3. How did He “learn obedience through what he suffered” (vs. 8)?
4. Can you think of specific occasions in Jesus’ life when He “offered prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears”?
5. The Hebrew writer mentions a man named Melchizedek for the first time in vs. 6 by quoting Psalm 110. There are only two OT Scriptures that talk about this person.
  - A. Read Psalm 110.
    - a. What is this Psalm about?
  
    - b. How is Melchizedek used in this Psalm?
  - B. Read Genesis 14.28-30.
    - a. What’s going on in the larger context of this chapter?
  
    - b. What details are we given about Melchizedek here?
  
    - c. What’s Abraham’s relationship to him?
  - C. How does the Hebrew writer link Jesus to this mysterious OT person?
6. The Hebrew writer flatly calls his readers “dull of hearing” (vs. 11). In context of these verses, what are the consequences of this? What causes spiritual dullness?

7. From the text, how should Christians guard against spiritual dullness?

## Chapter 6

**1** Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, **2** and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. **3** And this we will do if God permits. **4** For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, **5** and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, **6** and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. **7** For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. **8** But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned. **9** Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. **10** For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. **11** And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, **12** so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. **13** For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, **14** saying, “Surely I will bless you and multiply you.” **15** And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. **16** For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. **17** So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, **18** so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the

hope set before us. **19** We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, **20** where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

### Guiding Questions

1. Make a list of “elementary doctrines” that provide a foundation we should build upon?
2. What does the Hebrew writer say is “impossible” (vss. 4-6)?
3. What’s the point of the word pictures we see in vss. 7-8?
4. Why does the Hebrew writer hold out hope for these sluggish Christians in vss. 9-12?
5. Genesis 22.17 is quoted in Hebrews 6.14. What is Genesis 22 about?
6. What are the “two unchangeable things” that confirm the salvation God offers?
7. Where is our hope anchored?

## Chapter 7

**1** For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, **2** and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. **3** He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever. **4** See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! **5** And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. **6** But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. **7** It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. **8** In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. **9** One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, **10** for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him. **11** Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? **12** For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. **13** For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. **14** For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. **15** This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, **16** who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. **17** For it is witnessed of him, “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.” **18** For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness **19** (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. **20** And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly

became priests were made such without an oath, **21** but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever.’” **22** This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. **23** The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, **24** but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. **25** Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. **26** For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. **27** He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. **28** For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

### Guiding Questions

1. What does it mean that Melchizedek was “without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life”?
2. In vss. 1-10, how is Melchizedek superior to Abraham and the Levitical priests?
3. What was the relationship between the law of Moses and the Levitical priesthood?

4. Why was there a need for a change in priesthood? How do we know a change has taken place?
  
5. What are the unique and better characteristics of Jesus' priesthood? How do we benefit from that?

## Chapter 8

**1** Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, **2** a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. **3** For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. **4** Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. **5** They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain." **6** But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. **7** For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. **8** For he finds fault with them when he says: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, **9** not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. **10** For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. **11** And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his



brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. **12** For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." **13** In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

### Guiding Questions

1. What is "the point" in what the Hebrew writer is saying in vss. 1-2?
2. How is the ministry of Christ greater than the ministry of the Aaronic priests? How does the quotation of Exodus 25.40 help us understand the Hebrew writer's point?
3. The writer quotes from Jeremiah 31.31-34. Describe what is happening in the text of Jeremiah 31 around the quotation.
4. According to the passage quoted, how is the second covenant better than the first?
5. What does it mean that the first covenant is "becoming obsolete," "growing old," and is "ready to vanish away?"

## Chapter 9

**1** Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. **2** For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. **3** Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, **4** having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. **5** Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. **6** These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, **7** but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. **8** By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing **9** (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, **10** but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation. **11** But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) **12** he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. **13** For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, **14** how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. **15** Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. **16** For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. **17** For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. **18** Therefore not even the first

covenant was inaugurated without blood. **19** For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, **20** saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.” **21** And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. **22** Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. **23** Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. **24** For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. **25** Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, **26** for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. **27** And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, **28** so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

### Guiding Questions

1. Using the space below, draw a picture of the tabernacle and the various objects used in worship. Vs. 9 tells us that the first tent was symbolic. What was the symbolism behind the tabernacle objects?

2. In the beginning of the chapter, how does the Hebrew writer contrast the sacrifice of Jesus with the sacrifices of the Old Testament?
  
3. What happens as a result of Jesus' mediation of the new covenant?
  
4. There is much in this chapter about blood. What are the differences between the blood of Christ and the blood of animals?
  
5. When did the new covenant take effect? Why is this important for us to know?
  
6. Towards the end of the chapter, what are the contrasts between Jesus entering heaven and the Jewish high priests entering the holy places?

## Chapter 10

**1** For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. **2** Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? **3** But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. **4** For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. **5** Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; **6** in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. **7** Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’” **8** When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), **9** then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first in order to establish the second. **10** And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. **11** And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. **12** But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, **13** waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. **14** For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. **15** And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, **16** “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,” **17** then he adds, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” **18** Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin. **19** Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, **20** by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, **21** and since we have a great priest over the house of God, **22** let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. **23** Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he

who promised is faithful. **24** And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, **25** not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. **26** For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, **27** but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. **28** Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. **29** How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? **30** For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” **31** It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. **32** But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, **33** sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. **34** For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. **35** Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. **36** For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. **37** For, “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; **38** but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.” **39** But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

### Guiding Questions

1. Why was the law just a shadow of the good things to come?

2. Vss. 5-9 are quotes from Psalm 40. Please go back and read that short psalm of David. What is the psalm about? Why is the Hebrew writer using that psalm in his letter?
  
3. What are the consequences of Jesus' single sacrifice for sins? How does it affect us?
  
4. Explain the meaning of the following phrases:
  - a. "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith..." (vs. 22)
  
  - b. "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering..." (vs. 23)
  
  - c. "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works..." (vs. 24)
  
5. Vs. 26 begins the fourth warning section in the letter. What does the Hebrew writer mean by "sinning deliberately" (consider Numbers 15.30-31) and what are the serious consequences and implications of such actions? What do we learn about how a Christian forsakes the faith?

6. Vs. 30 quotes Deuteronomy 32.35-36. What is that Old Testament context and how is it being brought into this letter?
  
7. How did the Hebrew Christians act in the past that should have provided an example for their future?
  
8. The quote in vss. 37-38 comes from Habakkuk 2.3-4, 6). What was the book of Habakkuk about and how did it apply here to Christians who were tempted to give up?

## Chapter 11

**1** Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. **2** For by it the people of old received their commendation. **3** By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. **4** By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. **5** By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. **6** And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. **7** By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. **8** By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. **9** By



faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. **10** For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. **11** By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. **12** Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore. **13** These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. **14** For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. **15** If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. **16** But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. **17** By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, **18** of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." **19** He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. **20** By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. **21** By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. **22** By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones. **23** By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. **24** By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, **25** choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. **26** He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. **27** By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. **28** By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them. **29** By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. **30** By faith the walls of Jericho

fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. **31** By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies. **32** And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— **33** who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, **34** quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. **35** Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. **36** Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. **37** They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— **38** of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. **39** ¶ And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, **40** since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

### Guiding Questions

1. Why does the Hebrew writer begin to talk about the faith of many Old Testament individuals? Why would this be helpful for his readers?
2. According to the text, what is faith and what does it do?
3. How was faith demonstrated in the following lives? Put the Biblical character description into your own words and try to understand why these particular people/events were selected as examples.

- a. Abel:
  
- b. Enoch:
  
- c. Noah:
  
- d. Abraham:
  
  
- e. Sarah:
  
  
- f. Isaac:
  
  
- g. Jacob:
  
  
- h. Joseph:
  
  
- i. Moses:
  
  
- j. People of the Exodus:
  
  
- k. Israelites who went into Canaan:

- l. Rahab the prostitute:
  
- m. Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets:
  
- n. What is the climactic point the Hebrew writer wants us to understand?

## Chapter 12

**1** Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **2** looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. **3** Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. **4** In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. **5** And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. **6** For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” **7** It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? **8** If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. **9** Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? **10** For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. **11** For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. **12** Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, **13** and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not

be put out of joint but rather be healed. **14** Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. **15** See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; **16** that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. **17** For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. **18** For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest **19** and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. **20** For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” **21** Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.” **22** But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, **23** and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, **24** and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. **25** See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. **26** At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” **27** This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. **28** Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, **29** for our God is a consuming fire.

## Guiding Questions

1. How are the original readers (and us) supposed to “lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and run with endurance”?
2. What is the discipline of the Lord? How does the quote from Proverbs 3.11-12 help us understand it? How should we respond to His discipline?
3. How do vss. 12-13 frame the rest of the instructions to follow?
4. How can we learn from the example of Esau?
5. What’s the contrast between the mountain we’ve come to and the mountain the Israelites came to?
6. The fifth and final warning section begins in vs. 25 and runs through vs. 29. How can we avoid the danger of “refusing him who is speaking”?

## Chapter 13

**1** Let brotherly love continue. **2** Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. **3** Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. **4** Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. **5** Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." **6** So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" **7** Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. **8** Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. **9** Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them. **10** We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. **11** For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. **12** So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. **13** Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. **14** For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. **15** Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. **16** Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. **17** Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. **18** Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. **19** I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner. **20** Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, **21** equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. **22** I appeal to

you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. **23** You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon. **24** Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings. **25** Grace be with all of you.

### **Guiding Questions**

1. How do the first several verses of chapter 13 have to do with the first verse?
2. How do Christian leaders help God's people in their faith?
3. Why is verse 8 important to understand?
4. How should we go to Jesus outside the camp and bear his reproach?
5. What kind of sacrifices is God looking for?
6. What should we recognize about our leaders and how should we interact with them?





