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Hebrews

How can followers of Jesus face disappointment and yet remain strong in faith, hope and love? This is the question the book of Hebrews was written to answer. There is no mention of who wrote Hebrews. But we can see from its content and style that the author was a well-educated and skilled writer. It is not a letter, although it seems to be aimed at a particular group of people. It is clear that these people know the Old Testament and have had experience with the Jewish faith. Hebrews is more like a sermon. The writer describes it as a “message of encouragement”. Its goal is to help believers hold firmly to their faith in Jesus while facing many difficulties.

The writer begins by comparing how God spoke in the past to how he speaks to his people now. God spoke in the past in many different ways through his prophets. He has now spoken to us clearly through his Son Jesus. The Son has been given the place of highest honour in heaven. But what about God’s people here on earth? The Bible tells believers that God wants to reward people with “glory and honour”. But God’s people do not yet see God’s plan completed (2:5-8). And the fact that people do not see this promise come true in their own lives causes doubt and disappointment. This is the central problem the author of Hebrews deals with.

Jesus is the main character throughout the book of Hebrews. His life on earth was an example for his people. Jesus lived through

suffering to reach a great reward. In doing this, he showed his people how to live. He opened a path for them to follow. And if they follow in his steps, God will give them the reward of “rest” at the end. He will do this through Jesus, their faithful and kind high priest. But God’s people must follow Jesus, their leader, on the same path he walked. Like Jesus, they must face suffering before they receive their reward. This is why the author goes back and forth between encouraging his readers and challenging them to do better.

Jesus is not only a merciful priest for his people. He is also the sacrifice that brings them into a new relationship with God. With his death, Jesus opened the way for us to enter into the presence of God. There we can feel safe and sure of his love for us. So we should encourage each other with these promises. We see God’s plan for his people only by faith. God’s people have always had to trust in him without being able to see what the future holds. And God has always been faithful to keep his promises. So how should we respond to all that God has done for us through Jesus? We should offer him our life of sacrifice and praise.

The book of Hebrews tells believers that...

Jesus shows us the divine greatness of the God who saves us (1:1 – 2:4)

Jesus leads us through suffering to the reward God promises (2:5 – 5:10)

We should pay attention to both warning and encouragement (5:11 – 6:20)

Jesus’ sacrifice opens the way for us to enter into God’s presence (7:1 – 10:25)

We should encourage each other in faith, hope and love (10:26-39)

All who are faithful through suffering will receive God's blessing (11:1 – 12:27)

We must be thankful and honour God with lives of worship (12:28 – 13:25)

God Has Spoken Through His Son

1 In the past God spoke to our people through the prophets. He spoke to them many times and in many different ways. ² And now in these last days, God has spoken to us through his Son. He made the whole world through his Son. And he has chosen his Son to have all things. ³ The Son reveals the divine greatness of God. He is a perfect copy of God's nature, and he holds everything together by his powerful command. The Son made people clean from their sins. Then he sat down at the right side* of God, the Great One, in heaven. ⁴ The Son became much greater than the angels, and God gave him a name that is much greater than any of their names.

⁵ God never said this to any of the angels:

“You are my Son.

Today I have become your Father.”[†]

God also never said about an angel,

“I will be his Father,

and he will be my son.”[‡]

⁶ And then, when God brings his first-born Son into the world,[¶] he says, “Let all God's angels worship him.”[§]

⁷ This is what God said about the angels: “He changes his angels into winds** and his servants into flaming fire.”^{††}

⁸ But this is what he said about his Son: “God, your kingdom will last for ever and ever.

You use your authority for justice.

⁹ You love what is right and hate what is wrong.

So God, your God, has chosen you, giving you more honour and joy than anyone like you.”^{‡‡}

¹⁰ God also said,

“O Lord, in the beginning you made the earth,

and your hands made the sky.

¹¹ These things will disappear, but you will stay.

They will all wear out like old clothes.

¹² You will fold them up like a coat, and they will be changed like clothes.

But you never change,

and your life will never end.”^{¶¶}

¹³ And God never said this to an angel:

“Sit at my right side

until I put your enemies under your control.”^{§§*}

* **1:3 right side** The place of honour and authority (power).

† **1:5** Quote from Ps. 2:7.

‡ **1:5** Quote from 2 Sam. 7:14.

¶ **1:6 world** This may mean the world into which Jesus was born (see Luke 2:1-14), or it may have the same meaning as in 2:5—the world to come, to which Christ is presented as king after his resurrection (see Phil. 2:9-11).

§ **1:6 Let ... him** These words are found in Deut. 32:43 in the ancient Greek version and in a Hebrew scroll from Qumran.

** **1:7 winds** This can also mean “spirits”.

†† **1:7** Quote from Ps. 104:4.

‡‡ **1:9** Quote from Ps. 45:6-7.

¶¶ **1:12** Quote from Ps. 102:25-27.

§§ **1:13 until I put ... control** Literally, “until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”.

* **1:13** Quote from Ps. 110:1.

¹⁴All the angels are spirits who serve God and are sent to help those who will receive salvation.

Our Salvation Is Greater Than the Law

2 So we must be very careful to follow what we were taught. We must not let anything slowly pull us away from the truth we heard. ²The teaching that God spoke through angels was shown to be true. And every time his people did something against that teaching, they were punished for what they did. They were punished when they did not obey that teaching. ³So surely we also will be punished if we don't pay attention to the salvation we have that is so great. It was the Lord Jesus who first told people about it. And those who heard him proved to us that it is true. ⁴God also proved it by using miraculous signs, wonders and all kinds of miracles. And he proved it by giving people various gifts through the Holy Spirit in just the way he wanted.

Jesus Became Like People to Save Them

⁵God did not choose angels to be the rulers over the new world that was coming. That future world is the world we have been talking about. ⁶There is a Scripture that says,
“Why are people so important to you?
Why do you even think about them?
Why do you care about the son of man?[†]
Is he so important?”

