

Hebrews

Contents

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1 God, who in the past spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at various times and in many ways, ² has in these last days spoken to us through his Son. God appointed the Son heir of everything, and made the universe through him. ³ The Son is the radiant glory of God, and the visible expression of his true character. He sustains everything by his powerful command. When he had provided cleansing for sin he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. ⁴ He was placed much higher than the angels since he received a greater name than them. ⁵ God never said to any angel, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father,” or “I will be a Father to him, and he will be a Son to me.” ¹

6 Also, when he brought his firstborn ² Son into the world, he said, “Let all God’s angels worship him.” ⁷ Regarding the angels, he says, “He makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire,” ⁸ but about the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, lasts forever and ever, and justice is the ruling scepter of your kingdom. ⁹ You love what is right, and hate what is lawless. That is why God, your God, has placed you above everyone else by anointing ³

you with the oil of joy.”

10 “You, Lord, laid the foundations of the earth in the beginning. The heavens are the product of your hands. ¹¹ They will come to an end, but you will continue. They will wear out like clothes do, ¹² and you will roll them up like a cloak. Like clothes, they will be changed, but you never change, and your life never ends.” ⁴ ¹³ But he never said to any angel, “Sit at my right hand until I place your enemies in subjection under your feet.” ¹⁴ What are the angels? They are beings that serve, sent out to help those who will receive salvation.

2 So we should pay even closer attention to what we’ve learned so we don’t drift away from it. ² If the message the angels brought was trustworthy, and every sin and disobedient act brings its own consequence, ⁵ ³ how will we escape if we don’t pay attention to this great salvation that the Lord first announced, and then we had confirmed to us by those who heard him. ⁴ God also testified through signs and miracles, by acts that show his power, and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, given as he chose.

¹ + 1:5. Hebrews is full of Old Testament quotations and allusions, some of which are not quoted exactly or are given in summary form. It is therefore difficult at times to identify the exact source or sources, and to avoid burdening the text with too many footnotes Old Testament quotes will not usually be given here.

² + 1:6. “Firstborn”: this term is not to be taken that there was a time when Jesus did not exist; it is used to identify rank rather than chronology.

³ + 1:9. The ancient practice of pouring oil over the head of a person was to indicate they were being chosen for a specific position, a high honor.

⁴ + 1:12. Literally, “your years never fail.”

⁵ + 2:2. Literally, “receives its reward.”

5It's not angels who will be in charge of the world to come that we're talking about. ⁶ But as it's been said, "What are human beings that you should worry about them?"

What is a son of man ⁶ that you should care about him? ⁷ You set him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor, and placed him over all your creation. ⁷ ⁸ You gave him authority over everything." ⁸ Nothing was left out when God gave him authority over everything. However we see that not everything is subject to his authority yet.

9But we see Jesus, placed a little lower than the angels, through the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor. Through God's grace Jesus experienced death for everyone.

10It was appropriate that God, who creates and maintains everything, should bring many of his children to glory, and to completely prepare through suffering the one who leads them to salvation. ¹¹ For both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy belong to the same family. ⁹ That's why he doesn't hesitate to call them "brothers," ¹² saying "I will announce your name to my brothers;

I will praise you among your people when they meet together." ¹⁰ ¹³

Also: "I will place my trust in him," and "Here I am, together with the children God has given to me."

14Because the children share flesh and blood in common, he shared in this in the same way so that through death he could destroy the one that had the power of death—the devil—¹⁵ and free everyone who through fear of death were enslaved all their lives.

16Of course it's not angels he's concerned about; he's concerned to help the children of Abraham. ¹⁷ That's why it was necessary for him to become like his brothers in everything, so that he could become a merciful and trustworthy high priest in the things of God, to forgive his people's sins. ¹⁸ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.

3So, my brothers and sisters who live for God and who share in this heavenly calling, we need to think carefully about Jesus—the one we say is sent by God, ¹¹ and is the High Priest. ² He was faithful to God in the work he was chosen to do, just like Moses was faithful to God in

⁶ + 2:6. "Son of man": in normal use means just a human being; however Jesus applied this generic term to himself.

⁷ + 2:7. Instead of just referring to humanity, this can also refer to Jesus: "You made him less than the angels for a while, and then you crowned him with glory and honor." The whole passage can be seen in this dual way, referring to Jesus as the son of man, both representative and Savior of humanity.

