

STUDIES IN HEBREWS

Donald Guthrie says that Hebrews poses more problems than any other New Testament book - but has he read the book of Revelation? The Council of Trent and the KJV attribute it to Paul, but it is actually anonymous. The author refers to himself, but not by name (13:19, 22-23). Hebrews 2:3 does read like a second-generation work, not one from the hand of Paul. There have been a number of plausible suggestions as to its authorship. Tertullian attributed it to Barnabas, Paul's missionary partner on his first missionary journey (Acts 13-14). Augustine initially believed it came from Paul but later saw it as anonymous. Sir William Ramsay suggested that the author was Philip the deacon (cf. Acts 6-8). Martin Luther might have hit the jackpot in suggesting Apollos as the author. Apollos came from Alexandria, a place of much education, and much use of allegory and antithesis. The idea of typology is strong in Hebrews (see 8:5; 9:24; 10:1), and there is obviously a powerful theological mind behind the work. Apollos is described as 'mighty in the Scriptures' (Acts 18:24). Harnack suggested Priscilla as the author, but Hebrews 11:32 uses the masculine participle in the Greek so that theory can be discarded. Origen in the third century thought that Luke was possibly the author, but then very sensibly added that only God knows.

As to its source and its destination, Hebrews 13:24 can be interpreted to mean that the author was writing to Rome (and there were Italians with him) or that he was writing from Rome. Donald Guthrie thinks that Hebrews was written to Rome. The fact that the fall of Jerusalem - and the destruction of the Temple system of sacrifices - is not mentioned is a strong argument in favour of the view that the book was written before this took place i.e. before A.D. 66-70. If the temple had already been destroyed, that would have been an obvious point to mention.

There are warnings against falling away (2:1-4; 6:1-8; 10:29). The Hebrews had known persecution (10:34) but not martyrdom (12:4). The recipients of the letter seem to have simply become lazy (2:1; 5:11-14; 10:23-25). Hebrews 10:19 does indicate the point where the author turns more from doctrine to application (note the 'therefore' as in Romans 12:1; Ephesians 4:1), but there are many exhortations throughout the epistle, based on the superiority of the Christian faith over Judaism. The word 'better' is found thirteen times - Christ is a better mediator of a better covenant, based on better promises. For some strange reason, Geerhardus Vos thought that it was written to Gentile Christians, not Jewish Christians, but surely it was written to Jewish Christians who may have been tempted to return to Judaism.

God's Final Revelation (Heb.1:1-4)

We live in an age when all religions are seen as much the same. Gandhi used to say that 'the soul of all religions is one'. Prince Charles is on record as saying that he wants to be known as a 'Defender of faith' or 'Defender of faiths' i.e. any faith, rather than 'Defender of the Faith', i.e. the Christian faith in its Protestant form. But God declares that His final word to us is found in His Son Jesus Christ.

1. How is the new revelation compared to the old? (1:1-2a) How is it different and how is it similar? _____

The New English Bible says that formerly God spoke in 'fragmentary and varied fashion through the prophets'.

B. F. Westcott: 'While the revelations of the Old and New Covenants are thus sharply distinguished, God is the One Author of both.'

Augustine: 'The New Testament is concealed in the Old; the Old is revealed in the New.'

Donald Guthrie: 'The curtain has finally fallen on the previous age and the final age had now dawned.'

2. What does Christ Himself say in Matthew 12:41-42? What does Paul say in 2 Corinthians 1:20? _____

3. Note the expressions that are used to describe the Son in 1:2-4. What does each of them mean?

(a) heir of all things (Ps.2:8) _____

(b) who made the worlds (literally 'ages'; cf. Heb.3:4-6; John 1:3; Col.1:16) _____

(c) the brightness of God's glory (Ezek.1:28; 3:23; John 1:14) _____

(d) the express image of God's person (Col.1:15) _____

(e) who upholds all things by the word of His power (Col.1:17) _____

(f) who purged our sins (cf.10:3-4) _____

(g) who sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (remember that the Levitical priests stood during their ministrations) _____

4. Over whom else is Christ greater? (1:4) Why do you think this subject is raised? _____

Remember that the Jews believed that angels were connected with the giving of

the law (Heb.2:2; Acts 7:53; Gal.3:19).

The Son Far Above the Angels (Heb.1:5-14)

Jehovah's Witnesses will tell you that Christ is not God but only the greatest of the angels. The biblical teaching, however, as exemplified in the Westminster Confession, says that Christ is true God and true man, with two whole, perfect and distinct natures (the Godhead and the manhood) inseparably joined together in one person.

1. The author of Hebrews cites seven Old Testament passages to show the superiority of Christ over the angels. What is the point made in each passage?

v.5a (Ps.2:7) _____

Philip Edgcumbe Hughes says the resurrection is in mind here.

v.5b (2 Sam.7:14) _____

v.6 (Deut.32:43; Ps.97:7) _____

Remember that angels are not to be worshipped (Col.2:18; Rev.19:10; 22:8-9).

v.7 (Ps.104:4) _____

vv.8-9 (Ps.45:6-7) _____

The New World Translation has 'God is your throne', which is more than unlikely. Note John 20:28.

vv.10-12 (Ps.102:25-27) _____

This is an Old Testament passage which refers to Jehovah, but in the New Testament it is applied to Christ the Son. This can only be valid if the Son is divine, like the Father.

v.13 (Ps.110:1) _____

2. Each passage is introduced by 'he says', meaning 'God says'. Why does he say that, instead of the more usual 'It is written'? _____

What God *said* so long ago, He still *says* today.

3. What do the angels do? (1:14) How is this different from what the Son does? _____

No wonder Charles Wesley wrote:

*The praises of Jesus
The angels proclaim,
Fall down on their faces,*

And worship the Lamb.

The Danger of Drifting Away (Heb.2:1-4)

One of the most heart-breaking things to witness is a professing Christian who is drifting away from Christ. He/she may not feel tempted to become a raging atheist or a serial killer, but the temptation to skip things can become very great. In 1871 A. B. Bruce, soon to become Professor of Apologetics and New Testament at Glasgow, wrote a helpful book called *The Training of the Twelve*. There are a few danger signs even in that book but by the year of his death, in 1899, Bruce had become vague even about the basic facts of the gospel. That did not happen overnight; it was a fairly slow but definite drift from the truth.

This is the first of the warning passages in Hebrews (cf. 3:6b-4:12; 5:11-6:8; 10:26-31; 12:15-17, 25-29)

1. Why does the Bible so often use the word 'therefore'? (2:1) What is the danger? What are the Christians called upon to do? _____

2. What happened to those who broke the old covenant? (2:2) How was this revelation given? (cf. Deut.33:2; Ps.68:17; Acts 7:53; Gal.3:19) _____

3. Why is the new covenant referred to as one which confers 'so great a salvation'? (2:3) From whom did it come? How did the Hebrews receive it?

If the 'us' is literal - and not just a general reference to Christians - the writer is one step removed from the apostolic eyewitnesses.