⁷For a short time you made him lower than the angels.

You crowned him with glory and honour.

⁸You put everything under his control.”^{‡¶}

If God put everything under his control, then there was nothing left that he did not rule. But we don't yet see him ruling over everything. ⁹For a short time Jesus was made lower than the angels, but now we see him wearing a crown of glory and honour because he suffered and died. Because of God's grace, Jesus died for everyone.

¹⁰God wanted many people to be his children and share his glory. And he had just the right way to make this happen, because he is the one who made everything and still controls it all. So he made Jesus a perfect Saviour through his suffering to lead God's children to salvation.

¹¹Jesus, the one who makes people holy, and those who are made holy are from the same family. So he is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters. ¹²He says,

“God, I will tell my brothers and sisters about you.

Before all your people I will sing your praises.”[§]

¹³He also says,

“I will trust in God.”^{**}

And he says,

“Here I am with the children God has given me.”^{††}

[†]**2:6 son of man** This can mean any human, but the name “Son of Man” (see Son of Man in the Word List) is often used to mean Jesus, who showed what God planned for all people to be.

[‡]**2:8 control** Literally, “feet”.

[¶]**2:8** Quote from Ps. 8:4-6.

[§]**2:12** Quote from Ps. 22:22.

^{**}**2:13** Quote from Isa. 8:17.

^{††}**2:13** Quote from Isa. 8:18.

¹⁴These children are people with physical bodies. So Jesus himself became like them and had the same experiences they have. Jesus did this so that, by dying, he could destroy the one who has the power of death—the devil. ¹⁵Jesus became like these people and died so that he could free them. They were like slaves all their lives because of their fear of death. ¹⁶Clearly, it is not angels that Jesus helps. He helps the people who are from Abraham. ¹⁷For this reason, Jesus had to be made like us, his brothers and sisters, in every way. He became like us so that he could represent us before God as a merciful and faithful high priest. Then he could offer a sacrifice to take away people's sins. ¹⁸Yes, because he himself suffered and was tempted, he can now help those who are tempted.

Jesus Is Greater Than Moses

3 So, my brothers and sisters, you who are chosen by God to be his holy people, think about Jesus. He is the one we believe God sent to save us and to be our high priest. ²God made him our high priest, and he was faithful to God just as Moses was. He did everything God wanted him to do in God's house. ³When someone builds a house, people will honour the builder more than the house. It is the same with Jesus. He should have more honour than Moses. ⁴Every house is built by someone, but God built everything. ⁵Moses was faithful as a servant in God's house. He told people what God would say in the future. ⁶But Christ is faithful in ruling God's house as the Son. And we are God's

house, if we remain confident of the great hope we are glad to say we have.

We Must Continue to Follow God

⁷So it is just as the Holy Spirit says: "If you hear God's voice today, ⁸don't be stubborn as in the past, when you turned against God. That was the day you tested God in the desert.

⁹For 40 years in the desert, your people saw what I did, but they tested me and my patience.

¹⁰So I was angry with them and said, "Their thoughts are always wrong. They have never understood my ways."

¹¹So I was angry and made a promise: "They will never enter my place of rest."^{††}

¹²So, brothers and sisters, be careful that none of you has the evil thoughts that cause so much doubt that you stop following the living God. ¹³But encourage each other every day, while you still have something called "today".^{†††} Help each other so that none of you will be fooled by sin and become too hard to change. ¹⁴We have the honour of sharing in all that Christ has if we continue until the end to have the sure faith we had in the beginning. ¹⁵That's why the Spirit said,

"If you hear God's voice today, don't be stubborn as in the past, when you turned against God."^{§§}

¹⁶Who were those who heard God's voice and turned against him? It was all the people Moses led out of Egypt. ¹⁷And who was God angry with for 40 years? He was angry with those who sinned. And their dead bodies were left

^{††}3:11 Quote from Ps. 95:7-11.

^{†††}3:13 **today** This word is taken from verse 7. It means it is important to do this now, while there is still opportunity.

^{§§}3:15 Quote from Ps. 95:7-8.

in the desert. ¹⁸And which people was God talking to when he promised that they would never enter his place of rest? He was talking to those who did not obey him. ¹⁹So we see that they were not allowed to enter and have God's rest, because they did not believe.

4 And we still have the promise that God gave those people. That promise is that we can enter his place of rest. So we should be very careful that none of you fails to get that promise. ²Yes, the good news about it was told to us just as it was to them. But the message they heard did not help them because they did not believe it. They were not in agreement with those who accepted it as true. ³Only we who believe it are able to enter God's place of rest. As God said, "I was angry and made a promise: 'They will never enter my place of rest.'"^{*}

But God's work was finished from the time he made the world. ⁴Yes, somewhere in the Scriptures he talked about the seventh day of the week. He said, "So on the seventh day, God rested from all his work."[†] ⁵But in the Scripture above God said, "They will never enter my place of rest."

⁶So the opportunity is still there for some to enter and enjoy God's rest. But those who first heard the good news about it did not enter, because they did not obey. ⁷So God planned another day for entering his rest. It is called "today". He spoke about that day through David a long time later using the words we quoted before:

"If you hear God's voice today, don't be stubborn."[‡]

⁸We know that Joshua was not able to give the people the rest that God had promised. We know this because God spoke later about another day for rest. ⁹This shows that the rest[¶] for God's people is still to come. ¹⁰God rested after he finished his work. So everyone who enters God's place of rest will also have rest from their own work just as God did. ¹¹So let us try as hard as we can to enter God's place of rest. We must try hard so that none of us will be lost by following the example of those who refused to obey God.