## **The Promise of a Sabbath Rest**

*David McClister*

The Bible has many ways of telling its own story. Some of those ways are explored in other lectures on this program. In this study we will explore one of those ways: the story of the Sabbath. There truly is a sense in which the plan of salvation is the story of the Sabbath rest of God. Our aim here will be to explore this rich Biblical theme in order to try to understand its meaning and significance.

### **Clues to the Meaning of the Sabbath**

There have been some attempts, primarily by liberal critics, to find the origin of the Biblical Sabbath in the cultural milieu of the ancient Near East. These attempts, however, have not been fruitful (Hasel 850). The Code of Hammurabi, a Babylonian legal text dated to about 1800 B.C. and which is similar to many of the Mosaic regulations, has nothing concerning a day of cessation from labor. The closest thing to the Sabbath that we know of in any other ancient Near Eastern culture appears in the Babylonian calendrical system in which the king, his physician, and his magician were not allowed to work on each seventh day of the months Elul and Marcheshwan (Lohse 2), but this has nothing of the character of the Biblical Sabbath. It was not observed every week, nor was it imposed on everyone, and there is nothing of the idea of a holy day. Others have proposed parallels between the Biblical creation story and the Babylonian myth *Enuma Elish*, in which Marduk and El both are said to rest (Wallace 237–41). These similarities, however, are strained (Jaki 39), and one could just as easily argue that the similar features in the Babylonian texts came from the original creation account preserved in Genesis. The fact is that the Israelite Sabbath was truly unique in the ancient world.

The story of the Biblical Sabbath begins with the opening scene of the Bible, the creation of the universe by God. After the description of God's creative activity we read "By the seventh day God completed His work which he had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which he had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made" (Gen. 2:2–3 NASB). Here begins the concept of the seventh day as a day of rest. Yet here immediately we are forced to come to grips more precisely with the Biblical idea of rest. God did not rest because He was exhausted, for as Isaiah said, "the Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired" (40:28). Nor was God's rest a cessation from all activity, for Jesus plainly said that God has been working since the creation, including on the Sabbath day (John 5:16–17). Even the Mosaic Sabbath was not a complete cessation of all activity (more on this below). Rest, then, is something else.

Before we come to that however, we should notice that God's rest on the seventh day of the creation week is no incidental part of that narrative. The links within Genesis 2:1–3, and with the account in chapter one, are too strong to allow us to read Genesis 2:2–3 in a casual way. We have "completed" in 2:1, followed by "completed" in 2:2. "His work" in 2:2 is repeated in 2:3. "Seventh

day” (which appears twice in 2:2) is followed by the same phrase in 2:3, and “rested” in 2:2 is likewise picked up again in 2:3. “Created” in 2:3 relates the passage to 1:1, as does the phrase “the heavens and the earth” in 2:1. Even more, the completion of creation in 2:1 leads naturally to God’s rest in 2:2, which in turn naturally leads to the sanctification of the seventh day in 2:3. “The tight sequence of argument” in this passage “cannot be broken so lightly” (Wallace 237). It is clear, then, that Moses intended to show that the origin of the Sabbath lay in God’s rest at the end of the creation week. It was an integral part of the original order of things.

It must not escape our notice that God rested at the *end* of His creative work. This was not just because God simply finished all He had set out to do. The last thing God did before He rested was He “created man in His own image” (1:27). Of all earthly creatures that God made, only man was made in God’s image, which means that only man was endowed with a spirit capable of fellowship with God who Himself is spirit. Note also that immediately after the statement about God resting on the seventh day (Gen. 2:3) comes the more detailed account of the formation of man, the goodness of the garden, and God’s terms that would sustain Adam’s life (2:4ff). God’s rest must be understood in light of this sequence, for this is the first Biblical clue concerning the meaning of the Sabbath. When God entered into His rest after creating the world, it was with the intention of enjoying fellowship with the man He had made with the capability of that fellowship. God had placed Adam and Eve in a place that was ready-made for them, a place that would sustain them comfortably. All they needed to live was provided for them so they would not be burdened with having to labor for their survival. In such an environment God had made it possible for man to live without giving all his time, energy, and thought to staying alive. With their survival provided by God, Adam and Eve were supposed to direct their attention to God. Given their circumstances, it should have been relatively easy. Adam and Eve had no reason to distrust God, and God’s provision of all their needs in a productive, beautiful garden was proof that they could, and should, trust Him.

This brings us to another clue concerning the significance of the Sabbath. After the creation account comes the story of the sin of Adam and Eve. The fellowship God wished to have with man did not materialize. Adam and Eve were deceived into a distrust of God, sinned, and were expelled from Eden. One then searches in vain through the rest of Genesis and the first half of Exodus before encountering the next mention of the Sabbath. (The closest we get is with Noah, whose name is a form of the Hebrew word for *rest* and of whom it was said in Genesis 5:29, “This one will give us rest from our work.” However, Noah has his downfall in Genesis 9:20f, and there is no Sabbath ordinance that comes from the story of Noah.) The introduction and rise of sin in the world meant that God was unable to enter into a fellowship with man. Only when God brought Israel out of Egypt to make them His own people do we again begin to hear of a Sabbath. So after Israel crossed the Red Sea and entered into the wilderness of Sin, God began to lead them to Sinai where He would enter into a covenant with them, a covenant that created (and had provisions to maintain) a fellowship between them and God. On the way to Sinai God began to feed them with manna, and with the coming of the manna came the first mention of a Sabbath rest since the creation. The command to do no work at all did not come at this time, but it certainly is foreshadowed here. God said that on the seventh day no manna would come (Exod. 16:25), thus making the work of gathering manna impossible. On the sixth day the Israelites were to gather twice as much as they normally needed. Only on the sixth day would the manna not rot on the next day (16:5, 19f, 24). So the Israelites gathered no manna on the seventh day (for there was none to gather), and Moses records “so the people rested on the seventh day” (Exod. 16:30).

There are two important things to notice from this account. First, there is the idea that the Sabbath was a time when the Israelites were relatively free from the concerns of their physical existence. It was a day in which they lived not because they had worked on that day, but because God blessed them. It was the day they lived by God's hand and not their own. This echoes the story of Genesis 1–2, where God provided everything Adam and Eve needed in the garden of Eden. God was doing for Israel with the manna what He had done for Adam and Eve with the garden. This brings us to the second point. God provided Israel with an abundance of manna on the sixth day for the same purpose He had provided Adam and Eve with the garden: that the Israelites might not be distracted with their survival and instead turn their attention to God. The Sabbath was a day in which they were called upon to demonstrate their faith and trust in God. Before the manna first came, God said “I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily” (Exod. 16:4–5). It required trust on Israel's part to remain in the tent on the seventh day and believe that the previous day's supply of manna would get them through that day (when every other day the manna would not). They were to trust that God would provide for them, and God proved Himself trustworthy by sending the extra manna on the sixth day and preventing it from rotting on the Sabbath. This was an opportunity for Israel to live by faith in God, which was the very thing that God had desired from man since the creation.

The Law revealed at Sinai made the connection between Sabbath and fellowship with God more explicit. While there is much about the Mosaic Sabbath regulations to notice, we will have to content ourselves with a few key considerations. First, while the Sabbath day was commanded in the decalogue and thus formed a pillar of Israelite law, more instructions for the Sabbath come in Exodus 31. This is not a case of poorly organized laws. The ten commandments were a kind of index to the more detailed laws that followed (Kaiser 129). Furthermore, again the sequence of the material is instructive. It is not without significance that the Sabbath regulations in Exodus 31 come immediately after the instructions for building the tabernacle in chapters 25–30. The juxtaposition of the tabernacle and the Sabbath is another important clue as to the character of the Biblical Sabbath. The Sabbath was about worship, just as the tabernacle was about worship. Thus the regulations for the *time* when Israel was to worship God (the Sabbath) came in the same context as the instructions for the *place* where God was to be worshiped (the tabernacle). This same juxtaposition of tabernacle and Sabbath laws appears in Leviticus 26:2–9, where God plainly ties the two together when He says “You shall keep My Sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary” (vs. 2). The worship character of the Sabbath is further underscored by the fact that on the Sabbath day the priests not only continued to do their service of worship in the tabernacle, but the Law required additional sacrifices for the Sabbath day (Num. 28:9–10). In other words, there was “more” worship on the Sabbath day than on the other six days, and this highlighted the fact that the Sabbath was a special day for man and God to enjoy each other's fellowship.

We may also remind ourselves that the fourth commandment explicitly recalled God's rest on the seventh day of the creation week (Exod. 20:8–11; 31:12–17). The verbal links between Exodus 20:8–11 and the creation story reinforce the connection. The words *seventh day*, *bless*, *sanctify*, *make*, and *work* appear in both texts (Hasel 851). As we noted above, the Sabbath was an integral part of the original order of things. This should not be mistaken to mean that the observance of the Sabbath day is for all time. Instead it means that part of God's original design in creating the world was to enter into fellowship with man. When God connected the Mosaic Sabbath with the creation account, this was to make clear that God was offering to Israel what he had originally offered to

Adam: a relationship with Himself. It was God's intention to have a people and to enjoy His relationship with that people. Adam refused to enter into that relationship, so God's Sabbath rest had gone unrealized since that time. The opportunity to enjoy what Adam rejected was now being given to Israel. God was still seeking to enter into His rest, His fellowship with man. When God gave Israel the instructions for the tabernacle, God was providing the means by which Israel could enter into God's rest.