4. How was this testimony confirmed? (2:4) Who determined how these happened? _____

5. Is it true that the New Testament has more mercy and less judgment in it than the Old Testament? What implications do this have for us? _____

Bishop John A. T. Robinson used to say that Jesus will save everybody, and that 'hell is an ultimate impossibility'. To reject the New Testament is worse than to

reject the Old Testament because the gospel was spoken by the Lord Himself, not just an angel; it was confirmed by the apostles; and it was testified to by miracles. We need to pay more careful attention to so great a salvation.

Christ as True Man (Heb.2:5-18)

Martin Luther's *A Mighty Fortress is our God* contains the lines:

*Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing,
Were not the right Man on our side,
The Man of God's own choosing.*

Hebrews 1 tells us that Christ is truly God, but Hebrew 2 tells us that Christ is also true man. He fulfils what Adam ought to have done.

1. To whom is the world to come not subject? (2:5) _____

Hywel Jones points out that the 'world to come' is not heaven but the final era of God's redemptive purpose (cf. 1:2; 9:26).

2. The author then refers to Psalm 8, although it is introduced in a rather vague way (2:6). What do verses 6-8, from Psalm 8, tell us about man? Has this been fulfilled as yet? (2:8) _____

Psalm 8 tells us two important things about man:

- (a) we are seemingly insignificant
- (b) yet we have great dignity.

Hebrews 2:6-8 applies Psalm 8 to Christ as the true man. Everything is under man's feet, but we do not yet see this (v.8). The Son of God became the Son of Man and suffered the most terrible of deaths on behalf of sinners (v.9). By faith, the Christian sees Christ - the one who is above the angels (Heb.1) but who on earth was made true man and thus a little lower than the angels (Heb.2:9) - crowned with glory and honour (see too Phil.2:5-11). Psalm 8 will be fulfilled - but only in Christ. Then, redeemed man, created lower than the angels, will be higher than the angels, and will judge the evil angels (1 Cor.6:3).

Verse 7 can mean 'a little lower than the angels' or 'for a little while lower than the angels'. Both will fit.

Grammatically and theologically, the subjection in verse 8 can refer to man or Christ, but it surely refers firstly to man.

3. What is said of Christ in verse 9? _____

4. What was quite fitting for the sovereign God to do? (2:10) How is Christ

described? How was Christ made perfect - or complete? (cf.5:7-9) What does this mean? _____

For 'pioneer', see Acts 3:15; 5:31; Heb.12:2.

5. How are Christ and His people one? (2:11) How are we made His brethren? (note Rom.8:29; John 20:17) _____

In liberal circles, it used to be common to hear that the Christian message is one which teaches the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. However, the gospel is that we sinners are not born God's children except in the sense that He created us (Acts 17:28). In a saving sense, we only *become* God's children when we repent of sin and trust in Christ alone (John 1:12-13; Rom.8:14-16).

6. How do Psalm 22:22 and Isaiah 8:17-18 (cited in vv.12-13) tell us of Christ's mission? How are Christians addressed? _____

Verse 13a speaks of the Messiah's trust in the Father, not our trust in Christ.

Verse 13 implies that there is a parallel between Isaiah and his children, and Christ and His people.

Psalm 22 tells of the terrible sufferings of the Messiah, forsaken by God (Ps.22:1-2) and men (Ps.22:6-8), yet finally vindicated, and bringing many brothers from the ends of the earth to God (Ps.22:22-31). The Son of God became the Son of Man that the sons of men might become sons of God.

7. What did the Son of God become? (2:14) Why did He become (literally) 'blood and flesh'? What victory did He achieve? How? _____

The Nicene Creed declares that Christ was 'made man'. But in the early Church there were people called Docetists who believed that the divine Christ only *seemed* to be a man. The Christ spirit was thought to have lived in a human body for a time. The apostle John had to argue against this view (1 John 4:2; 2 John 7), and so does the author of Hebrews. Christ came to redeem men, not angels, and so He had to become man. The Word did not inhabit flesh but *became* flesh (John 1:14). Unless Christ is truly man, He could not suffer (v.18), be tempted (v.18) and die (vv.14, 17).

8. What is the terrible bondage of the person outside of Christ? (2:15) _____

This is not disguised by Woody Allen's joke about this: 'It's not that I'm afraid to die; it's just that I don't want to be there when it happens.' Today many fantasise that everybody goes to heaven - that seems, for example, to have been the assumption behind Princess Diana's funeral.

9. Who are delivered, and who are not? (2:16) What does the author mean by 'the seed of Abraham'? (cf. John 8:39; Rom.4:11) _____

10. What did Christ achieve as the merciful and faithful high priest? (2:17) How?

For 'to propitiate' and 'propitiation', see Luke 18:13; Rom.3:25; Heb.9:5; 1 John 2:2; 4:10. It refers to the holy anger of God being placated.

11. What has Christ gone through which is thoroughly human? (2:18) What does this mean for Him and us now? _____

God was under no obligation to save us. He does not need us (Acts 17:25), and it would be quite just of Him to condemn every human being who has ever lived because of our sins (Rom.3:9-20). But to save us, He had to become one of us. It was as perfect representative man that He died for the sins of His people.

Greater Than Moses (Heb.3:1-6)

How does Christ compare to the Old Testament saints? He declares that He is greater than Jonah (Matt.12:41) and Solomon (Matt.12:42). He is greater too than the temple where God met man and where the sacrifices were carried out on behalf of sinners (Matt.12:6). Hebrews tells us that He is also greater than Moses. We often see things more clearly when we compare them to something else e.g. I always mark a number of Church History papers together for comparison. That is why Hebrews now compares Jesus to Moses.

1. What is Christ called in 3:1? (note John 17:18 for the apostle reference. 'Apostle' means 'sent one') How did He carry out His task? (3:2) _____

2. What about Moses? (3:2) What was Moses? (Num.12:7-8; Ex.24:8; Deut.33:5; Gal.3:19) _____

3. In what ways is Christ greater than Moses? (3:3-6) What is the house? (3:6) Who would build this house (or household)? (1 Chron.17:11-12; Zech.6:12-13) _____

F. F. Bruce rightly says that no distinction can be made here between the Father and the Son.

4. What are Christians called in verse 1? Why? (see 2:11) How are we to respond to all this? (3:1, 6) _____

Notice how, in the Bible, what we are to do is so closely connected to what we are to believe.

There is no denigration of Moses in these verses. Moses was faithful (v.2), even when his brother Aaron and the rest of the Israelites apostatised by building a golden calf to worship (see Ex.32). God spoke to Moses face to face, and Moses proved to be faithful in God's house (Num.12:7-8). But Jesus is far greater. As God is the builder, so too is Jesus (vv.3-4). Jesus is greater than Moses as the builder is greater than the house and the son is greater than the servant (vv.3-6).

Rest for the People of God (Heb.3:7-4:13)

Using Psalm 95, the author shows the failure of the people under Moses and Joshua. According to Hywel Jones, Psalm 95 is referred to in 19 of the 29 verses in this section, and is actually quoted five times. F. F. Bruce: 'By dint of repetition our author endeavours to bring home to his readers the fact that the divine warning is as applicable to them as it was in the days of Moses or David.'