¹²God's word[§] is alive and working. It is sharper than the sharpest sword and cuts all the way into us. It cuts deep to the place where the soul and the spirit are joined. God's word cuts to the centre of our joints and our bones. It judges the thoughts and feelings in our hearts. ¹³Nothing in all the world can be hidden from God. He can clearly see all things. Everything is open before him. And to him we must explain the way we have lived.

Jesus Is Our High Priest

¹⁴We have a great high priest who has gone to live with God in heaven. He is Jesus the Son of God. So let us continue to express our faith in him. ¹⁵Jesus, our high priest, is able to understand our weaknesses. When Jesus lived on earth, he was tempted in every way. He was tempted in the same ways we are tempted, but he never sinned. ¹⁶With Je-

* 4:3 Quote from Ps. 95:11.

† 4:4 Quote from Gen. 2:2.

‡ 4:7 Quote from Ps. 95:7-8.

¶ 4:9 *rest* Literally, "Sabbath rest", meaning a sharing in the rest God began after he created the world.

§ 4:12 *God's word* God's teachings and commands.

sus as our high priest, we can feel free to come before God's throne where there is grace. There we receive mercy and kindness to help us when we need it.

5 Every high priest is chosen from among men. That priest is given the work of helping people with the things they must do for God. He must offer to God gifts and sacrifices for sins. ²The high priest has his own weaknesses. So he is able to be gentle with those who do wrong out of ignorance. ³He offers sacrifices for their sins. But because of his weakness, he must also offer sacrifices for his own sins.

⁴To be a high priest is an honour. But no one chooses himself for this work. That person must be chosen by God just as Aaron was. ⁵It is the same with Christ. He did not choose himself to have the honour of becoming a high priest. But God chose him. God said to him, "You are my Son. Today I have become your Father."**

⁶And in another part of the Scriptures God says,

"You are a priest forever—the kind of priest Melchizedek was."††

⁷While Jesus lived on earth he prayed to God, asking for help from the one who could save him from death. He prayed to God with loud cries and tears. And God heard his prayers because of his great respect for God. ⁸Jesus was the Son of God, but he still suffered, and through his sufferings he learned to obey whatever God says. ⁹This made him the perfect high priest, who provides the way for everyone who obeys him to be saved

forever. ¹⁰God made him high priest, just like Melchizedek.

Warning Against Falling Away

¹¹We have many things to tell you about this. But it is hard to explain because you have lost interest in listening. ¹²You have had enough time that by now you should be teachers. But you need someone to teach you again the first lessons of God's teaching. You still need the teaching that is like milk. You are not ready for solid food. ¹³Anyone who lives on milk is still a baby and is not able to understand much about living right. ¹⁴But solid food is for people who have grown up. From their experience they have learned to see the difference between good and evil.

6 ¹⁻²So we should be finished with the basic lessons about Christ. We should not have to keep going back to where we started. We began our new life by turning away from the evil we did in the past and by believing in God. That's when we were taught about baptisms,‡‡ laying hands on people,¶¶ the resurrection of those who have died and the final judgement. Now we need to go forward to more mature teaching. ³And that's what we will do if God allows.

⁴⁻⁶After people have left the way of Christ, can you make them change their lives again? I am talking about people who once learned the truth, received God's gift and shared in the Holy Spirit. They were blessed to hear God's good message and see the great power of his new world. But then they left it all be-

**5:5 Quote from Ps. 2:7.

††5:6 Quote from Ps. 110:4.

‡‡6:1-2 *baptisms* The word here may mean the baptism (brief "burial" in water) of believers in Christ, or it may mean Jewish ceremonial washings.

¶¶6:1-2 *laying hands on people* This act was a way of asking God to bless people in a special way—to heal them, to cause the Holy Spirit to come into them or to give them power for a special work.

hind, and it is not possible to make them change again. That's because those who leave Christ are nailing him to the cross again, shaming him before everyone.

⁷Some people are like land that gets plenty of rain and produces a good crop for those who farm it. That kind of land has God's blessing. ⁸But other people are like land that grows only thorns and weeds. It is useless and in danger of being cursed by God. It will be destroyed by fire.

⁹Dear friends, I am not saying this because I think it is happening to you. We really expect that you will do better—that you will do the good things that come with being saved. ¹⁰God is fair, and he will remember all the work you have done. He will remember that you showed your love to him by helping his people and that you continue to help them. ¹¹We want each of you to be willing and eager to show your love like that the rest of your life. Then you will be sure to get what you hope for. ¹²We don't want you to be lazy. We want you to be like those who, because of their faith and patience, will get what God has promised.

¹³God made a promise to Abraham. And there is no one greater than God, so he made the promise with an oath in his own name—an oath that he would do what he promised. ¹⁴He said, "I will surely bless you. I will give you many descendants."^{§§} ¹⁵Abraham waited patiently for this to happen, and later he received what God promised.

¹⁶People always use the name of someone greater than themselves to

make a promise with an oath. The oath proves that what they say is true, and there is no more arguing about it. ¹⁷God wanted to prove that his promise was true. He wanted to prove this to those who would get what he promised. He wanted them to understand clearly that his purposes never change. So God said something would happen, and he proved what he said by adding an oath. ¹⁸These two things cannot change: God cannot lie when he says something, and he cannot lie when he makes an oath.

So both of these things are a great help to us who have come to God for safety. They encourage us to hold on to the hope that is ours. ¹⁹This hope we have is like an anchor for us. It is strong and sure and keeps us safe. It goes through the curtain* into the most holy place in God's temple. ²⁰Jesus has already entered there and opened the way for us. He has become the high priest forever, just like Melchizedek.

The Priest Melchizedek

7 Melchizedek was the king of Salem and a priest for God the Most High. He met Abraham when Abraham was coming back after defeating the kings. That day Melchizedek blessed him. ²Then Abraham gave him a tenth of everything he had.

The name Melchizedek, king of Salem, has two meanings. First, Melchizedek means "king of justice". And "king of Salem" means "king of peace". ³No one knows who his father or mother was

§§6:14 Quote from Gen. 22:17.