It is sometimes noted that there are actually two reasons for the Sabbath given in the Law of Moses. As noted above, the first reason is that the Israelite Sabbath imitated (or more properly, was designed to realize) God's rest on the seventh day of creation (Exod. 20:8–11; 31:12–17). The second reason is given in Deuteronomy 5:15. It says "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to observe the Sabbath day." Here the reason for the Sabbath is to commemorate the freedom of the exodus. Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes apparent that these are not two different reasons, but two ways the Bible has of speaking of the same thing. The exodus itself is described in terms of the creation. For example, in Isaiah 43:15–17 God refers to Himself as the creator of Israel, and then proceeds to describe the exodus from Egypt. In Psalm 74:12ff the Psalmist speaks of God's "deeds of deliverance" (which certainly includes the exodus) in words that could equally describe the creation of the world. In both the creation and exodus accounts God separates the waters and makes dry land appear for the benefit of His people. In both, God "conquers" the waters and gathers them into one place. Exodus 15 says that the flowing waters of the Red Sea "stood up like a heap" when God parted it, and that same term ("heap") is used in Psalm 33:7 of God's gathering of the waters in the creation. In both accounts God provides objects of reference in the sky for both day and night (in the creation: sun and moon; in the exodus: the pillars of cloud and fire), and in both accounts there is the idea of God bringing a new thing into existence (creation: the world; exodus: Israel as God's people). Time on earth began with the creation, and the Israelite calendar was reset to zero the month of the very first Passover (Exod. 12:2; cf. 1 Sam. 8:8; 1 Kings 6:1). Most of all, in both accounts there is the idea of God acting or doing something so that, when God is finished, man may have a relationship with God. In the beginning a good world was made for man, and man was placed in that good environment where all his needs were provided so that he might have every reason to trust in God and enjoy His relationship with His creator. Similarly, in the exodus (and the plagues against Egypt that preceded it) that generation of Israelites saw God's power at work, and their witnessing of His power against Egypt on their behalf was supposed to instill in them a sense that they could trust God to care for them (cf. Exod. 19:4; Deut. 11:2–7). God then brought them to Sinai for the purpose of entering into a covenant relationship with them (called a "rest" in Exod. 15:13). The exodus, then, was patterned after the creation of the world. In both events God made a new situation, and when He was finished there existed a circumstance where man and God could live in fellowship together. Therefore Deuteronomy 5:15 is not a second reason for the Sabbath, but is actually another way of relating the Sabbath to the creation.

The Sabbath regulations reached their Old Testament climax, as it were, in the instructions for the Sabbath year (Lev. 25:3–7) and the Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:8–28). The Sabbath year was every seventh year, and the Jubilee came after every seventh Sabbath year (or every fifty years). In the Sabbath year Israel was not to plant crops. In an agricultural society, this surely was a tremendous challenge! God's promise was that the land would produce enough on its own to sustain them, and Israel was called upon to trust God and His promise (and live like it). That is, Israel was to practice for an entire year what they normally practiced for one day each week

(especially as seen in the Sabbath regulation given when the manna came). The highlight of the Sabbath concept, however, comes in the Jubilee. The Jubilee year is specifically called a year of release (Lev. 25:10). Land that had been forfeited through debt was returned to the original clan that owned it, and people who had become slaves because of debt were freed from service. Also, like the Sabbath year, there was to be no planting or sowing. This meant that every fifty years the Israelites faced a period of about three years in which they did not have an ordinary harvest. They could not sow in the (seventh) Sabbath year, and then they could not sow the next year either (for it was the Jubilee year). They could sow the year after the Jubilee year, and then they had to wait for the harvest. So God said “But if you say, ‘What are we going to eat on the seventh year if we do not sow or gather in our crops?’ then I will so order My blessing for you in the sixth year that it will bring forth the crop for three years. When you are sowing the eighth year, you can still eat old things from the crop, eating the old until the ninth year when its crop comes in” (vss. 20–22). Just as Eden provided Adam and Eve with all they needed, and just as God provided an abundance of manna on the sixth day to cover Israel’s needs on the Sabbath, so would it be on a larger scale in the Jubilee cycle. We should also note that the Jubilee cycle was observed on a smaller scale in the Feast of Weeks. The fiftieth day (that is, the day after seven Sabbath days) after the harvest of the firstfruits was a special day of worship on which no work was allowed and special sacrifices were offered (Lev. 23:10–21).

While we are thinking about these things we should return to the Biblical concept of rest, which is at the heart of the meaning of the Sabbath. Perhaps the first thing that comes to our minds when we think of rest is a cessation of activity, even in the sense of inactivity. This, however, does not do justice to what the Biblical writers meant by this term. In fact, Genesis 49:15 shows that one could have “rest” even though one was working hard. Also, as Jesus pointed out in Matthew 12:5, “Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent?” As noted above, the priests actually had more to do on the Sabbath than on regular weekdays. The Sabbath certainly was not a day of inactivity for them. Consider also that the rest the Israelites were promised in Canaan (Deut. 3:20) certainly did not mean they would not have to work. They would have to sow, harvest, cut wood and draw water to survive. Even when God rested on the seventh day of the creation week, this does not mean that God stopped doing everything, for Jesus, responding to a complaint of His healing on the Sabbath, said “My Father is working until now” (John 5:17).

Rest in the Biblical sense does not mean a cessation of activity, but instead refers to “the ideal living condition in the promised land” (Robinson 42) where one’s activity is not burdensome but is blessed by God and productive. This brings us to an important fact at which our observations above on the Sabbath and Jubilee years has hinted: there is a strong connection in the Old Testament between *rest* and *the land*. One form of the Hebrew word for *rest* (*nahala*) “is used almost as a synonym to ... the promised land of Israel” (Robinson 35). Deuteronomy 12:9f; 25:19; Joshua 1:13; 22:4 are some examples. What made the land a place of rest was the fact that there the Israelites would enjoy a freedom from the oppressive slave labor they knew in Egypt and their work in the land would be repaid with an abundance of goods. They would still have to work, but their labors would bring bountiful harvests (see Deut. 28:2–13). The character of the land itself as fertile and productive, “flowing with milk and honey,” provided a measure of this rest to Israel, and God’s provisions for His people in the Sabbath and Jubilee years were extraordinary demonstrations of this very idea. Again, this is rooted in the scene of the bountiful garden of Eden, and later echoed in God’s provision of abundant manna for Israel on every sixth day in the wilderness.

To rest in the Biblical sense, then, was to live in a situation where one's work was pleasurable and productive, and it also involved enjoying a situation of safety and peace, where one could settle down. Again, Genesis 49:15 is instructive. It says "When he saw that a resting place was good and that the land was pleasant, he bowed his shoulder to bear burdens, and became a slave at forced labor" (NASB). What Issachar saw as good was the opportunity to settle down in the land, and for that he was willing to take up forced labor (Robinson 35). The Hebrew verb *nuach* (often translated *rest* in our English Bibles) has exactly this connotation of "settling down" in several places, as in Exodus 10:14 and Isaiah 7:19. In the case of the Israelites, the rootless and vulnerable existence they knew in Egypt would, in the promised land of rest, be turned into a condition of settlement and tranquility (Oswalt 1133). Thus in Deuteronomy 12:10 and 25:19 *rest* refers to peace, the cessation of war. Generally the word refers to a condition of remaining in a situation (see Judg. 2:23). Rest, then, also involves the idea of continuance, and when used of the Sabbath it suggests a continuing relationship between man and God. Again, the Sabbath and Jubilee years especially highlighted the long-term nature of rest when Israelites were to spend an entire year (not just one day a week) of their lives living off of God's gracious provision, not working in the fields but instead devoting their time that whole year to God.

A further significance of the connection between *rest* and *the land* is seen in the fact that this same word (*nuach*) is used when God speaks in Psalm 132:8, 13–14 of Zion as His resting-place. That is, Zion was the place where God settled among His people. This passage is especially instructive, because Zion was not just the place where God Himself rested, but was preeminently the place where God and Israel met in fellowship, and the erection of a permanent structure there for God's dwelling-place indicated that God was settling down in the midst of Israel for a long-term relationship. That is, God's rest was institutionalized in the tabernacle/temple. There was already a hint of this concept in Numbers 10:33. When Israel left Sinai "the ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them a three days' journey to provide rest for them." Already the presence of God (which was centered around the ark of the covenant) was being associated with Israel's rest. The building of the temple turned this into a more permanent reality.

Living in a land where one could enjoy a continuing situation of freedom from oppressive labor specifically meant that time would be available for the worship of God. This is especially apparent from Deuteronomy 12:9–11, where Israel's entering into rest means going to the land where God would be worshiped. The text says "for you have not as yet come to the resting place and the inheritance which the Lord your God is giving you. When you cross the Jordan and live in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies around you so that you live in security, then it shall come about that the place in which the Lord your God will choose for His name to dwell, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution of your hand, and all your choice votive offerings which you will vow to the Lord." At a particular place in that land God would cause His name to dwell, and there Israel would present offerings to the Lord (vs. 11). This would be the essence of Israel's rest in God. Yet it is important to note that while the land and God's rest are closely connected in the Old Testament, we must not make the mistake of thinking the connection amounts to an equation of those terms. That is, God wanted Israel to rest in the land, and the land would be the place where the rest would be achieved, but one could live in the land without necessarily entering into God's rest. As Oswalt says, "The land was a metaphor, God was the reality" (1135). The land, then, was the place where God would be worshiped among His people, but resting in that land always primarily meant devoting time to fellowship with God through worship.

Rest, then, involves the ideas of God's provision of one's needs, a resulting freedom from constant attention to one's physical needs which produces both a condition of peace and time for fellowship with God expressed especially in worship, and enjoyment of these conditions over one's lifetime. All of these aspects of rest were to be found ultimately in God. Oswalt has said it well: "What is the Biblical understanding of rest? It is the rest of faith, a life of trust, belief, and obedience in God. In him who is eternal there is permanence; in him who has no rival there is security; in him who has made us in his own image there is freedom; in him who combines complete power, complete holiness, and complete love there is tranquility" (1135).