1. Who is the author of Psalm 95? (3:7) Why is He said to speak in the present tense? Can we ever say that the Old Testament is irrelevant to us today? _____

Notice the urgency in 'today' (3:7, 13, 15). A funeral director in Bowraville told me of a petrol pump attendant who said to him, when filling up his hearse, 'It will be a long time before you get me in one of those.' The next day the petrol pump attendant, who was only 16 years of age, was killed when a load of watermelons fell on him.

2. When did the hardening of heart take place? (3:7-8; Ex.15:22-25; 17:1-7; 32:1ff; Num.14:26-35) _____

3. What did the Israelites do in the desert during the exodus? (3:9-10) How did God respond? (3:10-11) _____

4. What lesson is drawn from this example? (3:12) What is the apostasy which is almost certainly envisaged? How could this apply to us today? _____

5. What is the remedy? (3:13) How is sin described? (recall Gen.3) _____

6. What are we called upon to do? (3:14; see 3:6; 10:23) _____

7. What is the application made in 3:15-19? How are the disobedient described?

The 'all' does not deal with the exceptions - Joshua and Caleb.

8. Why should we fear? (4:1) What is the promise and what is the warning?

The word *dokeo* is usually to be translated as 'seem' or 'appear' but Donald Guthrie wants to translate it as 'judged' - which suits better, but linguistically is a

bit strained.

9. In principle, is there any difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament? (4:2) Where did the Israelites go wrong? _____

10. Who has entered God's rest? (4:3) What did rest mean in Genesis 2:2? (Heb.4:3-4) How is rest real but unachieved? (4:4-5) _____

11. Since the Israelites failed to enter that rest, what must remain? (4:6-7) _____

12. How does Joshua's failure not negate the promise of God? (4:8-9) _____

A Sabbath is a *sabbatismos*. There is a debate as to whether the author is referring to the Christian Sabbath or to salvation (rest from dead works).

13. What similarity is there between the believer and God? (4:10; Gen.2:2) _____

14. What are we called upon to do? (4:11; note Matt.11:28) _____

Note the paradox - to strive, to work to enter the rest.

15. What does the author say about the word of God? (4:12) How extensive is it? _____

Note Isa.49:2; Eph.6:17; Rev.1:16.

16. What does the author say about the judgment of God? (4:13) How extensive is it? _____

Our Great High Priest (Heb.4:14-16)

1. What do these verses say about the exaltation of Christ? Where did He go? (note the contrast with the Old Testament high priests) What is said about His character? _____

2. What is said about Christ's affinities with us? (note Matt.4:1-11; 26:39) How should this help us? _____

John Brown: 'The Son of God, had He never become incarnate, might have pitied, but He could not have sympathized with His people.'

3. In the light of these truths, what two things ought we to do? (vv.14, 16)

4. How are duty and doctrine combined in these verses? _____

*Jesus, my great High Priest,
Offered His blood and died;
My guilty conscience seeks
No sacrifice beside;
His powerful blood did once atone,
And now it pleads before the throne* (Isaac Watts).

Donald Guthrie: 'There is sympathy for the needy, but not for the self-sufficient.'

Thomas Hewitt: 'The human nature gave the assurance of sympathy, and the divine the confidence of strength.' This is true, provided we do not get the idea that God cannot be sympathetic (literally 'suffer with') His people (e.g. Ex.3:7-8; Hosea 11:8-9). The Thirty-Nine Articles declare that God is 'without passions', but that owes more to Aristotle than to the Bible. It is trying to guard against the idea that God could ever lose control of Himself, as we do of ourselves.

The Requirements of the High Priest: Aaron and Jesus (Heb.5:1-10)

1. What are the requirements of a high priest?

vv.1-2 (Num.15:29-30) _____

v.4 (Ex.30:7-10; see as a contrast Num.16:40; 2 Chron.26:18) _____

2. How is Christ similar to the Old Testament high priest?

vv. 5-6, 10 (see John 8:54; Ps.2:7; 110:4) _____

vv.7-9 _____

It is perhaps not totally surprising that the Dead Sea Scrolls indicate that the Qumran community almost certainly expected two Messiahs - a kingly one and a priestly one. The community did not see how these two could be combined in the one person.

3. How can Christ have 'learned obedience' (5:8) and be said to have been 'made perfect' or 'made complete' (5:9; note Matt.26:36-42)? _____

Geerhardus Vos: 'the perfection attained was not moral perfection, but a perfect fitness for His office'. Perhaps Griffith Thomas was closer to the truth: 'Innocency is life untested, while virtue is innocency tested and triumphant'. We cannot escape the fact that there was growth in the life of the sinless one (cf. Luke 2:52).

4. How is Christ different to the priests of the line of Aaron? (Heb.5:3; Lev.16:11, 15; Zech.3:1-4 & Heb.5:9; 7:26-27) _____

5. What kind of priest is Christ? (5:6, 10; note Genesis 14:18-22; Ps.110:4; this will be developed in chapter 7) Why should we entrust our eternal destiny to Him? _____

Since Christ is high priest forever, He obviously has no successor.

Hebrews 5:11-6:12 is something of a pastoral parenthesis i.e. a parenthesis to the main argument, but with pastoral intentions.

The Pilgrims' Regress (Heb.5:11-6:8)

1. Why does the author suddenly rebuke the Hebrews? (5:11) Where were they spiritually and where should they have been? (5:11-14) _____

Donald Guthrie thinks that the author is referring to a group amongst the Hebrews which had the potential for teaching, but it reads like he is referring to the whole group. Every Christian should be able to teach the basics of the gospel.

The milk and solid food image is also found in 1 Corinthians 3:1-2; and the baby reference in 1 Corinthians 13:11.

In the physical world, we can grow rusty through not using a skill e.g. in sport or in riding a bicycle or playing a musical instrument.

2. How do we obtain spiritual growth? (5:14) _____

We get the English word 'gymnasium' from the word for Greek word here for 'practice'.

3. What are six elementary or foundational principles of the Christian faith? (6:1-2)

(a) _____

(b) _____

(c) _____

It is baptisms or washings. This could refer, as F. F. Bruce thought, to Old Testament washings (e.g. Ex.30:17-21) or it could refer to Christian baptisms - in water and in the Spirit. The former is perhaps more likely.

(d) _____

Laying on of hands refers to many things in the Bible, including ordination and prayer (cf. Mark 16:18; Acts 8:17; 13:3; 19:6; 28:8; 1 Tim.4:14).

(e) _____

(f) _____

4. What is the author's intention? (6:1, 3) How does he qualify it? _____

'Perfection' in 6:1 can also mean 'maturity'.

5. Hebrews 6:4-6 is a most contentious section. What warning is found there? Is he referring to something that can happen inside or outside the church? _____

There are three main interpretations of these verses:

(a) Christians can lose their salvation (John Wesley). But other passages are against that view (John 10:28-30; Rom.8:31-39; 1 John 2:19).