*6:19 *curtain* The spiritual curtain in the heavenly temple, which was symbolized by the physical one that separated the inner sanctuary (and God's presence) from the other room in the Holy Tent and in the Jerusalem Temple. See curtain in the Word List. Also in 10:20.

or where he came from.[†] And no one knows when he was born or when he died. Melchizedek is like the Son of God in that he will always be a priest.

⁴You can see that Melchizedek was very great. Even Abraham, our great ancestor, honoured him by giving him a tenth of everything he won in battle. ⁵Now the law says that those from the tribe of Levi who become priests must get a tenth from their own people, even though they and their people are both from the family of Abraham. ⁶Melchizedek was not even from the tribe of Levi, but Abraham gave him a tenth of what he had. And Melchizedek blessed Abraham—the one who had received God’s promises. ⁷And everyone knows that the more important person always blesses the less important person.

⁸Those priests receive a tenth, but they are only men who live and then die. But Melchizedek, who received a tenth from Abraham, continues to live, as the Scriptures say. ⁹Now those from the family of Levi are the ones who receive a tenth from the people. But we can say that when Abraham paid Melchizedek a tenth, then Levi also paid it. ¹⁰Levi was not yet born, but he already existed in his ancestor Abraham when Melchizedek met him.

¹¹The people were given the law under the system of priests from the tribe of Levi. But no one could be made spiritually perfect through that system of priests. So there was a need for another priest to come. I mean a priest like Melchizedek, not Aaron. ¹²And when a different kind of priest comes, then the law must be changed too. ^{13–14}We are

talking about our Lord Jesus, who belonged to a different tribe. No one from that tribe ever served as a priest at the altar. It is clear that our Lord Jesus came from the tribe of Judah. And Moses said nothing about priests belonging to that tribe.

Jesus Is a Priest Like Melchizedek

¹⁵And these things become even clearer when we see that another priest has come who is like Melchizedek. ¹⁶He was made a priest, but not because he met the requirement of being born into the right family. He became a priest by the power of a life that will never end. ¹⁷This is what the Scriptures say about him: “You are a priest forever—the kind of priest Melchizedek was.”[‡]

¹⁸The old rule is now ended because it was weak and unable to help us. ¹⁹The problem was that the Law of Moses could not make anything perfect. But now a better hope has been given to us. And this hope gives us the confidence to come near to God.

²⁰Also, it is important that God made a promise with an oath when he made Jesus high priest. When those other men became priests, there was no oath. ²¹But Jesus became a priest with God’s oath. God said to him,

“The Lord has made a promise with an oath and will not change his mind: ‘You are a priest forever.’”[¶]

²²So this means that Jesus is the guarantee of a better agreement from God to his people.

²³Also, when one of those other priests died, he could not continue be-

[†]7:3 *No one ... came from* Literally, “Melchizedek was without father, without mother, without genealogy.”

[‡]7:17 Quote from Ps. 110:4.

[¶]7:21 Quote from Ps. 110:4.

ing a priest. So there were many of those priests. ²⁴ But Jesus lives forever. He will never stop serving as a priest. ²⁵ So he can save those who come to God through him. Jesus can do this forever, because he always lives and is ready to help people when they come before God.

²⁶ So Jesus is the kind of high priest we need. He is holy. He has no sin in him. He is pure and not influenced by sinners. And he is raised above the heavens. ²⁷ He is not like those other priests. They had to offer sacrifices every day, first for their own sins and then for the sins of the people. But Jesus doesn't need to do that. He offered only one sacrifice for all time. He offered himself. ²⁸ The law chooses high priests who are men and have the same weaknesses that all people have. But after the law, God spoke the oath that made his Son high priest. And that Son, made perfect through suffering, will serve forever.

Jesus Our High Priest

8 Here is the point of what we are saying: we have a high priest like that, who sits in heaven on the right side[§] of the throne of God, the Great One. ² Our high priest serves in the Most Holy Place.^{**} He serves in the true place of worship^{††} that was made by the Lord, not by anyone here on earth.

³ Every high priest has the work of offering gifts and sacrifices to God. So our high priest must also offer something to God. ⁴ If our high priest were now living on earth, he would not be a priest. I say this because there are al-

ready priests here who follow the law by offering gifts to God. ⁵ The place where these priests serve is really only a copy and a shadow of what is in heaven. That is why God warned Moses when he was ready to build the Holy Tent: "Be sure to make everything exactly like the pattern I showed you on the mountain."^{‡‡} ⁶ But the work that has been given to Jesus is much greater than the work that was given to those priests. In the same way, the new agreement that Jesus brought from God to his people is much greater than the old one. And the new agreement is based on better promises.

⁷ If there had been nothing wrong with the first agreement, there would be no need for a second agreement. ⁸ But God found something wrong with the people. He said, "The time is coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new agreement with the people of Israel and the people of Judah.

⁹ It will not be like the agreement that I made with their ancestors. That is the agreement I gave when I took them by the hand and led them out of Egypt. They did not continue following the agreement I made with them, and I turned away from them, says the Lord.

¹⁰ This is the new agreement I will make with the people of Israel in the future, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their minds, and I will write my laws on their hearts. I will be their God,

[§]8:1 *right side* The place of honour and authority (power).

^{**}8:2 *Most Holy Place* Literally, "holies" for "holy of holies", the spiritual place where God lives and is worshipped. This spiritual place was symbolized by the room inside the Holy Tent in the Old Testament. See Holy Tent and Most Holy Place in the Word List.

^{††}8:2 *place of worship* Literally, "Tabernacle" or "tent".

^{‡‡}8:5 Quote from Exod. 25:40.

and they will be my people.

¹¹ Never again will anyone have to teach their neighbours or their family to know the Lord. All people, important or not, will know me.