The concept of fellowship with God that was at the core of the Sabbath was no minor or marginal part of the relationship between God and Israel. The Sabbath observance on Israel's part was explicitly said in the Mosaic law to be inextricably tied to the covenant with God. Exodus 31:16 said "So the sons of Israel shall observe the Sabbath, to celebrate the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant." This makes perfect sense in light of what we have already discerned about the character of the Sabbath rest. In the Sabbath Israel participated in the goal for which God had created them. The Sabbath was to be a time of fellowship with God. That fellowship was now to be effected through the covenant of Sinai. The Israelite who despised the Sabbath and used it for himself was by that disobedience indicating his disdain for Israel's relationship with God. The one who acted thusly paid for his disregard of fellowship with God with his life (Exod. 31:15; Num. 15:35). Similarly, it was a refusal to observe the Sabbath years (which indicated a refusal to live by faith in God) that the Bible itself gives as the reason for the exile (Lev. 26:31–35, 43; 2 Chron. 36:21).

The Biblical Sabbath, then, was not just time off from work. It was rather a time in which God provided for His people's physical needs so they could with trust turn their attention to their relationship with God and worship Him. This is why Amos complained that even though Israel was outwardly observing the Sabbath, they were using the day to plan their dishonesty for the coming week (8:4–6). It was supposed to be a time for God's people to demonstrate the one thing God wanted to see from them most: their faith in Him. The Sabbath was designed to be the time when man and God enjoyed each other's fellowship, the time when man put off physical concerns and came to God in faith, and God enjoyed the heartfelt expression of thanks and adoration from man. It was, in a sense, the time when man and God came together.

Like everything else in the old law, the design of the Mosaic Sabbath belied its character as merely the shadow of something greater. The Sabbaths of the Mosaic code were observed only periodically (once every seven days or every seven years). Its periodic character indicated that it was not the ongoing, ultimate or perfect rest itself. A fuller and permanent expression and enjoyment of the God-man relationship was in the works. The Mosaic Sabbath simply bore witness to it.

### **The Sad Story of Israel's Sabbath**

God had offered to Israel what Adam had refused: rest, or an ongoing fellowship, with God. The sad story, however, is that Israel refused that rest as well. In general, Israel preferred fellowship with the false gods of her pagan neighbors over the fellowship of the one true and living God who made her and formed her. Ironically, the worship of those false gods (especially Baal) involved a concentration on Israel's physical existence, whereas God had offered to guarantee Israel's physical existence if she would draw near to God through the Sabbath.



There were a few moments in Israel's history where it seemed that Israel might realize the rest God had offered. Israel had rest from war after the initial conquest of Canaan under Joshua (Josh. 21:44), and thus the conditions for achieving a lasting, settled relationship with God were in place, but Israel did not go on to obey the stipulations of God's covenant. The history of the Judges was a cyclic repetition of unfaithfulness and punishment from God. Israel would learn the consequences for unfaithfulness and for a while would be faithful, but later generations failed to learn from the experiences of their ancestors and as Nehemiah later confessed, "but as soon as they had rest, they did evil again before You" (Neh. 9:28). When the monarchy came along, it appeared that perhaps Israel was now on a course to realize true rest with God. David was a righteous man, and with his legacy came the potential for the nation to achieve a lasting fellowship between Israel and God. Although David was not allowed to build the temple, God said to him "Behold, a son will be born to you, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side; for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days. He shall build a house for My name, and he shall be My son and I will be his father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever" (1 Chron. 22:9–10). Note the ideas of being settled and enjoying one's situation in that passage. The idea was that with Solomon a time of lasting fellowship with God would be possible. Solomon acknowledged "But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side; there is neither adversary nor misfortune" and expressed his initial desire for the nation to enter into its ideal relationship with God when he said "Behold, I intend to build a house for the name of the Lord my God" (1 Kings 5:4–5). With this assessment and plan David himself concurred (1 Chron. 22:18–19). Note again the connection between having rest and building the temple, the place where God was worshiped, the place where fellowship between man and God was achieved. When Solomon dedicated the temple he said "Blessed be the Lord, who has given rest to His people Israel" (1 Kings 8:56), and David's view of the situation was "The Lord God of Israel has given rest to His people, and He dwells in Jerusalem forever" (1 Chron. 23:25). Solomon had turned his attention to solidifying the nation's relationship with God by building the temple, but alas Solomon's own unfaithfulness ruined the plan.

The next we hear of Israel approaching entrance to God's rest is under king Asa. He said, " 'The land is still ours because we have sought the Lord our God; we have sought Him, and He has given us rest on every side.' So they built and prospered" (2 Chron. 14:7). Here Israel had turned to God, which was the principle behind the Sabbath rest, and God had responded by blessing them. Asa's reforms prompted the author of Chronicles to note that "the Lord gave them rest on every side" (2 Chron. 15:15). But Asa also became unfaithful, and so again a continuing fellowship between God and Israel did not materialize. He was succeeded by his son Jehoshaphat who was also a good man, yet the inspired account says that during his reign "The high places, however, were not removed; the people had not yet directed their hearts to the God of their fathers" (2 Chron. 20:33). The next king, Jehoram, led Judah back into idolatry. When Jeremiah appeared at the end of the southern kingdom's existence, he asserted that Sabbath-keeping was the key to understanding both Judah's destruction and its hope (17:19–27). Similarly, from captivity Ezekiel also explained Judah's woes as a failure to observe the Sabbaths (20:12) and spoke of a time when God's priests would sanctify the Sabbath (44:24), and Isaiah spoke of the restoration of Israel as dependent upon its sincere observance of the Sabbath when he said "If because of the Sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your own pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and honor it, desisting from your own ways, from seeking your own pleasure and speaking your own word, then you will take delight in the Lord, and I will make

you ride on the heights of the earth, and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken” (Isa. 58:13–14; see also 56:2–7).

The Old Testament closes with the rebuilding of the temple after the exile, but it is hardly a picture of faithfulness and fellowship with God. When Nehemiah discovered that the returned Jews were not observing the Sabbath, he reprimanded them severely and said “What is this evil thing you are doing, by profaning the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers do the same, so that our God brought on us and on this city all this trouble? Yet you are adding to the wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath” (13:17–18). Nehemiah’s use of the word “Sabbath” eleven times in that short scene underscores the centrality of the Sabbath concept to Israel’s well-being (Jaki 45). Nehemiah understood the failure of faith that neglect of the Sabbath reflected. Even as the Jews labored to rebuild the temple, God said through Isaiah, “Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest?” (66:1), indicating that the true rest would not be tied to some physical location like Jerusalem. Like the Sabbath itself, the temple was a symbol of something greater, a symbol of a more perfect fellowship that was to come. God’s rest would not be achieved in the temple the returned exiles were building (and thinking that it would seem to have been a crucial mistake of the Jews of Jesus’ day). That rest would instead be realized in that to which the temple pointed.

### **The Sabbath Rest Realized**

The author of Hebrews understood that the Old Testament was not a story of a rest achieved, but of a rest unrealized. He makes his case from Psalm 95, which ends with a warning based on Israel’s failure to enter into God’s rest. King David (according to Heb. 4:7) had urged God’s people to succeed where former generations of God’s people had failed. The place of David’s warning in the chronology of Old Testament discussions of rest implies that in David’s day God’s rest was yet unrealized. Neither Genesis 2:2 nor Joshua 21:44 meant that God had achieved His fellowship with His people, “for if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that” (Heb. 4:8). Thus the author can say “So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God” (Heb. 4:9). That is, since the seventh day of the creation week God had not entered into the lasting fellowship with man He has desired, but God’s longing for an ongoing relationship with man is now being fulfilled in the new system of things in Jesus. The goal of creation is achieved through Jesus who brings us into God’s rest through His blood.

The long-awaited Sabbath rest between God and man was inaugurated in the ministry of Jesus. To the attentive reader, many things in the gospel narratives proclaim this fact. For example, when Jesus began His public ministry in Galilee He read from Isaiah 61 in the synagogue of His hometown, Nazareth. The text He read said “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord” (vss. 1–2). While the words “Sabbath” or “rest” do not appear in that text, it is plain that the language is that of the announcement of the Jubilee (Lincoln 201). When Jesus said “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21), He meant that the fellowship (rest) between God and man that was symbolized in the Jubilee was now being fulfilled in Himself and His work. Some have argued that Jesus’ ministry actually began in a Jubilee year according to the Jewish calendar (Finegan 342). If correct, that is surely significant. From a broader point of view we may note that Luke’s presentation of the beginning of the public ministry does not begin with an announcement of the kingdom, but with Jesus preaching in the synagogues of Galilee

(which would have been done primarily on Sabbath days) and reading Isaiah 61 in His hometown synagogue. In his own subtle way, then, Luke is trying to present the ministry of Jesus first in terms of the fulfillment of the Sabbath (Lohse 26).

Other indicators of the Sabbath nature of Jesus' work appear in His sayings. "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things [physical provisions—from the context] will be added to you" (Matt. 6:33). In those familiar words Jesus was describing the kingdom of God as a relationship with God like the Sabbath of old. Remember that the first mention of Israel's Sabbath appears in connection with God sending the manna to feed Israel. God provided them with food for that day so they could turn their attention to God, having been given assurance that they could trust in God. That is the same idea Jesus set forth in Matthew 6:33. Then there is the clear reference to rest in Matthew 11:28f, where Jesus invites all saying "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (echoing the same call issued by God through Jeremiah 6:16, but spurned by Israel). Even when Jesus says "I am the good shepherd," He was evoking imagery that partakes of the ideas inherent in the Sabbath rest. Recall that "rest" involves the idea of living in safety and security. Jesus' claim to be the good shepherd surely evokes Ezekiel's prophecy of the Davidic shepherd who would come, and of the corresponding time when Israel would live securely on the land and enjoy its blessings (Ezek. 34), which are Sabbath concepts.