(b) The passage is hypothetical (B. F. Westcott, Thomas Hewitt, Donald Guthrie, Spurgeon). This makes it rather lame, but verse 9 is often used to justify it. However, in chapter 10 the warning is repeated. Why waste space on something

that is hypothetical? Verse 9 does not mean that it cannot happen, only that the author is confident that it will not happen.

(c) A person may be very close to being a Christian, and yet not be one (John Owen, John Calvin, Hywel Jones). This seems the best interpretation. There are a number of texts which help to illustrate it - Mark 4:16, 18; Matt.7:21-23; the example of Judas. Some of the bitterest anti-Christians were once professing Christians. Josef Stalin once studied for the Russian Orthodox priesthood before he went on to become the most brutal dictator and greatest mass murderer in the history of the world.

6. If we adopt this third view, what six things can we possess and still not be Christians?

- (a) _____
F. F. Bruce thinks that enlightenment refers to baptism.
- (b) _____
F. F. Bruce thinks tasting the heavenly gift refers to the Lord's Supper.
- (c) _____
- (d) _____
- (e) _____
- (f) _____

Hywel Jones: 'the least grace is a better insurance for heaven than the greatest gift.'

7. Why is this treated as such a serious sin? (6:6) _____

Notice what Peter says in 2 Peter 2:20-21.

8. How do the examples of Esau, Saul, Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-13, 18-23), and the disciples in John 6:66 help us understand this? Tertullian (c. A.D 200) thought that there could be no forgiveness for serious post-baptismal sin. But what about Peter's threefold denial of Christ, then Christ's restoration of him in John 21:15-17? What should happen if the 'apostate' repents? _____

This is a hugely difficult - if not, virtually impossible - section to implement pastorally. Apostates do not repent and God does not grant them repentance, but apparent apostates can and do repent (e.g. Peter).

9. Explain the agricultural illustration in 6:7-8. What is the end of such people?

The Pilgrims' Progress (Heb.6:9-20)

1. Of what is the author confident? (6:9) _____

Donald Guthrie: 'The writer appears to be reflecting on a hypothetical case, although in the nature of the whole argument it must be supposed that it was a real possibility.' What does that mean?

2. What are the bases for the author's optimism? (6:10) _____

3. What are Christians to exhibit in their lives? (6:10-12) What is one way of achieving this? (6:12) What is the result? (6:11) _____

Donald Guthrie says that the ones to be imitated are both Old Testament saints (see Heb.11) and Christians.

4. What promise did God make to Abraham? (6:14; Gen.22:16-17) How did He confirm it? (6:13) Why did He take an oath on Himself? _____

5. Did God fulfil His promise? (6:15) How did Abraham wait for it? _____

The Bible is kind to Abraham here. He did wait 25 years (Gen.12:3-4; 21:5), but he was not always patient (Gen.16).

6. On what do men take oaths? (6:16; see Ex.22:10-11) What is their effect? _____

7. Why did God take an oath? (6:17) How should this help us in the faith? _____

Of course, God's word would have been true without an oath.

John Trapp: 'His word cannot be made more true, but yet more credible. Now two things make a thing more credible: 1. The quality of the person speaking; 2. The manner of the speech.'

As another example, note that in Genesis 15:8 Abram asked for a confirmation of God's word. This came in Genesis 15:9-21. The meaning of this strange ceremony is: 'If I do not keep my word, may I be cut up like these animals.' This shows us the lengths that God is prepared to go to in order to encourage and build up our weak faith.

8. What does God find it impossible to do? (6:18; cf. Tit.1:2) What effect should this have on the believer? How is the believer described? (note Num.35:6, 11-28 for the image) _____

9. What is the other image used to describe the hope of the Christian? (6:19) _____

The hope could be sure and steadfast or, as in the RSV, the anchor could be. Either way, the same point is made.

10. What has Jesus done as the great high priest? (6:19b-20) What is the point of His being described as our forerunner? How are the Old Testament high priests and Christ compared? What is the difference, so far as where they went?

The author does mix his metaphors in vv.18-20 - cities of refuge, an anchor, and entrance behind the veil in the temple (heaven)!

In 6:20 the author returns to the Melchizedek motif which he left at 5:10. Hebrews 5:11-6:20 is an interlude in the argument wherein the author drives home a few necessary truths.

Christ, the High Priest After the Order of Melchizedek (Heb.7:1-28)

1. Who was Melchizedek? (Gen.14:18-20; Ps.110:4) _____

Salem was the original name for Jerusalem. 'Salem' means 'Shalom' (peace).

2. How was he made like the Son of God?

vv.1-2 _____

v.3 _____

Some say that the appearance of Melchizedek was actually a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ but that is not what is being said here.

Genealogy was vital to a Levitical priest e.g. Ezra 2:59-63.

As man, Christ did have a genealogy e.g. Matt.1:1.

3. How do verses 4-10 show that Melchizedek is greater than Levi (Abraham's great grandson)? _____

For v.5, see Numbers 18:26-27.

Re. vv.6-7, Hywel Jones writes: 'To bless is not to wish someone well, but to possess and confer a benefit.'

In effect, Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek, and so acknowledged his superiority over the whole Levitical priesthood.

John Cennick wrote:

*A good High Priest is come,
Supplying Aaron's place,
And taking up his room,
Dispensing life and grace,
The law by Aaron's priesthood came,
But grace and truth by Jesus' Name.*

4. Noting Psalm 110:4, what conclusion can be drawn? (7:11) What was not possible under the Levitical priesthood? _____

5. What does it mean when it says that the law is changed? (7:12) How can the law remain (e.g. Matt.5:17; Rom.3:31) yet be changed? _____

6. What aspects of the law are changed, and what aspects remain?

(a) ceremonial law (e.g. Gen.17:9-14 and Gal.5:2-4; Lev.11 and Mark 7:19; Lev.16 and Heb.10:18) _____

(b) judicial law (e.g. Lev.20:10 and 1 Cor.5) _____

(c) moral law (Ex.20:1-17 and Rom.13:8-10) _____

Donald Guthrie explains nothing: 'The writer is here arguing hypothetically, for the law itself cannot be changed. He has primarily in mind the law affecting the Aaronic priesthood.' That is about as muddled an explanation as one could hope

for.

Once the building is up, there is no need for the scaffolding.

7. What is clear about Christ? (7:13) What is clear from the law about anyone who comes from the tribe of Judah? (7:13-14) _____

The Qumran community of Dead Sea Scroll fame almost certainly believed in two Messiahs - one Davidic and one priestly. One can almost understand why.

8. What is the basis of Christ's claim to the priesthood? (7:15-17) What is the key word in verse 17? _____

9. What two conclusions does this lead to, in verses 18-19? (negative and positive) _____

10. How is Christ superior to the Levitical priests?

vv.20-22 _____

vv.23-25 _____

vv.25, 27 (note 10:2-4) _____

vv.26-28 _____

The Mormon cult has two human priesthods - Levitical (which is bad enough) and the order of Melchizedek (which is blasphemous).