⁸ + 2:8. Again this can apply to humanity, God giving authority over the creatures as mentioned in Genesis 1, or it can apply to the authority of Jesus as Lord.

⁹ + 2:11. Literally, "all from one."

¹⁰ + 2:12. "Meet together": the word is "ecclesia" which eventually came to mean "church."

¹¹ + 3:1. Literally, "apostle."

God's house.¹² ³ But Jesus deserves much greater glory than Moses, in the same way that the builder of a house deserves more credit than the house.⁴ Every house has its builder; God is the builder of everything.⁵ As a servant, Moses was faithful in God's house. He provided evidence of what would be announced later.⁶ But Christ is a son, in charge of God's house. And we are God's house as long as we hold on with confidence to the hope we boast we believe in.

⁷This is why the Holy Spirit says, "If you hear what God is saying to you today,⁸ don't harden your hearts¹³ like the time you rebelled against him, when you tested him in the wilderness.⁹ Your fathers put me through it, trying my patience, and they saw the evidence I gave them for forty years.

¹⁰"That generation made me angry¹⁴ and so I said, 'They're always mistaken in what they think, and they don't know me or what I'm doing.'¹¹ So in my frustration I vowed, 'They shall not enter my rest.'¹⁵

¹²Brothers and sisters, make sure that none of you has an evil mindset that's given up trusting in the God of life.¹³ Encourage each other every

day while you still have "today," so that none of you will be deceived by sin and become hard-hearted.¹⁴ For we are partners with Christ as long as we hold on to our confidence in God from beginning to end.

¹⁵As Scripture says, "If you hear what God is saying to you today, don't harden your hearts like the time you rebelled against him."¹⁶ Who was it that rebelled against God, even though they heard what he said? Wasn't it all those who were led out of Egypt by Moses?¹⁷ Who was God upset with for forty years? Wasn't it those who sinned, those who were buried in the desert?¹⁸ Who was God speaking of when he vowed they should not enter into his rest? Wasn't it those who disobeyed him?¹⁹ So we see that they were not able to enter because they didn't trust him.

⁴Therefore let's take care to make sure that even though God has given us his promise of entering his rest, none of you miss out!² For we've heard the good news just like they did, but it didn't help them because they didn't accept and trust in what they heard.³ However those of us who trust in God 'have' entered into that rest God mentioned when he said, "In my frustration I vowed, 'They shall not enter my rest.'" (This

¹² + **3:2.** The word "house" here means more than the building: it refers to the members of the house, the household, the family.

¹³ + **3:8.** "Harden your hearts," meaning to become stubborn or obstinate.

¹⁴ + **3:10.** As always, God uses human terms. We should not understand God as being angry as we are, especially when it comes to "losing our temper" and acting in unloving or irrational ways. The same comment applies in 3:11.

¹⁵ + **3:11.** "Rest." This concept is developed more in chapter 4 and is related to the Sabbath, the Promised Land, and God's invitation to come to him. While it is not the easiest of phrases, "entering rest" is perhaps the best translation since it retains the basis which is to be developed later, and includes all the various allusions.

is so even though God's plans were already complete when he created the world).⁴ Regarding the seventh day there's a place in Scripture that says, "God rested on the seventh day from all his work."⁵ And as the previous passage stated, "They shall not enter my rest."

6God's rest is still there for some to enter, even though those who previously heard the good news failed to enter because of disobedience.⁷ So God again sets a day—today—saying a long time later through David¹⁶ as he did before, "If you hear what God is saying to you today, don't harden your hearts."⁸ For if Joshua had been able to give them rest, God wouldn't have spoken later about another day.⁹ So a Sabbath rest remains for God's people.¹⁰ For whoever enters God's rest also rests from what he's doing, just as God did.

11As a result we should try hard to enter that rest so nobody falls through following the same bad example of disobedience.¹² For God's word is alive and effective, sharper than any twin-edged sword, so penetrating it separates life and breath,¹⁷ bone joints and their marrow, judging the thoughts and intentions of the mind.¹³ No living being is hidden from his sight; everything is exposed and visible to the one we're accountable to.