One of the most obvious things about Jesus to His contemporaries was that He often worked His miracles specifically on Sabbath days. This was not coincidence but was deliberately intended by Jesus (cf. Mark 3:2ff). These healings appeared to the Pharisees to violate the Sabbath day, and they were so perturbed by this that they did not see that Jesus was in fact demonstrating that in Himself the Sabbath—a freedom from physical concerns to enjoy lasting fellowship with God—was being fulfilled. Perhaps this is best illustrated in the story Luke preserves about the healing of the woman who was bent over with illness. When the Pharisees objected to this cure being worked on the Sabbath, Jesus responded "this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?" (13:16). What more appropriate day was there to set someone free from physical hardship than the Sabbath? This takes us back to the exodus from Egypt and the reason given for the Sabbath commandment in Deuteronomy 5:15. But we must not fail to understand that the miracles Jesus worked were illustrations of what He came to accomplish spiritually. Setting the woman free from physical ailment was an illustration of Jesus' power to free people from slavery to sin and the flesh and make their fellowship with God possible. Just as the Sabbath remembered the new situation God made when He liberated His people so they could enter into covenant fellowship with Himself, so Jesus, when He healed on the Sabbath day, was proclaiming that in Him a new time of fellowship with God was dawning and the old Sabbath was fulfilled.

This brings us to an important consideration. Sometimes we hear it asserted that the Lord's day (Sunday) has replaced the Sabbath day now that Christianity has come. This, however, fails to see the true significance of both the old Sabbath and Christianity. Remember that the Sabbath came at the end of the week. The days of labor led up to the Sabbath, making the Sabbath a day of completion or, in the Biblical sense, perfection (Robinson 39). Thus that old institution by its nature pointed forward. Also, by having only an occasional (even if regular) day that was devoted to the Lord, the old Mosaic system was showing its imperfection. God's rest is achieved not when man gives God one day each week, but when man spends his entire life living in faithful, trusting fellowship with God. When Jesus said "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these

things will be added to you,” He certainly indicated what is to be the way of life everyday for those in the kingdom of God. Thus the *messianic age* is God’s Sabbath rest realized. In the messianic age every day is a Sabbath day, every year is a Sabbath year, and the messianic age is a spiritual Jubilee to God. Jesus rose from the dead (and we worship) on the first day of the week, proclaiming that the time of looking forward to completion had ended. The time when God enters into a lasting fellowship with man has arrived, and those who enter into that fellowship begin each week in the very thing that old Sabbath emphasized: worship. But it would surely be a mistake to think that the formal worship of God on the first day of the week fulfills the old Sabbath. *All* of life in the messianic age is to be devoted first to the worship and fellowship of God with the promise that God will take care of the other aspects of our existence.

We noted above that the Jubilee cycle was observed on a smaller scale in connection with the harvest of the firstfruits. The day following the next seven Sabbaths after the harvest of the firstfruits was a holy day dedicated to God. In New Testament times this was called the feast of Pentecost, and was the day on which the Spirit Jesus had promised to His disciples came upon them and they first proclaimed the forgiveness of sins in the name of the crucified and resurrected Jesus. It hardly seems coincidental that the age of freedom from sin and of fellowship with God began on the day that was itself part of the larger Sabbath pattern of the Old Testament.

## Conclusion

The Old Testament’s perspective on rest was summed up by God when He said through the prophet Jeremiah, “I will come to give rest to Israel” (31:2 NIV). The Psalmist anticipated the outcome of the story when he testified, “My soul finds rest in God alone” (61:2 NIV). The Old Testament presented a picture of God who desired to rest with man, but whose offer of rest was repeatedly rejected. In Jesus, however, that rest has begun. In Jesus God has made a new Israel with whom His rest is realized. But the story is not yet over, for although the rest has begun, it remains to find its perfect fulfillment in heaven. “Let us be diligent to enter that rest.”

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<sup>1</sup> The Promise of a Sabbath Rest. (2003). In D. W. Petty (Ed.), *The Gospel in the Old Testament*. 2003 (D. W. Petty, Ed.). Florida College Annual Lectures (213–232). Temple Terrace, FL: Florida College Bookstore.

# The Story of The Tabernacle

Phil Roberts

## Introduction: Typology and the Book of Hebrews

As much as this lecture neither originated in a study of the book of Hebrews, nor concentrates on the text of Hebrews, I suppose a word of explanation is in order. Though the tabernacle is a central theme in Hebrews, it is in fact a theme that can be traced throughout the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. It can be used to tell the whole story of man's redemption from sin. And a weakness of our Bible study is that we often concentrate on the smaller particulars and miss the big picture. We know many individual passages and can dissect individual verses almost without end. But when it comes to tying everything together we are sometimes lost.

This is where the book of Hebrews comes in. Hebrews is built around themes such as the tabernacle, the priesthood, sacrifices, sabbath rest, and covenants, all of which recur throughout the Bible. Often such symbols are referred to as "types," and their use throughout the Bible is called "typology." Typology presumes that God is in control of history and that he designs the institutions and events of one age to serve as types or shadows of the things to come in another age (Heb. 10:1). Now we usually limit our study of typology to the two ages of the Old Testament and the New Testament. This is natural, but it is not the end of the matter. Indeed, to think of typology simply as the Old Testament shadows of New Testament realities is to miss the point of the use of typology in the book of Hebrews, which focuses rather on *earthly* types of *heavenly* realities. Thus, while it is true that the types of the Old Testament point to the New Testament, it is further true that the types of the Old Testament join together with their New Testament fulfillments to point to the ultimate reality of heaven itself. Not only that, but many Old Testament types reach back to the age before the Mosaic covenant as well. As we shall shortly see, the story of the tabernacle goes back to the garden of Eden itself.

Thus the book of Hebrews, like no other part of the Bible, forces us to look at the *whole* story of the Bible. And that is what we intend to do in this lecture. We will tell the story of the Bible, the story of our redemption, by telling the story of the tabernacle. And while this is not a study of the text of Hebrews, we hope it will illustrate the hermeneutical principle of typology that undergirds the use of the theme of the tabernacle in the book of Hebrews. And we will, of course, pass through the book of Hebrews as we trace the theme of the tabernacle from Eden to heaven.

## In the Beginning

Sometimes it is better to begin at the end. A few years ago a friend of mine and I were studying in the last few chapters of the book of Revelation. He read the first few verses of chapter twenty-one, and then after a brief pause he blurted out in an almost hostile tone of voice, "What's *that* doing there?" "What's what doing there?" I asked.

“That tabernacle,” he responded. “That’s part of the old covenant. It was done away with; nailed to the cross. The tabernacle was replaced by the church. So what’s that tabernacle doing there in heaven?”

Well, I proceeded to spend about the next forty-five minutes telling him what I thought that tabernacle was doing there in heaven. When I finished he sat there for a minute and then said, “That’s pretty good. I think I’ll preach that next Sunday.” So I decided that if he could get a sermon out of that, then I ought to be able to as well. This lecture is essentially what I told him. I have used it as a sermon many times since.

The word “tabernacle” means a dwelling place. It does not necessarily connote a sacred dwelling place, but it does usually have the special connotation of a tent-type of dwelling. It could also be used by the Hebrews as a verb. I don’t know if Hebrew boys ever went camping in the back yard or not, but if they did they might have said something like, “Mommy, can Eli and I go tabernacle tonight.”

The story of the tabernacle begins, as noted above, in the garden of Eden. Of course there is no actual reference to a tabernacle in Eden, but that is where we first find God and man dwelling together in fellowship. It was itself a sort of temple or tabernacle in which Adam (man) had direct access to God, unfettered by sin.

On the identification of the garden of Eden as a type of the temple of God, scholars have often pointed to the role of the cherubim protecting against the entrance of sinful man back into the presence of God. These seem to be analogous to the cherubim which were woven into the curtains of the tabernacle (Exod. 36:35), and especially to the protecting cherubim over the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place, which was also forbidden to sinful man. And the cherubim of both Eden and the tabernacle recall the living creatures surrounding the throne of God in heaven (Rev. 4:6–9). But an even more important key is to be found in the identification of heaven with the garden of Eden in the book of Revelation. Heaven, which is the ultimate temple of God, is there identified likewise as Paradise (2:7), complete with the tree of life (22:2), and a river of life (22:1) which is probably based on the rivers that flowed out of the garden of Eden. In fact, the idea of a river flowing out from the mountain of God on which the temple is built occurs repeatedly in Scripture (Ezek. 47:1–12; Zech. 14:8; Rev. 22:1–2; Joel 3:18; Ps. 46:4, etc.). Thus it may be no accident that the only stream that flowed from Mount Zion and the temple in Jerusalem bore the name Gihon, exactly the same as one of the rivers of Eden. Not only that, but the idea of God’s temple being built on a mountain, both literally in the case of the Jerusalem temple on Mount Zion, and figuratively in the church (Isa. 2:2; Heb. 12:22) and in heaven (Rev. 14:1; 21:10), can be correlated with the idea that the garden of Eden itself was on a mountain (Ezek. 28:13–14). Some have even suggested that the penchant of ancient peoples to build their temples on high places (either natural or artificial) was a dim reflection of the fact that God had first dwelt with man on a mountain. A common religious image from the Ancient Near East was that of a mountain god depicted with four rivers flowing down from the mountain. Not only that, but the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (Gen. 2:14) do in fact take their rise in the mountains of Urartu (Ararat). And if it be objected that Satan was in Eden, remember that he appears before the throne of God elsewhere in the Old Testament as well.

In short, Eden was God’s heaven on earth. When man sinned, he lost the heaven or Paradise God had created for him. And the rest of the Bible is the story of God’s plan to deliver man from sin and return him to dwell once again in the presence of God, in the new Paradise of the new heavens and the new earth (Rev. 21:1; 2 Pet. 3:13).

But sin enters the world in Genesis 3. I often remark that if it were not for Genesis 3 the Bible would have ended at Genesis 2. The seemingly absurd simplicity of that statement is intended to emphasize the fact that if man had never sinned the rest of the Bible would never have had to have been written. But man did sin, and the fact that man's punishment for his sin included being *cast out of the garden* is far more significant than we ordinarily realize. It was not just punishment. It was symbolic punishment. Man was being separated from the presence of God. Note that even before Adam and Eve were cast out they were already afraid and ashamed of themselves in the presence of God (Gen. 3:7–11). Compare their fear and shame with the sense of fear and sinfulness experienced by the priests of the Old Testament when they were in the presence of God in the tabernacle.