Behind v.27 is the Day of Atonement (Lev.16) where the high priest offered a sacrifice for his own sins first, but the reference to daily offerings is a likely reference, as F. F. Bruce says, to the sin offerings.

John Cennick wrote:

*I other priests disclaim,
And laws and offerings too;
None but the bleeding Lamb
The mighty work can do:
He shall have all the praise; for He
Has loved, and lived, and died for me.*

John Owen: 'Plurality of priests under the gospel overthrows the whole argument of the apostle in this place; and if we have yet priests that have infirmities, they are made by the law, and not by the gospel'.

11. The old priesthood and the sacrificial law came from God, but they were shadows pointing to the substance. What is implied if the shadow is retained?

Does Christ's priesthood need to be supplemented? _____

Donald Guthrie: 'The writer's purpose, however, is not to decry the ineffectiveness of Aaron's line, but to glorify the superiority of Christ's.'

The Ministry of the New Covenant (Heb.8:1-13)

Christ ministers in a better place (8:1-5) and the new covenant is a better covenant (8:6-13). As A. T. Robertson says: 'At every point Christianity is better than Judaism.' In 8:1, the author comes to the main point, or as William Manson paraphrases it, 'To crown the argument'.

1. Where does Christ minister? (8:1-2; see 9:24) In what two ways is this superior to any earthly tabernacle? What do you notice about His posture? Why is He seated? What do you think of the comment of James Cone (a theologian who espoused liberation theology): 'The Christian cannot waste time contemplating the next world (if there is a next)'? If heaven is not a better place, is Christ a better priest? _____

John Calvin and John Owen both say that the tabernacle or tent in v.2 is the human nature of Christ, but clearly the contrast is between the earthly tabernacle and the heavenly tabernacle.

Christ is not in heaven presenting His eternal offering, but interceding for His people.

2. What did the Old Testament priests offer in sacrifice? (8:3) What did Christ offer? (see 7:27) _____

3. If the old law on the priesthood still operates, what logically follows? (8:4; see 7:14) _____

4. What was the real function of the old covenant? (8:5; see 9:23; 10:1) _____

The blood of bulls and goats cannot wash away sins - nor, said Lady Macbeth, can all the perfumes of Arabia.

5. What does verse 5 teach about our worship? (see Ex.25:40) Do you agree with Calvin that 'It is not permissible for us to invent anything we like, but it belongs to God alone to show us "according to the pattern that was showed thee"'? _____

6. Where does the true cause of failure lie in the old covenant? (8:7-8a; see Rom.8:3) _____

Some manuscripts do read in v.8 that the fault was with 'it' (the covenant), not 'them' (the people), but the better reading is 'them'.

7. With whom is the new covenant made? (8:8) Can the Church be called the new Israel? (Gal.6:16; Phil.3:3) _____

8. Jeremiah 31:31-34 predicts that the new covenant will differ from the old covenant (this is the longest Old Testament quotation in the New Testament). The covenant at Sinai was declared in Exodus 19:1-23:33, and inaugurated in Exodus 24:1-18. Obedience brought blessing (Lev.26:1-13; Deut. 28:1-14) and disobedience brought curses (Lev.26:14-33; Deut.28:15-68). In what ways is the new covenant superior to the old?

8:10 (see Ezek.36:26-27) _____

8:11 (see John 6:45; 1 John 2:20, 27) _____

8:12 (note Heb.10:4) _____

9. Why must the readers not go back to Judaism? (8:13) _____

Recall that in A.D. 70 the city of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman armies, and the temple razed to the ground. This was the funeral of the old covenant sacrificial system.

*Where high the heavenly temple stands,
The house of God not made with hands,
A great High Priest our nature wears,
The Saviour of mankind appears.*

*He who for men their surety stood,
And poured on earth His precious blood,
Pursues in heaven His mighty plan,
The Saviour and the Friend of man.*

- Michael Bruce (1746-67)

The Old and New Ministries Compared (Heb.9:1-28)

1. For what did the first covenant have regulations? (9:1) _____

2. Describe the first or outer room (9:2; Ex.25, 37, 40). What was its called? _____

3. What separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies? (9:3; note 6:19)
What was in the Holy of Holies? (9:4) _____

The golden altar of incense belonged to the Holy of Holies rather than stood within it.

4. What were above the ark? (9:5) Why were they there? Why does the author not continue his explanation? _____

The mercy seat was, literally, 'a propitiating thing', and was sprinkled with blood on the Day of Atonement.

5. What regularly took place in the outer room? (9:6) _____

6. What access was there to the Holy of Holies? (9:7; Lev.16) For whom? (contrast to 10:19-20) How was it obtained? _____

7. What lesson does the Holy Spirit give in all this? (9:8; note Matt.27:51) _____

8. What does all this show? (9:9) _____

9. What were the old covenant sacrifices and ceremonies all about? (9:10) Were

they meant to be permanent? Should Christians be concerned with rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem? Was its destruction in A.D. 70 just a sad accident of history? _____

10. What has Christ done? (9:11) _____

There is a textual problem here - the verse may refer to the good thing to come or to the good things that have come.

The tent is the heavenly sanctuary (see Acts 7:48). Many of the early Fathers said that the better tabernacle was Christ's flesh, while Bishop Westcott saw it as the spiritual temple, the people of God. It is surely heaven.

11. What did Christ not do? (9:12) What did He do? What did He accomplish?

Note: the word 'taking' in the RSV in verse 12 is not there in the text. The emphasis is not on Christ's taking His blood into heaven.

John Murray: 'Christ did not come to put men in a redeemable position but to redeem to himself a people.'

12. What did Christ accomplish in contrast to the Old Testament priests? (9:13-14; see Lev.16 & Num.19) Who is the eternal Spirit? To whom is the offering made? Why is Christ said to be 'without blemish'? What is the outcome of all this? _____

*Not all the blood of beasts,
On Jewish altars slain,
Could give the guilty conscience peace,
Or wash away the stain.
But Christ, the heavenly Lamb,
Takes all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler Name,
And richer blood than they.*

- Isaac Watts

The 'lesser to greater' argument is found all through Hebrews (e.g. 2:2-3; 3:3; 9:13-14; 10:28-29; 12:25).

Donald Guthrie is not very helpful about the 'eternal Spirit' reference. He says that the eternal Spirit is Christ's spirit, but also says that the Holy Spirit is in mind. Geerhardus Vos is even less helpful. He says that it means 'through the heavenly aspect of his deity'. Surely it refers to the Holy Spirit, who, as God is eternal. Hywel Jones: 'Only a triune God can save!'

Christ enters a better place (9:1-12), His death actually works (9:13-14), is absolutely necessary (9:15-23), and is unrepeatable, perfect, and final (9:24-28).

13. How were people saved in Old Testament times? (9:15) Is the way of salvation the same in both Testaments? _____

14. What is necessary for a testament to be in operation? (9:16-17) _____

B. F. Westcott maintained the idea of a covenant here, not a will. The New American Standard Bible too has 'covenant', but clearly the context demands 'testament'. The word itself, *diatheke*, can be translated either way. It is the context that determines how it is to be translated.