¹² And I will forgive the wrongs they have done, and I will not remember their sins.”[¶]

¹³ God called this a new agreement, so he has made the first agreement old. And anything that is old and useless is ready to disappear.

Worship Under the Old Agreement

9 The first agreement had rules for worship and a place for worship here on earth. ² This place was inside a tent. The first area in the tent was called the Holy Place. In the Holy Place were the lamp and the table with the holy bread offered to God. ³ Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place. ⁴ In the Most Holy Place was a golden altar for burning incense. And also there was the Box of the Agreement. The Box was covered with gold. Inside this Box was a gold jar of manna and Aaron’s staff—the staff that once grew leaves. Also in the Box were the flat stones with the Ten Commandments of the old agreement on them. ⁵ Above the Box were the winged creatures that showed God’s divine greatness. These winged creatures were over the place of mercy.^{§§} But we cannot say everything about this now.

⁶ Everything in the tent was made ready in this way. Then the priests went into the first room every day to perform their worship duties. ⁷ But only the high priest could go into the second room,

and he went in only once a year. Also, he could never enter that room without taking blood with him. He offered that blood to God for himself and for the sins the people committed without knowing they were sinning.

⁸ The Holy Spirit uses those two separate rooms to teach us that the way into the Most Holy Place was not open while the first room was still there. ⁹ This is an example for us today. It shows that the gifts and sacrifices the priests offer to God are not able to make the consciences of the worshippers completely clear. ¹⁰ These gifts and sacrifices are only about food and drink and special washings. They are only rules about the body. God gave them for his people to follow until the time comes to make everything new.

Worship Under the New Agreement

¹¹ But Christ has already come to be the high priest. He is the high priest of the good things we now have. But Christ does not serve in a place like the tent that those other priests served in. He serves in a better place. Unlike that tent, this one is perfect. It was not made by anyone here on earth. It does not belong to this world. ¹² Christ entered the Most Holy Place only once—enough for all time. He entered the Most Holy Place by using his own blood, not the blood of goats or young bulls. He entered there and made us free from sin forever.

¹³ The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a cow were sprinkled on those who were no longer pure enough to enter the place of worship. The blood and ashes made them pure again, but only their bodies. ¹⁴ So surely the blood

[¶]8:12 Quote from Jer. 31:31-34.

^{§§}9:5 *place of mercy* Or “mercy seat”, a place on top of the “Box of the Agreement”, where the high priest put the blood of an animal once a year to pay for the sins of the people.

sacrifice of Christ can do much more. Christ offered himself through the eternal Spirit as a perfect sacrifice to God. His blood will make us completely clean from the evil we have done. It will give us clear consciences so that we can worship the living God.

¹⁵ So Christ brings a new agreement from God to his people. He brings this agreement so that those who are chosen by God can have the blessings God promised, blessings that will continue forever. This can happen only because Christ died to free people from sins committed against the commands of the first agreement.

¹⁶ When someone dies and leaves a will,^{*} there must be proof that the one who wrote the will is dead. ¹⁷ A will means nothing while the one who wrote it is still living. It can be used only after that person's death. ¹⁸ That is why blood, as proof of a death, was needed to begin even the first agreement between God and his people. ¹⁹ First, Moses told the people every command in the law. Then he took the blood of young bulls[†] and mixed it with water. He used red wool and a branch of hyssop to sprinkle the blood and water on the book of the law and on all the people. ²⁰ Then he said, "This is the blood that makes good the agreement that God commanded you to follow."[‡] ²¹ In the same way, Moses sprinkled the blood on the Holy Tent. He sprinkled the blood over everything used in worship. ²² The law says that almost everything must be made clean by blood. Sins cannot be forgiven without a blood sacrifice.

Jesus Christ Is Our Sacrifice for Sin

²³ These things are copies of the real things that are in heaven. These copies had to be made clean by animal sacrifices. But the real things in heaven must have much better sacrifices. ²⁴ Christ went into the Most Holy Place. But it was not the one that people built, which is only a copy of the real one. He went into heaven, and he is there now before God to help us.

²⁵ The high priest enters the Most Holy Place once every year. He takes with him blood to offer. But he does not offer his own blood like Christ did. Christ went into heaven, but not to offer himself many times like the high priest offers blood again and again. ²⁶ If Christ had offered himself many times, he would have needed to suffer many times since the world was made. But he came to offer himself only once. And that once is enough for all time. He came at a time when the world is nearing an end. He came to take away all sin by offering himself as a sacrifice.

²⁷ Everyone must die once. Then they are judged. ²⁸ So Christ was offered as a sacrifice once to take away the sins of many people. And he will come a second time, but not to offer himself for sin. He will come the second time to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

Jesus Christ—the Only Sacrifice

10 The Law of Moses gave us only an unclear picture of the good things coming in the future. The law is not a perfect picture of the real things. The law tells people to offer the same sac-

^{*}9:16 *will* The word for "will" here in Greek is the same as the word for "agreement" in the previous verse.

[†]9:19 *bulls* Some copies of the ancient Greek version have "bulls and goats".

[‡]9:20 Quote from Exod. 24:8.

rifices every year. Those who come to worship God continue to offer those sacrifices. But the law can never make them perfect. ²If the law could make people perfect, those sacrifices would have already stopped. The people would already be clean from their sins, and they would not continue to feel guilty. ³But that's not what happens. Their sacrifices make them remember their sins every year, ⁴because it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

⁵So when Christ came into the world he said to God,

“You did not really want sacrifices and offerings,

but you have prepared a body for me.

⁶You were not satisfied with burnt offerings

and sacrifices to take away sins.

⁷Then I said, ‘Here I am, God.

It is written about me in the book of the law.