The next several chapters of Genesis tell the story of man's progressive alienation from the presence of God. At one point man had so distanced himself from his Creator that God repented of having made man at all and determined to destroy the human race (save Noah and his family). But even when God did that, man still fell right back into sin. The first thing we read of after the flood is Ham's sin against his father Noah, and the next thing after that was the building of the tower of Babel. Thus we see that man was unable to deliver himself from his sin and return himself to the presence of his God. Even when God wiped the slate clean and gave him a whole new start he still wasted the opportunity.

As an aside, all of this may help us to understand better the significance of the tower of Babel and the reason for God's displeasure with mankind for building it. The ancient Babylonians built towers called ziggurats that were artificial temple mountains for the worship of their gods. As noted above, these artificial mountains may represent man's dim recollection of Eden as the mountain of God. It is often presumed that the tower of Babel was just such a temple tower. If that is so, then the building of the tower of Babel might represent, either man's arrogant attempt to climb up into the heavens and pull God down to himself, or perhaps his perverted attempt to build temples so that he might invite other gods to take up their dwelling with him in place of the true God.

Along the same line, perhaps we can better understand the fact that men of ancient times were building temples long before God ever commanded the children of Israel to build his temple. Critics of the Bible say this just proves that the religion of the Israelites was not really revealed from God, but borrowed from surrounding cultures. So how are we to explain this pre-Mosaic penchant for temple building? I would suggest that this again represents man's memory of Eden and a time when God had dwelt with man. Man thus longs for God to come and dwell with him again. It was, according to Paul, with just such a longing that the Athenians built altars to unknown gods and "groped after" God (Acts 17:22–27). But because of man's sinfulness, God could not come and dwell in those temples. And man, instead of turning from sin, filled his temples with false gods that could dwell peaceably with sin.

At any rate, by the time we get to the end of Genesis 11 it is clear that man is not going to extricate himself from the problem of sin. If he is ever going to be restored to fellowship with God and dwell in the presence of God again, God is going to have to provide the means to accomplish it. And that is exactly what began to take place in Genesis 12. God called Abraham and made the promise of blessing to him that became the driving force of all the rest of the Bible.

## **Tabernacle and Promise**



To locate the significance of the promise to Abraham in the context of our discussion of the tabernacle we need only point out that, if the *curse* that accompanied the sin of Adam brought *separation* between God and man, then the *blessing* (Gen. 12:1–3) of the promise to Abraham will mean the *re-uniting* of God and man. If the curse meant that God and man must dwell apart, then the blessing of the promise means that they will one day dwell together again. Thus the story of the tabernacle becomes the story of the fulfilling of the promise to Abraham and his seed.

## Tabernacle and Covenant

As the story of the Bible unfolds we follow the seed of Abraham down into Egypt where we see them eventually enslaved and oppressed—mired as deeply as possible in the curses of a sin cursed world. It could even seem as though God had forgotten his promise to Abraham, and that neither the Israelites nor anyone else would ever dwell with God again.

But God had not forgotten, and at the end of the four hundred and thirty years God sent Moses to lead them out of Egypt and into the land of promise. But notice that God did not take them straight to the land of promise. First he took them down to Mount Sinai where he gave them a law and organized them as a nation. For our purposes we need only notice the central role the construction of the tabernacle and its related institutions played in that law. Just as soon as that covenant was ratified in Exodus 24, God instructed his people to:

... construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them. (Exod. 25:8)

I will dwell among the sons of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them; I am the LORD their God. (Exod. 29:45–46)

Note that God did not just say that he would dwell among them. He said that *the reason the brought them out of Egypt was that he might dwell among them*. The next sixteen chapters of Exodus are devoted to the construction of this tabernacle for God to dwell among his people. No other subject in all the law of Moses receives as much attention. And when the project was completed we read about God actually moving into the tabernacle they had built for him:

Thus Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. (Exod. 40:33–35)

God had taken up residence among his people. You could look out over the camp of Israel there at the foot of mount Sinai and see off in one direction the tents of Dan, in another, the tents of Judah, in yet another, the tents of Benjamin, and there in the middle, dwelling among his people, the tent of God himself.

The significance of God dwelling with his people in the tabernacle is dramatically illustrated in another tidbit of information from archaeology. We now know that when God made his covenant with Israel, he used a covenant form very much like that commonly used between nations in the time of Moses. It was especially similar to the pattern used by the Hittites in ruling vassal nations. And those Hittite treaties regularly specified where the official copies of the treaty would be stored. Usually one was kept by the Hittite lords, and one was kept by the conquered vassals.

It has thus been suggested that the two tables of the ten commandments were actually two copies of the ten commandments. One was God's copy and one was Israel's copy. If this is correct, and I believe it is, then the fact that both copies could be kept *together* in the ark of the covenant

becomes very significant. God did not take his copy back up to Mount Sinai, or even up to heaven. He did not need to, because he was going to dwell with his children. Both copies could be kept together in his tent in the midst of the camp.

God had indeed begun to fulfill the promise to Abraham. He had taken the first step to make it possible for sinful man to dwell in his presence once again. When we could not climb up to him, he came down to us (Deut. 30:11–14). But note that restoration was only partial and provisional. Its imperfections and limitations are seen in the fact that, even though God dwelt in the midst of his people, the average Israelite still could not go directly into the presence of God. Only the priests could enter even the front room of the tabernacle. And only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place, and that usually only once a year, and only after extensive sacrifices were made. God might be dwelling among his people, but it was a “hands off” dwelling. And it was only Israel that enjoyed even that limited presence of God, when it was in fact *all mankind* that was in need of restoration. But it was a start, a beginning in God’s purpose to restore fellowship between himself and sinful man.

Of course the limitations of this restoration of fellowship were based on the limitations of the Mosaic covenant itself. I find it helpful to think of the Mosaic covenant as a *temporary solution* to the problem of sin. Its temporary and provisional nature is seen especially in the nature of the sacrifices upon which it was founded. The animal sacrifices could not really bring forgiveness of sin (Heb. 10:4). At best they could only provide a temporary and provisional forgiveness. Thus the restoration of fellowship was also limited, temporary, and provisional.

But the solution to the problem of sin which the Mosaic covenant provided was *not just* a provisional solution. It was also a *prototype of the real solution* that God would eventually provide through the sacrifice of his son Jesus. So also the provisional restoration of fellowship provided by God dwelling in the tabernacle was a shadow of the greater restoration that would come in Christ and the church.

But it was also the prototype of the true sanctuary of God in heaven itself (Heb. 8:1–2). Thus the injunction to Moses was to “make all things according to the pattern” (Heb. 8:5) which God showed him in the mountain. I believe that pattern was essentially a blueprint of heaven itself (“a copy and shadow of the heavenly things,” Heb. 8:5). In other words, the tabernacle was to serve as a miniature heaven on earth—an earthly model of God’s true throne and sanctuary.

Along with the express statements in Hebrews, numerous additional details illustrate the nature the tabernacle as an earthly model of God’s real heavenly sanctuary. We have already had occasion to mention the cherubim. But notice now that the Bible speaks of God as “enthroned over the cherubim” (Ps. 80:1; 99:1). The Most Holy Place is thus God’s throne room and the earthly counterpart to his heavenly throne (Rev. 4:2) where he is also surrounded by the “living creatures” (Rev. 4:6). Note also the altar of incense in heaven (Rev. 7:3–5) corresponding to the altar of incense standing before the veil of the Mosaic tabernacle. It is, of course, easy to slip into thinking that God just describes heaven symbolically in terms of the Old Testament tabernacle. But that is exactly what Hebrews tells us is not the case. Heaven is the reality, and the earthly tabernacle is designed to be like it (Heb. 8:5)

But this Old Testament solution to sin was not only a limited solution. It was also a *fragile* solution. It was fragile because it was based on the obedience of the Israelites to the covenant. It was conditional. If they did not continue in obedience, the terms of the covenant dictated that God should destroy their cities and their sanctuaries, and refuse to accept their offerings (Lev. 26:31). This would include not only the illegitimate sanctuaries which they might build, but also the true sanctuary where God had dwelt among them. The principle was very simple. God is holy; he

cannot dwell in the presence of sin. Only by their wholehearted faithfulness to the covenant could God continue to dwell among the Israelites. If they persisted in sin, God would be compelled to leave, to move out of his sanctuary, no matter how many sacrifices they might offer.

## **From Tabernacle to Temple**

Thus the children of Israel left Mount Sinai to go to the land of promise. The first three hundred years or so of their history in the land were characterized by repeated apostasy, punishment, and occasional renewal. God continued to dwell with his people in the tabernacle, which appears to have been at Shiloh during most of that period of the Judges. Just how close God came to abandoning his people during that time is indicated by references to the destruction of Shiloh toward the end of that period (Jer. 7:12–14; 26:6–9).

But the tabernacle survived. It even survived a temporary abandonment by God when the ark was captured by the Philistines and the “glory” of the Lord departed (cf. the case of “Ichabod” in 2 Sam. 4:9–12). And with the establishment of the monarchy and the accession of David—a man after God’s own heart—to the throne, the fortunes of the nation took a dramatic upswing, both economically and spiritually. In the flush of all that success David apparently decided that the time had come to replace the humble and perhaps somewhat tattered tabernacle with a magnificent temple. Now a temple is only a permanent version of a tabernacle, a tabernacle being only a tent, while a temple was a proper building with foundations and walls. Symbolically they are all one and the same thing.

But it seems to me there is a subtle distinction to be made on some occasions. A tabernacle was designed to be portable. Its very structure and potential for easy removal should have reminded the Israelites of the conditional nature of God’s presence among them, and the ease with which it could be removed.