F. F. Bruce writes of Christ: 'He is testator and executor in one, surety and mediator alike.'

15. Was this true in the Old Testament? (9:18-22; see Ex.24:3-8; Lev.16:14-20; the 'almost' in verse 22 refers to Lev.5:11-13, which is due to extreme poverty) What does Leviticus 17:11 teach? _____

16. How often did Christ need to make His sacrifice? (9:23-26) Where did Christ enter? (9:24) If repetition is the mark of imperfection, what do we make of the Roman Catholic mass which is supposed to re-enact Calvary in a bloodless sacrifice? _____

Verse 23 looks at first as though it is referring to many sacrifices by Christ, but Donald Guthrie writes: 'It may be said that the sacrifice of Christ is so many-sided that it required a whole range of sacrifices to serve as adequate copies.'

The 'presence' of God is literally the 'face' of God in verse 24.

Quotes from the Roman Catholic Catechism of Christian Doctrine:

'Q. Is the Mass a different sacrifice from that of the Cross?

A. The Mass is the very same sacrifice as that of the Cross, though offered in a different manner.

Q. Why do you say the Mass is the same sacrifice as that of the Cross?

A. The Mass is the same sacrifice as that of the Cross because the same Christ, who once offered Himself a bleeding victim to His Heavenly Father on the Cross, continues to offer Himself in an unbloody manner, by the hands of His Priests on our altars.'

17. What happens after death? (9:27) How can we be saved from this? Is there any hope of a second chance after death? Do we come back as reincarnated beings? _____

We all die once. Obviously, the exceptions are not in mind here (e.g. 2 Kings 4:34; Luke 7:14; 8:53; John 11:43; Acts 9:40; 1 Thess.4:15ff).

Andrew Reed:

*There is an hour when I must stand
 Before the judgment-seat,
 And all my sins, and all my foes,
 In awful vision meet.
 There is an hour when I must look
 On one eternity;
 And nameless woe, or blissful life,
 My endless portion be.*

18. How many times was Christ offered? (9:28) For what purpose? How is the second coming of Christ to be different from the first coming? What is to be our attitude to this second coming? _____

19. List the ways in which Christ's ministry is superior to that of the Levitical priests:

vv.8, 11, 24 (note vv.1-7) _____

v.12 (note vv.9-10, 13-14) _____

vv.25-26 _____

*No blood, no altar now:
 The sacrifice is o'er;
 No flame, no smoke ascends on high,
 The lamb is slain no more.*

*But richer blood has flowed from nobler veins,
 To purge the soul from guilt and cleanse the reddest stains.
 We thank Thee for the blood,
 The blood of Christ, Thy Son;
 The blood by which our peace is made,
 The victory is won;
 Great victory o'er hell and sin and woe,
 That needs no second fight and leaves no second foe.*

- Horatius Bonar.

Offering Himself for Others (Heb.10:1-18)

This concludes the more obviously theological section of the epistle. Note the 'therefore' in v.19, although there have been many warnings and exhortations given throughout the epistle (e.g. in chapters 2 and 6). The Old Testament sacrifices were inadequate and so repeated (10:1-4); Christ first accomplished God's will (10:5-10) and then offered Himself once for all (10:11-14); so no further offerings are possible (10:15-18).

1. What was the function of the Old Testament law concerning sacrifices? (10:1, 3) How did the author demonstrate this? (10:2) What does repetition imply? _____

B. F. Westcott: 'In themselves ... the sacrifices gave no pleasure to God. Their value was in what they represented.'

It is not that the law *is* a shadow, but it *has* the shadow i.e. the ceremonial cultus.

J. C. Ryle: 'Christ's priesthood is the *great secret of daily comfort in Christianity* ... Happy is that man who knows how to begin and end each day with his Priest! This is, indeed, to live the life of faith.'

2. What could the Old Testament sacrifices not do? (10:1-4; note also v.11)

Calvin: 'there could be nothing more silly and frivolous than to offer the fat and stinking entrails of beasts in order to reconcile oneself with God, or to take refuge in a few sprinklings of blood or water to cleanse stains upon the soul.'

3. What did Psalm 40:6-8 predict? (see Heb.10:5-8) Does this fit in with the rest of the Old Testament? (Micah 6:6-8; Isa.1:11-15; Jer. 7; Hos.6:6; Amos 5:21-25)

Psalm 40 is put into the mouth of Jesus.

4. What does this mean for Jesus? (10:7) _____

5. What does this mean for the Old Testament sacrifices? (10:8-9) What sort of sacrifices do Christians offer now? (Rom.12:1-2; Heb.13:16) _____

6. How is Christ's sacrifice different to the Old Testament sacrifices? (10:10)

7. Why is the 'once for all' repeated so often in this epistle? (7:27; 9:26, 28; 10:10; see 1 Pet.3:18) _____

8. Contrast the different postures of the Old Testament priests and Christ? (10:11-12) What does this reveal? _____

9. What does verse 13 look to? (note Psalm 110:1) _____

Philip Edgcumbe Hughes: 'The delay should be seen ... as the prolongation of the day of grace.'

10. Who inspired Jeremiah 31:31-34? (see Hebrews 8:8-12) Who is the 'He' in 8:8? What about Hebrews 10:15-17? What does this show? _____

In verse 16 'hearts' and 'minds' are interchanged compared with Hebrews 8:10, but there is no change in meaning.

11. Can we add anything to Christ's work? (10:14) Are we able to believe in Christ's sacrifice and take part in other sacrifices also? (10:18) _____

12. What has this section taught you about Christ's work on the cross? _____

What Flows from All This? (Hebrews 10:19-13:25)

'Let Us' ... (Heb.10:19-39)

1. Why can a Christian have confidence that he has access to heaven? (10:19)

Luther: 'he who relies on Christ through faith is carried on the shoulders of Christ.'

2. The veil separated the outer and inner sanctuaries of the tabernacle. What does it mean when it says that Christ's flesh is the veil? (10:20) Whom do we have that the Old Testament saints did not have, in a clear way? (10:21) _____

*When Satan tempts me to despair
And tells me of the guilt within,
Upward I look, and see Him there
Who put an end to all my sin.*

3. How must we draw near to God? (10:22) _____

Note the purification of the Levitical priests in Exodus 29:4, 21.

Thomas Hewitt: 'This faith must not be divided between Christianity and Judaism ... or between our great High Priest, the only and all-sufficient Mediator, and a human priesthood.'

4. What are we told to do in verse 23? What do you notice about our responsibilities and God's work in verse 23? _____

See Phil.2:12-13; 1 Thess.5:24.

5. What do verses 24-25 teach us about the necessity of fellowship? Of what does fellowship consist? What hangs over all we do? (cf. Rom.13:12) _____

Paul White (the Jungle Doctor): 'Fellowship is the antidote to backsliding.'
John Wesley: 'The Bible knows nothing of solitary religion.'