14Since we have such a great high priest who has ascended to heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us make sure we hold on to what we say we believe.¹⁵ For the high priest we have isn't one who doesn't sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who was tempted in all the ways we are, but did not sin.¹⁶ So we should go confidently to God on his throne of grace so we can receive mercy, and discover grace to help us when we really need it.

5Every high priest is chosen from the people and is appointed to work for the people as they relate to God. He presents to God both their gifts and sacrifices for their sins.² The high priest understands how ignorant and deluded people feel because he also experiences the same kind of human weaknesses.³ As a result he has to offer sacrifices for his sins as well as for those of the people.⁴ No one can take the position of high priest for himself; he must be chosen by God, just like Aaron was.⁵ In just the same way Christ did not honor himself by becoming high priest. It was God who said to him, "You are my Son. Today I have become your Father."⁶ In another verse, God says, "You are a priest forever, following the order of Melchizedek."⁷ Jesus, while he was here in human form, prayed and appealed with loud cries and tears to God, the one who was able to save him from death. Jesus was heard because of his respect for God.⁸

¹⁶ + 4:7. Referring to Psalm 95:7.

¹⁷ + 4:12. Greek "psuche" and "pneuma," sometimes translated "soul" and "spirit," though it is hard to understand the meaning since in common thought there is no difference between "soul" and "spirit." The translation of "life" and "breath" is employed since it is considered that this better expresses the original thought.

Even though he was God's Son, Jesus learned practically the meaning of obedience through suffering.¹⁸ ⁹ When his experience was complete,¹⁹ he became the source of eternal salvation to everyone who does what he says,¹⁰ having been designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

¹¹ We have much to say about Jesus, and it's hard to explain because you don't seem able to understand!¹² By now you should have had enough time to become teachers, but you need someone to teach you the fundamentals, the first principles of God's word. It's like you need to go back to baby milk instead of solid food!¹³ Those who drink baby milk don't have the experience of living the right way—they're just babies.¹⁴ Solid food is for grown-ups—those who by always using their brains have learned to tell the difference between good and evil.

⁶ So let's not get stuck on the basic teachings about Christ, but let's progress to a more mature understanding. We don't need to go over again the ideas of repenting from what we used to do, about trusting in God—² or teachings about baptism, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.³ So let's get on with it, as God gives us the opportunity!

⁴ It's impossible for those who once understood and experienced God's heavenly gift—who shared in receiving the Holy Spirit,⁵ who had known God's good word and the power of the coming age—⁶ and then completely abandon God, for them to be brought back to repentance once more. They themselves have crucified the Son of God all over again and publicly humiliated him.⁷ Land that has been watered by rain, and produces crops for those who farm it, has God's blessing.⁸ But land that only produces weeds and thorns is worthless, and is about to be condemned. In the end all that can be done is to burn it.

⁹ But dear friends, we believe better of you and your salvation, even if we talk like this!¹⁰ God wouldn't be so unjust as to forget what you've done and the love you've shown for him by the care you've shown for fellow-believers—something you're still doing.¹¹ We want each of you to show the same kind of commitment, confident in God's hope until it's fulfilled.¹² Don't be spiritually lazy, but follow the example of those who through trusting in God and patience inherit what God has promised.¹³ When God gave his promise to Abraham he could swear by no one greater so he took an oath on himself,¹⁴ saying, "I will definitely bless you, and multiply your descendants."¹⁵ And so, after patiently waiting, Abraham

¹⁸ + **5:8.** The usual translation that Jesus "learned obedience through suffering" could suggest that Jesus was not originally obedient, or that suffering was necessary in order for him to learn—both rather strange ideas to place on Jesus, the pre-existing Son of God.

¹⁹ + **5:9.** Avoiding the term "having been made perfect," which in the minds of some might suggest he wasn't perfect in the first place.

received the promise.

16 People swear on things that are greater than they are, and when they have some dispute the oath is taken as the final word on the matter. ¹⁷

That's why God wanted to demonstrate more clearly to those who would inherit the promise that he would never ever change his mind. ¹⁸ So by these two actions ²⁰ that can't be changed, and since it's impossible for God to lie, we can have total confidence, having run for safety to take hold of the hope God presented to us. ¹⁹ This hope is our spiritual anchor—it's both certain and reliable, and it takes us past the curtain to the presence of God. ²⁰ That's where Jesus went in on our behalf, because he had become a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

7 Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of the Most High God. He met Abraham who was returning from defeating the kings and blessed him. ² Abraham gave him a tithe of all that he had won. Melchizedek's name means "king of right" while king of Salem means "king of peace." ³ We don't have any information about his father or his mother or his family tree. We don't know when he was born or when he died. Like the Son of God he continues as a priest forever.