But a temple suggests that which is permanent and cannot be rooted up. Now David indicated that his intention to build a temple grew out of his desire for the Lord to have a dwelling that corresponded to the splendor of his own recently built palace (2 Sam. 7:2). Perhaps that was good, but I wonder. It would be very easy for that desire to glorify God to be transformed into a sinful overconfidence in the permanence of God’s presence, which Jeremiah tells us is exactly what did take place (Jer. 7:1–15). Note also that God himself indicated to David that the lowly tabernacle had served him quite well for the last four hundred years or so, implying that a temple was not really necessary (2 Sam. 7:5–7). As an aside, I would note how often today congregations push and work to get out of their rented storefronts and build a nice building, but then cease to grow once they get the building built and paid for. But God permitted the construction of the temple to go ahead. No doubt it could serve to celebrate the glory of God’s presence among his people if they would but use it properly.

It was, of course, Solomon who carried out the actual construction of that replacement for the tabernacle. The completion of temple is recorded in 2 Chron. 5:1, and the following chapters tell of its dedication. First the ark of the covenant was removed from the tabernacle and deposited in the newly built temple. Of course this signified the relocation of God’s earthly dwelling from the tabernacle to the temple. Therefore, just as the completion of the tabernacle at the foot of Mount Sinai had been marked by the filling of the tabernacle with the cloud of the glory of the Lord, so also the same phenomenon marked the completion of Solomon’s temple. “[T]hen the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because

of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God” (2 Chron. 5:13–14). God had moved into his new house, his new dwelling among the children of Israel.

Of course that temple was still within the confines and limitations of the old covenant. The sacrifices offered there were still animal sacrifices, unable to bring real forgiveness to those who drew near. Thus God could not really dwell in that temple. This limitation was acknowledged by Solomon who on that very occasion said, “But will God indeed dwell with mankind on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain Thee; how much less this house which I have built” (2 Chron. 6:18). But the temple, and especially the Most Holy Place, was still the earthly version of God’s true heavenly sanctuary. And that correspondence between the earthly sanctuary and its heavenly reality was also clearly indicated on this occasion. Solomon said, “I have built Thee a lofty house, And a place for thy dwelling forever” (2 Chron. 6:2). And, according to Ps. 132:14, which was perhaps composed for the occasion of the dedication of the temple, the Lord himself said, “This is My resting place forever; Here will I dwell, for I have desired it.” Yet Solomon in his prayer of dedication still asked that when the people turned and prayed toward the temple that God would “hear from [His] dwelling place, from *heaven*” (2 Chron. 6:21).

We also need to note that the construction of a more “permanent” temple did not signify an end to the conditional nature of God’s dwelling with the children of Israel. If anything, God was even more pointed about the conditional nature of his presence:

But if you turn away and forsake My statutes and My commandments which I have set before you and shall go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will uproot you from My land which I have given you, and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight, and I will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples. As for this house, which was exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and say, ‘Why has the LORD done thus to this land and to this house?’ And they will say, ‘Because they forsook the LORD ...’ (2 Chron. 7:19–22)

### **From Glory to Ruin**

Of course the Lord’s warnings to the children of Israel became prophetic. The temple was built at the height of the golden age of Israelite history, both economically and spiritually. But almost before the mortar was dry (if any was used) in the temple, the nation began a spiritual apostasy that would continue with only minor reverses until God was driven to make good on his pledge to destroy the nation. The apostasy began even in the reign of Solomon whose heart was seduced by his foreign wives. It progressed more rapidly in the northern kingdom, which severed itself both from the house of David and the temple. With no legitimate claim to God’s presence among them, the north fell completely away, and was carried off into captivity by the Assyrians within a span of a little more than two hundred years. The south, including Jerusalem and the temple, hung on a bit longer, but by the end of the reign of Manasseh God had determined that they too must be destroyed.

When the destruction of Judah finally came, it came in waves. First a few hostages (including Daniel) were taken to Babylon in 605 BC. Then a larger group of captives including the king Jehoiachin and the prophet Ezekiel were taken in 597 BC. Yet many of the people were still convinced that God would not really let the city of Jerusalem fall because, after all, his temple was there, and certainly God would not let his own house be destroyed (Jer. 7:4). They had forgotten the conditional nature of God’s dwelling with them, and they had despised his holiness. They had become so sinful that God could not abide their presence any longer. He had to move out of his defiled and corrupted dwelling place.

And when God withdrew his presence from the temple, there was nothing left to prevent its fall into the hands of the Babylonians. The actual destruction of the temple is recorded in a sobering, matter-of-fact style in 2 Kings 25:8–9:

Now on the seventh day of the fifth month, which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. And he burned the house of the LORD, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem; even every great house he burned with fire.

Ezekiel, speaking to the exiles in Babylon, interprets for us the real significance of that destruction. He does so by describing how, before the destruction took place, the “glory of the God of Israel” had moved out of the temple, so that when the Babylonians destroyed the temple it was no longer really the house of God, but only an empty and abandoned shell. Ezekiel himself narrates the scene for us:

Now the cherubim were standing on the right side of the temple when the man entered, and the cloud filled the inner court. Then the glory of the LORD went up from the cherubim to the threshold of the temple, and the temple was filled with the cloud, and court was filled with the brightness of the glory of the LORD. (Ezek. 10:3–4)

Then the glory of the LORD departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. When the cherubim departed, they lifted their wings and rose up from the earth in my sight with the wheels beside them; and they stood still at the entrance of the east gate of the LORD's house. And the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them. (Ezek. 10:18–19)

Then the cherubim lifted up their wings with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them. And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city, and stood over the mountain which is east of the city. (Ezek. 11:22–23)

With that the presence of God departed, not only from the temple, but also from the city. God simply moved out. If ever there was a time for the children of Israel to feel that all was lost that was it. They had lost the throne of David, the land, and the temple, the three institutions that gave them their identity as a nation. To many Jews it no doubt looked as though all hope for the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham had collapsed. God had tried to dwell with man, but it just didn't work out.

### **Hope against Hope: The Promise of a New Covenant**

In just that darkest hour, however, the very same prophets who had announced God's judgment on the nation turned and extended hope that God would yet again dwell with his people, but through a new covenant. The days were coming, said God through his prophet, when:

My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd ... And I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be my people. And the nations will know that I am the LORD their God who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever. (Ezek. 37:24–28)

This new covenant would succeed where the old one had failed. It would succeed because it would be based on the faithfulness of God to his promise to Abraham (Heb. 8:6) rather than on the unfaithfulness of man to the Mosaic covenant. It would succeed because it would be based on a

better sacrifice (Heb. 9:14, 23) that really could remove sin. And a real forgiveness of sin would make possible a real restoration of fellowship between God and man. Notice also that the promise of the new covenant as recorded in Jeremiah speaks not only of this forgiveness of sin, but of the whole city of Jerusalem being rebuilt and declared “holy to the LORD” (Jer. 31:38–40). In other words, the whole city of Jerusalem will become a holy temple of the Lord under the new covenant. This will be the basis of the New Testament identification of the church both as spiritual Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22–23) and as the temple of the Lord (Eph. 2:22). Likewise, both city and temple will merge into one in the description of heaven in Rev. 21 and 22.

Ezekiel’s extended vision of the future temple (Ezek. 40–48) is to be understood in this same light. It is an idealized picture of the church as the temple for spiritual Israel. As such it far outstrips anything the Jews were ever able actually to build after their return from the Babylonian captivity, thus preventing any possible misinterpretation by those seeking to find its fulfillment in the temples of Zerubabel or Herod. Indeed, its perfectly balanced dimensions (e.g., the courtyard was a perfect one hundred cubit square, 40:47) find their closest parallel in the symbolic dimensions of the new Jerusalem in Rev. 21:16.

### **Zerubabel’s Temple: A Step of Faith**

Of course the Jews began to rebuild the house of God almost as soon as they returned from the Babylonian captivity. But even before it was completed they could see that it was nowhere near the magnificent edifice that Solomon’s temple had been (Hag. 2:3). Still less could it be candidate for the fulfillment of the prophecies of Ezekiel and Jeremiah. Indeed, some who saw how insignificant it was turning out to be were apparently ready to abandon the project altogether. But God sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to stir the people up and get them to complete the project. Just complete your part, said the Lord, “and I will fill this house with glory ... The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former ... and in this place I shall give peace” (Hag. 2:7, 9). God had not abandoned his purpose to dwell with his people. And for his people to rebuild this temple, meager though it might have been, would be a statement of faith on their part—faith in the promise of God.

The temple of Zerubabel was completed in about 515 BC as described in Ezra 6:13–22. But one thing is strikingly absent in that description. The completion of the original tabernacle and the completion of Solomon’s temple as well were both marked by the descent of the cloud of the glory of the Lord which filled the sanctuary so that no one could stand to enter. But no such phenomenon is recorded at the dedication of this temple of Zerubabel. Actually Jewish tradition specified five things from the original tabernacle that were missing in Zerubabel’s temple: (1) the ark with the mercy seat and cherubim; (2) the sacred and continuous fire; (3) the urim and thummim; (4) the spirit of prophecy; and (5) the Shekinah, which was their term for the cloud of the “glory” of the Lord. In short, they built a house for the Lord, but he didn’t move in. And that, I think, is a metaphor for the way in which the Old Testament ends. Judaism was a spiritually empty house, chastened by judgment and still waiting for salvation, waiting for their God to come and dwell with them once again. They were, as Malachi puts it, awaiting the day when “the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight ...” (Malachi 3:1; cf. also Hosea 3:4–5). And without that presence of the Lord it wouldn’t make any difference how magnificent the temple might be.