I have come to do what you want.”[¶]

⁸First Christ said, “You did not want sacrifices and offerings. You were not satisfied with burnt offerings and sacrifices to take away sin.” (These are all sacrifices that the Law commands.) ⁹Then he said, “Here I am, God. I have come to do what you want.” So God ends that first system of sacrifices and starts his new way. ¹⁰Jesus Christ did the things God wanted him to do. And because of that, we are made holy through the sacrifice of Christ's body. Christ made that sacrifice one time—enough for all time.

¹¹Every day the priests stand and do their religious service. Again and again they offer the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹²But Christ offered only one sacrifice for sins, and that sacrifice is good for all time. Then he sat down at the right side of God. ¹³And now Christ waits there for his enemies to be put under his power.[§] ¹⁴With one sacrifice Christ made his people perfect forever. They are the ones who are being made holy.

¹⁵The Holy Spirit also tells us about this. First he says,

¹⁶“This is the agreement** I will make with my people in the future, says the Lord.

I will put my laws in their hearts.

I will write my laws in their minds.”^{††}

¹⁷Then he says,

“I will forget their sins

and never again remember the evil they have done.”^{‡‡}

¹⁸And after everything is forgiven, there is no more need for a sacrifice to remove sin.

Come Near to God

¹⁹And so, brothers and sisters, we are completely free to enter the Most Holy Place. We can do this without fear because of the blood sacrifice of Jesus. ²⁰We enter through a new way that Jesus opened for us with the sacrifice of his body. He is now a living way that leads us through the curtain into God's presence. ²¹And we have a high priest who rules the house of God. ²²Sprinkled with the blood of Christ, our hearts have

[¶]10:7 Quote from Ps. 40:6-8.

§10:13 *to be put under his power* Literally, “to be made a footstool for his feet”.

**10:16 *agreement* The new and better agreement that God has given to his people through Jesus. See agreement in the Word List.

††10:16 Quote from Jer. 31:33.

‡‡10:17 Quote from Jer. 31:34.

been made free from a guilty conscience, and our bodies have been washed with pure water. So enter into God's presence with a sincere heart, full of confidence because of our faith in Christ.²³ We must hold on to the hope we have, never hesitating to tell people about it. We can trust God to do what he promised.

Encourage Each Other

²⁴ We should think about each other to see how we can encourage each other to show love by doing good. ²⁵ We must not stop meeting together, as some are doing. No, we need to keep on encouraging each other. This becomes more and more important as you see the Day getting closer.

Don't Turn Away From God's Son

²⁶ If we decide to continue sinning after we have learned the truth, then there is no other sacrifice that will take away sins. ²⁷ If we continue sinning, all that is left for us is a fearful time of waiting for the judgement and the raging fire that will destroy those who live against God. ²⁸ People who refused to obey the Law of Moses could be found guilty by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If they were guilty, they were not forgiven. They were killed. ²⁹ So what about people now who show their hate for the Son of God? Or what about those who have no respect for the blood sacrifice that began the new agreement and made them holy? And what about those who insult the Spirit of God's grace? Think how much more punishment those people de-

serve! ³⁰ We know that God said, "I will punish people for the wrongs they do; I will repay them."[¶] And he also said, "The Lord will judge his people."^{§§} ³¹ It is a terrible thing to face punishment from the living God.

Keep the Courage You Had

³² Remember the days when you first learned the truth. You had a hard struggle with much suffering, but you remained strong. ³³ Sometimes people said hateful things to you and mistreated you in public. And sometimes you helped others who were being treated the same way. ³⁴ Yes, you helped them in prison and shared in their suffering. And you were still happy when everything you owned was taken away from you. You continued to be happy, because you knew that you had something much better—something that would continue forever.

³⁵ So don't lose the courage that you had in the past. Your courage will be rewarded richly. ³⁶ You must be patient. After you have done what God wants, you will get what he promised you. ³⁷ He says,

"Very soon now, the one who is coming will come and will not be late.

³⁸ The person who is right with me will live by trusting in me.*

But I will not be pleased with the one who turns back in fear."[†]

³⁹ But we are not people who turn back and are destroyed. No, we are the people who have faith and are saved.

[¶]10:30 Quote from Deut. 32:35.

^{§§}10:30 Quote from Deut. 32:36 or Ps. 135:14.

*10:38 *The person ... trusting in me* Or "My Righteous One will live because of his faithfulness." "Righteous One" is a title for the Messiah (Christ), God's Chosen King promised in the Old Testament. See Isa. 53:11; Hab. 2:4; Zech. 9:9; Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14.

[†]10:38 Quote from Hab. 2:3-4 (Greek version).

Faith

11 Faith is what makes real the things we hope for. It is proof of what we cannot see. ²God was pleased with the people who lived a long time ago because they had faith like this.

³Faith helps us understand that God created the whole world by his command. This means that the things we see were made by something that cannot be seen.

⁴Cain and Abel both offered sacrifices to God. But Abel offered a better sacrifice to God because he had faith. God said he was pleased with what Abel offered. And so God called him a good man because he had faith. Abel died, but through his faith he is still speaking.

⁵Enoch was carried away from this earth, so he never died. The Scriptures tell us that before he was carried off, he was a man who pleased God. Later, no one knew where he was, because God had taken Enoch to be with him. This all happened because he had faith. ⁶Without faith no one can please God. Whoever comes to God must believe that he is real and that he rewards those who sincerely try to find him.

⁷Noah was warned by God about things that he could not yet see. But he had faith and respect for God, so he built a large boat to save his family. With his faith, Noah showed that the world was wrong. And he became one of those who are made right with God through faith.

⁸God told Abraham to travel to another place that he promised to give him. Abraham did not know where that other place was. But he obeyed God and started travelling because he had faith.

⁹Abraham lived in the country that God promised to give him. He lived there like a visitor who did not belong. He did this because he had faith. He lived in tents with Isaac and Jacob, who also received the same promise from God. ¹⁰Abraham was waiting for the city[‡] that has real foundations. He was waiting for the city that is planned and built by God.