4 Think how great this man was for Abraham the patriarch to give him a tithe of what was won in battle. ⁵ Yes, the sons of Levi who are priests

were commanded by the law to receive a tithe from the people, their brothers and sisters, who are descended from Abraham. ⁶ But Melchizedek who doesn't share their ancestry received tithes from Abraham, and blessed the one who had God's promises. ⁷ There's no argument that the lesser person is blessed by the one who is greater. ⁸ In the one case tithes are received by men who die, but in the other by one who is said to be living. ⁹ So you could say that Levi, the one who receives tithes, has paid tithes through being a descendant of Abraham, ¹⁰ for he was yet to be born from his father ²¹ when Melchizedek met Abraham.

11 Now if perfection could have been achieved through the priesthood of Levi (for that's how the law was received), what was the need for another priest to come following the order of Melchizedek, and not following the order of Aaron? ¹² If the priesthood is changed, then the law needs to be changed too. ¹³ The one we're talking about comes from a different tribe, a tribe that has never provided priests to serve at the altar. ¹⁴ It's clear that our Lord is a descendant of Judah, and Moses said nothing about priests coming from this tribe. ¹⁵ What makes it even clearer is when another priest appears who is similar to Melchizedek, ¹⁶ and who didn't become a priest by virtue of his human ancestry but by the power of a life that cannot be ended. ¹⁷ That's why it says, "You are a priest

²⁰ + 6:18. That is, the promise and the oath.

²¹ + 7:10. Literally, "in his father's loins."

forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

18So the previous rule has been set aside because it was powerless and didn't work, ¹⁹ (for the law didn't make anything perfect). But now it's been replaced by a better hope by which we can come close to God. ²⁰

This ²² was not without an oath, even though those who become priests do so without an oath. ²¹ But he became a priest with an oath because God told him, “The Lord has taken a solemn vow and will not change his mind: You are a priest forever.” ²² This is how Jesus became the guarantee of an agreed relationship with God ²³ that is so much better.

23There have been many priests because death prevented them from being able to continue; ²⁴ but since Jesus lives forever, his priesthood is permanent. ²⁵ As a result he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, living always to plead their case on their behalf.

26He is exactly the high priest we need: holy and without fault, pure and separate from sinners, and given a place in the highest heavens. ²⁷ Unlike those human high priests, he

doesn't need to offer a daily sacrifice for his sins and then the sins of the people. He did this once, and for everyone, when he offered himself. ²⁸ The law appoints imperfect men as high priests, but God gave his solemn vow after the law, and appointed his Son, perfect forever.

8The main point of what we're saying is this: We have just such a high priest who is seated at the right hand of God, who sits in majesty on his throne in heaven. ² He serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle that was set up by the Lord and not by human beings. ³ Since it's the responsibility of every high priest to offer gifts and sacrifices, this high priest must also have something to offer.

4Now if he was here on earth, he wouldn't be a priest at all, because there are already priests to present the offerings that the law requires. ⁵ The place they serve is a copy, a mere shadow of what is in heaven. That's what God told Moses when he was going to set up the tabernacle: “Be careful to make everything according to the blueprint you were shown on the mountain.”

6But Jesus has been given a far better ministry just as he is the one

²² + 7:20. Referring to the new way of approaching God.

²³ + 7:22. “An agreed relationship with God.” This translates a single word in Greek that has traditionally been translated as “covenant.” However the word “covenant” does not normally occur in everyday English and so has become a “theological” word. Much has been written about this concept and the terms used, and “covenant” has often been retained as there does not seem to be an effective way of explaining what is meant here. The covenant concept is extensively developed in chapters 8 and 9. Problems exist with alternative words. The word “contract” can mean the result of bargaining, which is not the case here. Similarly “treaty” or “agreement” when seen in human terms may refer to mutual negotiations. But here the word refers to something that is God's initiative, and certainly is not between equals. Perhaps a better concept is “a promise that is agreed to with corresponding obligations,” but such wording would be even more cumbersome.