### **The Temple of Herod: Empty Grandeur**

I think it is, in fact, one of the strangest ironies in all the history of God's dealing with his people that the greatest material magnificence ever bestowed upon the temple in Jerusalem was the remodeling of Zerubbabel's temple carried out by Herod the Great just before the opening of the New Testament period. Construction on Herod's temple began about 19 BC and continued until AD 63 cf. John 2:20). It was totally destroyed seven years later. If ever a temple was built to be destroyed, that was it. Sometimes I think there was only a very thin line between the temple of Herod and the tower of Babel. And even though Jesus acknowledged it as his Father's house (John 2:16), the only evaluations he ever placed upon it pointed toward its destruction. When its splendor was pointed out to him he merely remarked that soon not one stone would be left standing on another (Luke 21:5–6). Perhaps as the magnificent cathedrals of our own day contrast so sharply with the spiritual emptiness of the denominations that build them, the Herodian temple too, in all its hollow magnificence could be seen as a monument to man's need for the true temple not made with hands (Heb. 9:24). And a bizarre accent mark to the whole situation was the fact that most glorious of earthly temples was built by the irreligious and semi-pagan Edomite ruler, Herod the Great, who also claimed the building of temples to Zeus and Augustus among his accomplishments. But what an appropriate place for the money-changers and murderous chief priests. It is little wonder that Jesus was not welcome there. Yet what a bitter irony for those who had the spiritual sense to see it.

### **The Word Became Flesh and Tabernacled among Us**

The time had come to leave behind the temples made with hands and all the limitations of the old covenant to which they appertained. The time had come—the fullness of time—for God to provide real and lasting forgiveness for sin. The time had come for God truly to dwell among men. In John 1:1 we read, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Then we read that this “Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Note the word “dwell.” There are several words that are translated “dwell” in the New Testament. The most common occurs about forty times and has the connotation of dwelling in a house. But the word used here is rare. It is used only by John, and outside the book of Revelation he uses it only here in John 1:14. It carries the special connotation of dwelling in a tent. The Word became flesh and “tabernacled” among us.

The Lord had come to his temple (Malachi 3:1). But the temple to which he had come was not really that physical temple of Herod, destined for destruction (though his presence in its courts was probably the closest it ever came to being sanctified and dedicated with the glory of the Lord). Indeed, Jesus could not even enter the Most Holy Place of that temple because he was not of the Levitical priesthood (Heb. 7:13–14). But no matter, for that temple belonged to the old order, which was passing away (Heb. 8:13). Jesus brought in the presence of his own person the new temple of the new order and the new covenant. “Destroy this temple,” he said in the midst of the courts of the temple of Herod, “and in three days I will raise it up.” “But he was speaking,” we are told, “of the temple of his body” (John 2:20, 22).

Yet we should not make the mistake of thinking that he was simply the *replacement* of the long succession of Old Testament temples. Jesus might have been willing to present himself as a replacement of the Herodian temple in its corruption and earthliness. But he was actually making the much greater claim to be the *fulfillment* and *continuation* of the true Old Testament tabernacle and temple. He was, in effect, claiming that he was the fulfillment of God's promise through

Haggai to make the latter glory of Zerubbabel's temple even greater than that of Solomon's temple. He, in contrast to the Herodian temple, was the continuation of the theme of the dwelling of God among men. The Herodian remodelling of Zerubbabel's temple represented a wrong turn. It was a return to the rudiments of the world, rather than the true glorification spoken of by the prophet.

But man needs, not simply for God to descend and dwell with him, but, ultimately, for he himself to be able to ascend to dwell with God, for no lasting dwelling of God can be established on this sin cursed earth (Gen. 3:17). Christ, therefore, did not really come to perfect any earthly temple, but to open the door to the heavenly temple, the true dwelling of God, of which all earthly temples are but a model. Thus when he died on the cross, the veil of the temple in Jerusalem was torn in two (Matt. 27:51). The point of that rending was not to show that access had now been granted to the Most Holy Place of the Herodian temple. Nor do I think it had to do with the coming destruction of the Herodian temple. Rather, like all things pertaining to the earthly temples, it was the earthly counterpart to the heavenly reality. It signified that a sacrifice had now been offered which could provide access to the heavenly sanctuary itself. The animal sacrifices of the Old Testament provided access to the earthly model of God's dwelling place, but the perfect sacrifice of Jesus gives access to the true sanctuary which God pitched and not man (Heb. 9:11–12, 24–28). Thus, as the writer of Hebrews says, "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace ..." (4:16, cf. also 10:19–22).

### **The Temple of His Body: The Church**

At this point we can see more clearly than ever the two levels on which the story of the tabernacle can told—the earthly and the heavenly, the model and the reality, the type and the true. On the one hand we may follow the resurrected Jesus to heaven (Heb. 1:3; 4:14–15) where he as our high priest is now "a minister in the sanctuary, and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched and not man" (Heb. 8:1–2).

But, on the other hand, John said that when Jesus spoke of the temple he was speaking of his body (John 2:22). And the "body" of Christ that continued on earth was his church (Eph. 1:22–23; Rom. 12:4; 1 Cor. 12:27). Thus we continue to have an earthly counterpart to the heavenly reality. Only now the earthly counterpart is no longer a material temple, made with hands, but a spiritual temple (1 Pet. 2:5), not made with hands (Mark 14:58), and therefore that much more like the true heavenly sanctuary. And, by the same token, it is that much more glorious than its Old Testament predecessors (Hag. 2:9). We are, says the apostle Paul, the body of Christ, "in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:19–22).

Notice, incidentally, how this identification of the church as the temple of God helps us to understand the significance of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Remember that when Moses first erected the tabernacle the cloud of the glory of the Lord came down and filled the tent, and remember that the same phenomena was repeated when the Solomon's temple was dedicated. I believe that cloud of glory was exactly analogous to the Holy Spirit which descended and filled the church on the day that it was erected as the new dwelling place of God on earth. God was taking up residence, through the Spirit (Eph. 2:22), in his new temple. Exactly the same idea is presented in 1 Cor. 3:16 where Paul says to the church in Corinth, "Do you not know that you (plural) are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (Note that "in you" might be translated "among you".) And in 2 Cor. 6:16 Paul again affirms that "we are the temple of the living God, just as God said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them.' "



Seeing the church as the continuation of God's temple on earth highlights many features of the Christian's relationship to the church. As the altar stood in front of the temple, and those who would enter could not do so without an appropriate sacrifice for sin, so the sacrifice of Christ stands before the church, and no entrance is possible without that sacrifice. In all probability the laver of washing which also stood before the door of the temple should be seen as analogous to purification from sin in the waters of baptism (Heb. 10:22), for no sin can come into the presence of God in his holy dwelling place. And the fact that only priests could enter the temple illuminates the declaration that all Christians are members of a holy priesthood in the house of God (1 Pet. 2:5).

Also, the fact that the church is still only the earthly counterpart to the true heavenly sanctuary carries with it a stern warning. God's presence in his earthly sanctuaries was always conditional. If his people turned from him he could, and did, withdraw his presence. God's dwelling with his people in the church continues on that same conditional basis. Jesus said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him" (John 14:23). I would also suggest that the seven branched lampstand of the Old Testament temple must in some way be the earthly counterpart to the seven golden lampstands in the midst of which Jesus appears in Rev. 1:13. If that is true, then the lampstands of the churches in Revelation would represent God's presence in each of those churches, just as the lampstand represented his presence in the Old Testament temple. To remove a lampstand would signify God's removal of his own presence from one of those churches so that it would no longer be a temple to him. One is reminded, incidentally, of the picture on Titus' triumphal arch in Rome celebrating the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, in which the most prominently displayed treasure is the seven branched lampstand from the Herodian temple. That monument, already erected by the time Revelation was written, would serve as a graphic illustration of God's commitment to remove the lampstand of his presence from a faithless and disobedient earthly counterpart to his heavenly temple.

### **The Tabernacle of God is with Men**

I fear, however, that our lessons on the typology of tabernacle and church often miss the real point of that typology, especially as it is developed in Hebrews. We leave the impression that the tabernacle was a model of the church. That is not true, except in an indirect way. The tabernacle was a model of heaven, where Christ is now. The church is also a model of heaven. The church, in the language of Hebrews, is a better model. It is closer to the spiritual reality of heaven. It is based on a better sacrifice and it is entered by those who have obtained real forgiveness of their sins. But it is still only the earthly counterpart to the true sanctuary, where Jesus our high priest has already entered, and where he now intercedes on our behalf.

And this is the reason for the longing that we have even in this present body (Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 5:2). The church is not the end of the story of salvation. It is not the final place of God's dwelling with man. Though our access to the throne and dwelling of God in heaven is now based on the perfect sacrifice of Christ, our entrance into his presence is still by faith and not by sight. Our communication is still through prayer and not yet face to face. We are still strangers and pilgrims on this earth (1 Pet. 2:11), our citizenship being in another country (Phil. 3:20), another city (Heb. 11:10), the new Jerusalem. It is the city which John saw in Rev. 21 when, this sin cursed world having passed away, and the new heavens and the new earth having appeared, a voice from the throne declared:

Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away. (Rev. 21:3–4)

It is the city where they need no temple because God is its temple (Rev. 21:22). Yet it is also the city in which he who sits on his throne will “spread his tabernacle over” those who “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb,” so that there “they shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of the water of life” (Rev. 7:14–17). It is the city where “there shall no longer be any curse,” but instead the tree of life growing by the river of the water of life (Rev. 22:1–4). It is the city of God; it is the tabernacle of God; and it is our home.

In conclusion I would note that man has always carried deep within his soul a longing for something that seems to be just beyond his grasp—something he is sure will make him truly happy. In his youth he thinks it is the privileges of adulthood that he longs for. But as he grows up he finds his longing both greater and more elusive than ever. He thinks he may find it in the love of a woman or in a career or, later on, in his children. But however much delight these things may bring to his life, the longing is still there, always just out of grasp it seems.

It is a longing for Eden. It is man’s longing for that joy and happiness that he had in the presence of his Creator before sin destroyed the union and drove man from the presence of God. Or, to put it another way, it is a longing for heaven, Paradise regained, where we will finally be brought back to the tree of life to dwell in the presence of him who made us.