¹¹Sarah was not able to have children, and Abraham was too old. But he had faith in God, trusting him to do what he promised. And so God made them able to have children. ¹²Abraham was so old he was almost dead. But from that one man came as many descendants as there are stars in the sky. So many people came from him that they are like grains of sand on the seashore.

¹³All these great people continued living with faith until they died. They did not get the things God promised his people. But they were happy just to see those promises coming far in the future. They accepted the fact that they were like strangers and foreigners here on earth. ¹⁴When people accept something like that, they show they are waiting for a country that will be their own. ¹⁵If they were thinking about the country they had left, they could have gone back. ¹⁶But they were waiting for a better country—a heavenly country. So God is not ashamed to be called their God. And he has prepared a city for them.

¹⁷⁻¹⁸God tested Abraham's faith. God told him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. Abraham obeyed because he had faith. He already had the promises from God. And God had already said to him, "It is through Isaac that your descendants will come."[¶] But Abraham was ready to

[‡]11:10 *city* The spiritual "city" where God's people live with him. Also called "the heavenly Jerusalem". See Heb. 12:22.

[¶]11:17-18 Quote from Gen. 21:12.

offer his only son. He did this because he had faith. ¹⁹He believed that God could raise people from death. And really, when God stopped Abraham from killing Isaac, it was as if he got him back from death.

²⁰Isaac blessed the future of Jacob and Esau. He did that because he had faith. ²¹And Jacob, also because he had faith, blessed each one of Joseph's sons. He did this while he was dying, leaning on his rod and worshipping God.

²²And when Joseph was almost dead, he spoke about the people of Israel leaving Egypt. And he told them what they should do with his body. He did this because he had faith.

²³And the mother and father of Moses saw that he was a beautiful baby and hid him for three months after he was born. This was against the king's order. But they were not afraid because they had faith.

²⁴⁻²⁵Moses grew up and became a man. He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose not to enjoy the pleasures of sin that last such a short time. Instead, he chose to suffer with God's people. He did this because he had faith. ²⁶He thought it was better to suffer for the Messiah than to have all the treasures of Egypt. He was waiting for the reward that God would give him.

²⁷Moses left Egypt because he had faith. He was not afraid of the king's anger. He remained strong as if he could see the God no one can see. ²⁸And because he had faith, Moses arranged for the Passover meal. And he sprinkled the blood of the lambs on the doorways of his people so that the destroyer[§] would not kill their firstborn sons.

²⁹And God's people all walked through the Red Sea as if it were dry land. They were able to do this because they had faith. But when the Egyptians tried to follow them, they were drowned.

³⁰And the walls of Jericho fell because of the faith of God's people. They marched around the walls for seven days, and then the walls fell.

³¹And Rahab, the prostitute, welcomed the Israelite spies like friends. And because of her faith, she was not killed with the ones who refused to obey.

³²Do I need to give you more examples? I don't have enough time to tell you about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets. ³³All of them had great faith. And with that faith they defeated kingdoms. They did what was right, and God helped them in the ways he promised. With their faith some people closed the mouths of lions. ³⁴And some were able to stop blazing fires. Others escaped from being killed with swords. Some who were weak were made strong. They became powerful in battle and defeated other armies. ³⁵There were women who lost loved ones but got them back when they were raised from death. Others were tortured but refused to accept their freedom. They did this so that they could be raised from death to a better life. ³⁶Some were laughed at and beaten. Others were tied up and put in prison. ³⁷They were killed with stones. They were cut in half. They were killed with swords. The only clothes some of them had were sheepskins or goatskins. They were poor, persecuted and mistreated by others. ³⁸The world was not good enough for these great people. They had to wander in

§11:28 *the destroyer* The angel God sent to punish the Egyptians by killing the oldest son in each home. See Exod. 12:29-32.

deserts and mountains, living in caves and holes in the ground.

³⁹ God was pleased with all of them because of their faith. But not one of them received God's great promise. ⁴⁰ God planned something better for us. He wanted to make us perfect. Of course, he wanted those great people to be made perfect too, but not before we could all enjoy that blessing together.

We Also Should Follow Jesus' Example

12 We have all these great people around us as examples. Their lives tell us what faith means. So we, too, should run the race that is before us and never give up. We should remove from our lives anything that would slow us down and the sin that so often makes us fall. ² We must never stop looking to Jesus. He is the leader of our faith, and he is the one who makes our faith complete. He suffered death on a cross. But he accepted the shame of the cross as if it were nothing because of the joy he could see waiting for him. And now he is sitting at the right side of God's throne. ³ Think about Jesus. He patiently endured the angry insults that sinful people were shouting at him. Think about him so that you won't get discouraged and stop trying.

God Is Like a Father

⁴ You are struggling against sin, but you have not had to give up your life for the cause. ⁵ You are children of God, and he speaks words of comfort to you. Maybe you have forgotten these words: "My child, when the Lord disciplines you, pay attention and don't stop trying.

⁶ The Lord disciplines everyone he loves;

he punishes everyone he accepts as his child."^{**}

⁷ So accept sufferings like a father's discipline. God does these things to you like a father correcting his children. You know that all children are disciplined by their fathers. ⁸ So, if you never receive the discipline that every child must have, you are not true children and don't really belong to God. ⁹ We have all had fathers here on earth who corrected us, and we respected them. So it is even more important that we accept discipline from the Father of our spirits. If we do this, we will have life. ¹⁰ Our fathers on earth disciplined us for a short time in the way they thought was best. But God disciplines us to help us so that we can be holy like him. ¹¹ We don't enjoy discipline when we get it. It is painful. But later, after we have learned our lesson from it, we will enjoy the peace that comes from doing what is right.

Be Careful How You Live

¹² You have become weak, so make yourselves strong again. ¹³ Live in the right way so that you will be saved and your weakness will not cause you to be lost.