6. Compare the judgments experienced by rebels against the old covenant with those experienced by those who rebel against the new covenant? (10:26-31; see Numbers 15:30-31 on 'sinning with a raised hand') What three things does such a hard-hearted wilful sinner do? (10:29) Why can a greater exposure to grace lead to a greater judgment? (see Luke 12:47-48) In the light of this, what is the Church's responsibility towards those who come to her for baptism or communion? _____

Note for verse 28 the background in Deut.17:2-7.

Hebrews 6:4-6 is about no second repentance; Hebrews 10:26-31 is about no second sacrifice.

A. W. Pink: 'It is because the true nature of sin is so little viewed in the light of God's awful holiness, that so many fail to recognize its infinite demerits.'

7. Encouragement to persevere comes from looking back (vv.32-34) and looking forward (vv.35-39). What had the Hebrew Christians done in past days? (10:32-34; see Rev.2:4-5) How had they responded to these trials? _____

The NKJV says the author of Hebrews had been in chains too, but this reading is not accepted by all (e.g. by Donald Guthrie).

8. What consequence should flow from this? (10:35; note Matt.10:22) _____

9. What do we have need of? (10:36-38) How does Habakkuk 2:3-4 illustrate this? (remember the context in Habakkuk, with the Chaldeans threatening Judah).

Verse 37 may indicate that some of the backsliding may have come as Christians were disappointed that Christ had not yet returned (see 2 Peter 3).

*Soon shall close your earthly mission,
Swift shall pass your pilgrim days,
Hope soon change to glad fruition,
Faith to sight, and prayer to praise*

- Henry Francis Lyte

Hywel Jones: 'Their real problem was their loss of a heavenly perspective. That

is what caused their half-heartedness.'

10. Of what is the author confident? (10:39) _____

11. What ought we to do if we are tempted not to persevere? _____

Examples of Persevering and Hopeful Faith (Heb.11:1-40)

Hebrews 11 is an illustration of the principles of Hebrews 10:19-39. There is a great continuity between the faith of the Old Testament saints and those of the New Testament period (hence 1 Cor.10:1-11). This is despite the fulfilment and abolition of the ceremonial law.

1. Put together a definition of faith from verses 1, 6, 27. Were the Old Testament saints saved? (11:2) _____

Verse 6 says the person of faith must believe that God is. This probably means not so much that He exists as He is eternal.

Remember that these Hebrews seem to have been attracted - or distracted - by what was visible - the land, the temple, the city.

Hywel Jones says of faith: 'It is not intellectual suicide and it is more than an intellectual assent.'

2. Can faith be separated from obedience? (11:7, 8, 17-19; James 2:14-17, 26) _____

John Murray: 'Faith severed from obedience is presumption, just as formal obedience severed from faith is self-righteousness.'

Thomas Manton: 'Obedience is faith's daughter.'

3. What is the first example of faith? (11:3) How important is this? _____

4. Did the Old Testament saints live to see the complete fulfilment of the promises (11:13-16, 39-40; John 8:56) _____

Notice that Abraham never returned to Mesopotamia (note Gen.23:4; 1 Peter 1:1; 2:11).

Calvin: 'If those on whom the great light of grace had not yet shone showed such patience in bearing their ills, what effect ought the full light of the gospel to have on us? A tiny spark of light led them to heaven, but now that the sun of righteousness shines on us what excuse shall we offer if we still hold to the earth?'

5. What did faith prompt these saints in the Old Testament period to believe and to do?

(a) Abel (11:4; 1 John 3:12) _____

Donald Guthrie thinks that there is no evidence that God required a blood sacrifice. He sees it as a matter of attitude rather than offering. Surely it was a matter of both - because of his attitude, Cain offered a bloodless sacrifice and then was resentful when it was not accepted.

(b) Enoch (11:5; see Gen.5:21-24) _____

(c) Noah (11:7) _____

Hywel Jones: 'Faith believes in judgement as well as salvation, in hell as well as heaven.'

(d) Abraham (11:8-19) _____

There is more in Hebrews 11 on Abraham than on anyone else (for Abraham, see Gen.12-23).

(e) Sarah (11:11-12) _____

There are two texts for verse 11 - one focuses on Abraham and the other mentions Sarah's faith. Donald Guthrie accepts the latter, which is also found in the NIV footnote.

Abraham and Sarah knew a remarkable conception and a metaphorical resurrection.

(f) Isaac (11:20) _____

(g) Jacob (11:21) _____

See Genesis 48:16ff. The Hebrew text (called the Masoretic text) has 'bed' while the Greek translation (the Septuagint) has 'staff'.

(h) Joseph (11:22) _____

Joseph believed the exodus would come after his death (Gen.50:24ff).

(i) Moses' parents (11:23) _____

Moses was a beautiful baby!

(j) Moses (11:24-29) _____

Note that Moses did fear Pharaoh in Exodus 2:14f. Faith does not mean that fear is absent but that it is overcome.

(k) Joshua (11:30) _____

Notice how unusual God's commands were at Jericho.

(l) Rahab (11:31) _____

7. Who else is mentioned? (11:32) Why? _____

Like so many preachers, the author of Hebrews is running out of time!

8. Was the faith of the Old Testament saints focused only on God as such or on the divine Messiah too? (11:13, 26, 39-40; 2 Cor.1:20) What effect did the coming of Christ have? _____

9. Does having faith mean that God promises to preserve us from suffering in this life? (11:32-38) What happened to the various Old Testament saints mentioned here? _____

Note for verse 35: see 1 Kings 17:17ff; 2 Kings 4:18ff. The episodes referred to in v.35b probably go back to the revolt of the Maccabees, and the ill-treatment of the Maccabean priests by the Seleucids (2 Macc.6:18ff).

Verse 36 may have Jeremiah mainly in mind.

Note for verse 37: In the apocryphal *Ascension of Isaiah* - referred to later by Christian writers, Justin Martyr in the second century and Origen in the third century - it is Isaiah who is supposed to have been sawn in two in Manasseh's reign.

Note for verse 38: see 1 Kings 18:4; 19:9.

*Whither, pilgrims, are you going,
Going each with staff in hand?
'We are going on a journey,
Going at our King's command;
Over hills and plains and valleys,
We are going to His palace,
Going to the better land.'*

Why did John Bunyan write *The Pilgrim's Progress*? _____

The Example of Jesus (Heb.12:1-4)

Hebrews 11 is, in the main at least, in the third person (but see 11:3, 40), but in Hebrews 12 there is a switch to the first person.

1. In the light of Hebrews 11, why should we be encouraged? (12:1) _____

2. How is the Christian compared to a runner in 12:1? What slows the runner down? Who sets the race? _____

3. From whom do we draw strength? (12:2) In what way? How was Jesus able to endure the cross? _____

4. Why should we focus on Jesus' sufferings? (12:3) What effect should that have on us? _____

5. How is Christ both the object of faith (i.e. Christians have faith in Him) and the example of faith (i.e. Christians are to imitate His faith in the Father)? (12:2-3; see also 1 Pet.2:21-24 for another example) _____

Remember that even the Old Testament saints in Hebrews 11 were looking to the Messiah (11:26).