¹⁴ Try to live in peace with everyone. And try to keep your lives free from sin. Anyone whose life is not holy will never see the Lord. ¹⁵ Be careful that no one fails to receive God's grace. Be careful that no one loses their faith and becomes like a bitter weed growing among you. Someone like that can ruin your whole group. ¹⁶ Be careful that no one commits sexual sin or fails to respect God as Esau did. As the oldest son, Esau would have inherited everything from his father. But he sold all that for a single meal. ¹⁷ You remember that after Esau did this, he

^{**} 12:6 Quote from Prov. 3:11-12.

wanted to get his father's blessing. He wanted that blessing so much that he cried. But his father refused to give him the blessing, because Esau could find no way to change what he had done.

¹⁸ You are God's people, like the people of Israel when they came to Mount Sinai. But you have not come to a physical mountain that can be touched. It is not like the one they saw, which was burning with fire and covered with darkness, gloom and storms. ¹⁹ There is no sound of a trumpet or a voice speaking words like those they heard. When they heard the voice, they begged never to hear another word. ²⁰ They did not want to hear the command: "If anything, even an animal, touches the mountain, it must be killed with stones."^{††} ²¹ What they saw was so terrible that Moses said, "I am shaking with fear."^{‡‡¶¶}

²² But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.^{§§} You have come to a place where thousands of angels have gathered to celebrate. ²³ You have come to the meeting of God's firstborn* children. Their names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all people. And you have come to the spirits of good people who have been made perfect. ²⁴ You have come to Jesus—the one who brought the new agreement from God to his people. You have come to the sprinkled blood[†] that tells us about better things than the blood of Abel.

²⁵ Be careful and don't refuse to listen when God speaks. Those people refused to listen to him when he warned them on earth. And they did not escape. Now God is speaking from heaven. So now it will be worse for those who refuse to listen to him. ²⁶ When he spoke before, his voice shook the earth. But now he has promised, "Once again I will shake the earth, but I will also shake heaven."^{‡‡} ²⁷ The words "once again" clearly show us that everything that was created will be destroyed—that is, the things that can be shaken. And only what cannot be shaken will remain.

²⁸ So we should be thankful because we have a kingdom that cannot be shaken. And because we are thankful, we should worship God in a way that will please him. We should do this with respect and fear, ²⁹ because our God is like a fire that can destroy us.[¶]

Worship That Pleases God

13 Continue loving each other like brothers and sisters. ² Always remember to help people by welcoming them into your home. Some people have done that and have helped angels without knowing it. ³ Don't forget those who are in prison. Remember them as though you were in prison with them. And don't forget those who are suffering. Remember them as though you were suffering with them.

^{††}12:20 Quote from Exod. 19:12-13.

^{‡‡}12:21 Quote from Deut. 9:19.

^{¶¶}12:21 These verses refer to things that happened to the people of Israel in the time of Moses as described in Exod. 19.

^{§§}12:22 *Jerusalem* Here, the spiritual city of God's people.

*12:23 *firstborn* The first son born in a Jewish family had the most important place in the family and received special blessings. All God's children are like that.

[†]12:24 *sprinkled blood* The blood (death) of Jesus.

[‡]12:26 Quote from Hag. 2:6.

[¶]12:29 Quote from Deut. 4:24.

⁴Marriage should be honoured by everyone. And every marriage should be kept pure between husband and wife. God will judge guilty those who commit sexual sins and adultery. ⁵Keep your lives free from the love of money. And be satisfied with what you have. God has said,

“I will never leave you;
I will never run away from you.”⁸

⁶So we can feel sure and say,
“The Lord is my helper;
I will not be afraid.

People can do nothing to me.”^{**}

⁷Remember your leaders. They taught God’s message to you. Remember how they lived and died, and copy their faith.

⁸Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. ⁹Don’t let all kinds of strange teachings lead you into the wrong way. Depend only on God’s grace for spiritual strength, not on rules about foods. Obeying those rules doesn’t help anyone.

¹⁰We have an altar.^{††} And those priests who serve in the Holy Tent cannot share in the sacrifice we have. ¹¹The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place and offers that blood for sins. But the bodies of those animals are burned outside the camp. ¹²So Jesus also suffered outside the city. He died to make his people holy with his own blood. ¹³So we should go to Jesus outside the camp and accept the same shame that he had. ¹⁴Here on earth we don’t have a city that lasts forever. But we are waiting for the city that we will have in the future. ¹⁵So through Jesus we should never stop offering our sacrifice to God. That sacrifice is our praise,

coming from lips that speak his name. ¹⁶And don’t forget to do good and to share what you have with others, because sacrifices like these are very pleasing to God.

¹⁷Obeys your leaders. Be willing to do what they say. They are responsible to God for your spiritual welfare, so they are always watching to protect you. Obey them so that their work will give them joy, not sorrow. Causing them trouble will certainly not help you.

¹⁸Continue praying for us. We feel right about what we do, because we always try to do what is best. ¹⁹And I beg you to pray that God will send me back to you soon. I want this more than anything else.

²⁰⁻²¹I pray that the God of peace will give you every good thing you need so that you can do what he wants. God is the one who raised from death our Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of his sheep. He raised him because Jesus sacrificed his blood to begin the new agreement that never ends. I pray that God will work through Jesus Christ to do the things in us that please him. To him be all honour forever. Amen.

²²My brothers and sisters, I ask for your patience in listening to this message of encouragement I have sent you. I made it as brief as I could.

²³I want you to know that our brother Timothy is out of prison. If he comes to me soon, we will both come to see you.

²⁴Give my greetings to all your leaders and to all God’s people. All those from Italy send you their greetings.

²⁵I pray that God’s grace will be with you all.

§13:5 Quote from Deut. 31:6.

**13:6 Quote from Ps. 118:6.

††13:10 See verses 15-16, which explain that Jesus is the altar where his followers offer to God sacrifices of praise and acts of kindness.