6. What had the Hebrew Christians not yet suffered in their struggle against sin? (12:4) _____

God's Chastening of His People (Heb.12:5-11)

1. What do verses 5-6 teach us about suffering? (taken from Proverbs 3:11-12) Is chastening contrary to love? How is chastening different from punishment? Does God do both? To whom? Can you think of examples in your own life? _____

Charles Bridges: 'The scourge of the Judge is widely different from the rod of the Father.'

2. If God did not chasten us, what would this mean? (12:7-8) What does God think of the father who never chastens his children? Whom can an earthly father discipline and whom can he not? In what spirit does God chasten His people? (Lam.3:33) _____

Donald Guthrie in 1983: 'The authority of parents has been so eroded that discipline rarely if ever comes into play.'

3. Compare Matthew 7:11 and Hebrews 12:9-10. What do they teach about human and divine fatherhood? How are they different and how are they similar? _____

4. Why does God chasten His people (12:10b-11) What is more important - our temporal well-being or our righteousness and holiness? How should this influence our thinking about suffering? _____

The word used for 'train' in v.11 is *gymnazo*.

William Bridges: 'Affliction is God's soap.'

In Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, the Baptist, Alyosha, tells Ivan: 'Rejoice that you are in prison. Here you can think of your soul.'

*Whate'er my God ordains is right:
Here shall my stand be taken;
Though sorrow, need, or death be mine,
Yet am I not forsaken;
My Father's care
Is round me there;
He holds me that I shall not fall:
And so to Him I leave it all.*

- Samuel Rodigast

Exhortations and Warnings (Heb.12:12-29)

1. What is the application in 12:12-13? How had the faith of the readers been weakened? (note 1 Kings 18:21) What is the remedy? _____

The RSV in verse 12 has the idea of strengthening oneself, but it could refer to strengthening others.

Raymond Brown says that an elderly friend of his wrote on her Bible: 'I absolutely refuse to gratify the devil by being downhearted.'

2. What positive things are we to strive for, and what negative things are we to avoid? (12:12-17)

Positive

Negative

3. Can there be justification (we are declared righteous on the grounds of faith in Christ) without sanctification (we are made more righteous) (12:14)? _____

4. How is the example of Esau such an appropriate warning? (12:16-17; cf. Gen.25:29-34; Gen.27) _____

The repentance may refer to Isaac's change of mind or to Esau's. The former sounds more likely.

Philip Edgcumbe Hughes thinks that Esau is being portrayed as both a fornicator and a profane person, but it is the latter that is emphasised.

5. What is the consequence of the fact that the new covenant is superior to the old? How was Mount Sinai approached? (12:18-21) What is emphasised here?

Martin Luther: 'When God begins to justify a person, He first condemns him; when He wants to build up, He first tears down; whom He wants to heal, He first batters to pieces; whom He wants to bring to life, He first kills.'

6. By contrast, where does the Christian come to? (12:22-24) What is Mt Zion? How is Mt Sinai different to Mt Zion? Who are the spirits of the righteous made perfect? How does Christ's blood speak of greater things than Abel's? (cf. Gen.4:8-10) _____

F. F. Bruce says that the just men are pre-Christian saints, but they are surely all believers.

Hywel Jones: 'The invisible world is a present delight.'

7. What application follows from this? (12:25-28; recall 2:1-4; 10:19-31) _____

The shaking is the ending of the Sinaitic covenant (Ex.19:18; Hag.2:6).

8. What is the implication of the present tense in verse 25? How does God speak to us today? _____

9. Is it true that the God of the Old Testament is a God of fire and judgment while the God of the New Testament is a God of love and graciousness? (12:28-29 and Deut.4:24; also note Jonah 4:2 and Luke 16:19-31) _____

Stephen Charnock: 'It is impossible to honour God as we ought, unless we know Him as He is.'

John Brown: 'Everything about God is fitted to fill the mind with awe, and it would seem as if nothing short of insanity could prevent any being possessed of reason and affection from habitually feeling the sentiment of supreme veneration.'

Practical Expressions of the Christian Life (Heb.13:1-25)

1. What exhortations are given us in
13:1 (Rom.12:10; 1 Thess.4:9; 1 Pet.1:22) _____

This is 'philadelphia'.

Bishop Westcott: 'The love of the Jew for his fellow Jew, his "brother", was national: the Christian's love for his fellow-Christian is catholic.'

13:2 (Rom.12:13; 1 Pet.4:9; see Gen.18-19) _____

Donald Guthrie: 'It is, in fact, a Christian social service which is envisaged.'
13:3 (Matt.25:36) _____

The NIV paraphrases this as 'as if you yourselves were suffering'.

The 'in the body' reference probably means that the same treatment could be meted out to the readers, not that they are in the same body of Christ, true as that is. Calvin, however, thought it referred to the body of Christ.

13:4 (1 Cor.6:9-10) _____

13:5-6 (Deut.31:5; Josh.1:5 Ps.118:6-7; see too 1 Tim.6:10) _____

Hywel Jones: 'Gratification is not the path to satisfaction.'

A woman approached John Newton, wanting to be congratulated because she had a win in the lottery. Newton was blunt in his reply: 'Madam, as for a friend under temptation, I will pray for you.'

13:7 _____

2. What does verse 8 teach about Christ? Noting Malachi 3:6 and James 1:17, what does this tell us about Christ? Fit this in with Luke 2:40, 52. _____

In many ways, this verse is a kind of summary of the whole epistle.

3. Why is the warning given in verse 9? Can you think of an application today? (Col. 2:16-23) _____

4. What does verse 10 teach us about the exclusiveness of the Christian faith? Is the altar a way of referring to the Lord's Supper or to Christ's sacrifice? _____

This is called a metonymy, where one thing stands for another e.g. 'I will boil the kettle.'

5. Why did Christ suffer outside the camp? (13:11-13; see Lev.4:11-12; 16:27) How is this related to Christ's death, and to our response? Why does Donald Guthrie refer to verse 13 as 'the crux of the conclusion'? _____

6. What city does the Christian seek? (13:14) _____

7. What sacrifices do we owe now?

v.15 _____

v.16 _____

Late in the second century, Irenaeus of Lyons was told by a critic: 'You Christians have no real religion, for you have no sacrifices.'

8. What does verse 17 teach about authority in the church? How far does this authority extend? (Deut.4:2) Compare this to false views of authority in the church. _____

9. What does the author ask for in verses 18-19? What can we learn from this? _____

10. What are the issues raised in the author's benediction in verses 20-21? Why is the covenant described as eternal? _____

The glory could go to God or Christ.

B. F. Westcott: 'The work of God makes man's work possible.'

11. Summarise the postscript in verses 22-25. What things do we learn from it?

The KJV for v.22 has 'suffer the word of exhortation'!!!

The brevity may refer to the whole of Hebrews or just to Hebrews 13.

Verse 24 may mean that Hebrews is being written from Italy or it is being sent to Italy.

12. What have you learnt from the book of Hebrews? _____
