

Date: February 15, 2010  
Reading: Hebrews 1-2

Son of God  
Heir of all things  
Agent in creation  
The Brightness of the Father's Glory  
The Express Image of the Father's person  
Sustainer of all things by the word of His power  
Seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high



Heaping phrase upon phrase to describe Jesus in the very beginning of the book, the Hebrews author wastes no time affirming the exalted position of Jesus. In that sense, He has a more excellent name than the angels who offer worship rather than receive it (1:6). Jesus is THE Son of God, a position/relationship none of the angels has been given (1:5). The angels are ministering spirits (1:14), not the Creator of the earth and heavens, nor the One who rules on His throne (1:8-12).

The superiority of Jesus over the angels has consequence. The Old Law was associated with the angels (2:2a), but the Son has become God's spokesman in these last days (1:1-2; 2:3). If those who sinned under the lesser law ("the word spoken through angels" - the Mosaic Law) were punished, there will certainly be no escape for those who neglect the greater law, i.e., the salvation "which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord" (2:3)!

It is one of the paradoxes of the divine redemptive plan that the One who is greater than the angels took on the form of those who are "a little lower than the angels," i.e., Jesus shared in flesh and blood, became like us so that He could die on our behalf (2:9, 14). Jesus didn't

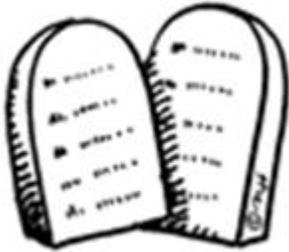
die for angels, regardless of their superiority to men - He died for us (2:16)!

In becoming like us, being tempted as we are tempted, He can adequately and justifiably serve as an intercessor (specifically a high priest) between us and God. He is both a merciful and faithful High Priest.

God bless the reader,  
Allen

**Date: September 26, 2009**

**Reading: Hebrews 1-3**



“Jesus is superior! Don’t go back to the Old Law!” That’s the message of Hebrews, a book whose argumentation is obvious and more linear than many of the other New Testament epistles.

Certainly one of the key verses of the book is 2:17. “Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”

The author of Hebrews, whose identity is uncertain, argued in the first chapter that Jesus is superior to the angels. The reader might legitimately ask, “If Jesus is superior to the angels, why was He ‘made a little lower than the angels,’” i.e., existed in human form?

Jesus took on flesh and blood, became incarnate, so that He could “taste death for everyone” (2:9). In order to help humanity, He needed to die as a sacrifice and that required that He share in a mortal form, a human body (2:14-15). After all, it was men who needed the help of Jesus to avoid the penalty of their sins (2:16).

Jesus became like us – suffered and was tempted – so that He could come to our aid, not just as a sacrifice, but also as our High Priest. The Old Testament high priest was one who appeared in the presence of God on behalf of men. The Hebrews writer noted that Jesus is both a merciful and a faithful High Priest (2:17).

Addressing those two descriptions (merciful & faithful) in reverse order, the author first affirms that Jesus was “faithful” to the One who appointed Him (3:1-2). Although Moses was also faithful, he was just a servant in the house while Jesus is Son over His own house (3:5-6). We are that house... “if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end” (3:6b)!

In the next reading, the author will begin to develop the proposition that Jesus is a merciful High Priest. In the meantime, “hold fast”!

Happy reading,  
Allen

**Date: February 16, 2010**

**Reading: Hebrews 3-4**

The Hebrews author encouraged his readers to “hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end” (3:6). To emphasize the need to persevere, he quoted David’s words in Psalm 95 and reminded them of the example of the Israelites who came out of Egypt.

It appears that David was referring to the events recorded in Exodus 17. The Israelites who came out of Egypt tested God and He showed them His works for 40 years (manna, manna, manna). The Hebrews author warns his readers not to have “an evil heart of unbelief” like those individuals.

The readers of this epistle may have thought to themselves, “But we are Christians! We have been delivered from the bondage of sin through the forgiveness available in Christ Jesus!”

The author of Hebrews reminded them that the ones who rebelled were those who had come out of the bondage of Egypt (3:16). Yet their hearts were hardened (through the deceitfulness of sin? – 3:13) and they sinned (3:17). Their unbelief resulted in disobedience (3:18; 4:11).

His readers could enter the rest that generation forfeited if they were diligent (4:11) and held the beginning of their confidence steadfast to the end (3:14).

Unfortunately, some people think that God can be fooled. They believe that they can mingle with the people of God and no one can determine what kind of heart they really have. However, God is “a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” – He knows whether or not we have hearts hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, whether our hearts are full of unbelief.

God was angry with the unbelieving Israelites for forty years (3:17). The result of His anger? Their corpses fell in the wilderness. Israel was forced to wander in the wilderness until nearly the entire generation who had come out of Egypt had died. What a tragedy!

How much greater the tragic end of Christians who allow their hearts to be hardened by sin, only to forfeit their eternal rest! Let’s be diligent! Guard your heart!

God bless the reader,  
Allen

**Date:** September 28, 2009  
**Reading:** Hebrews 4-6

Some things are not what they seem. Other things are simply just hidden.

For example, during the Second World War, Boeing produced bombers in Seattle, Washington. To hide the plant from any enemy pilots who might fly over, an elaborate cover with burlap houses and chicken-wire lawns was used to camouflage the rooftops of the bomber manufacturing center. Instead of production buildings and aircraft, an enemy pilot would only have seen what looked like a quiet suburb!



During that same war, the Germans were also hiding the production of rockets from the Allies. Allied bombing raids were disrupting production of Hitler's "wonder weapons" – the V1 & V2 rockets. Production of the V2 rocket was moved to huge underground factories like the one at Nordhausen, Thuringia.

Even in our day, various countries around the world try to hide their activities from the prying eyes of satellites. Laboratories and weapon-production facilities are sometimes constructed deep underground to keep

them secret.

Some things can be seen regardless of efforts to hide them. The Hebrews writer noted that it is futile to try to hide "an evil heart of unbelief" from God (3:12; 4:11). Personifying the Word of God, he affirmed that it is "sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (4:12). We shouldn't get lost in the figure; for instance, soul and spirit are intangibles which cannot literally be divided from one another. I suspect that the author was not suggesting the division of joint from marrow because the joint and the marrow are not typically adjacent to one another. But the joints of the body are often covered (hidden?) by tissue and the marrow is found in the interior of our bones. The author's intention, by this figure, is to say that there is nothing so deep in our being or covered that it is hidden from God (4:13a). God's word is able to penetrate even the innermost parts of our bodies, even to the thoughts and intents of the heart. We must not think that we can hide the condition of our heart from God.

We may be able to hide some things in our hearts from others. We can use deceit and hypocrisy to "camouflage" our real character...for a time. But "all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (4:13). The Greek word translated "open" means "exposed" and was usually used to speak of something which had been forcibly exposed. Even if we want to hide something, we will not be able.

Stay pure all the way to the "middle"!

Happy reading,  
Allen

**Date:** February 17, 2010  
**Reading:** Hebrews 5-6

Hebrews was written to proclaim the superiority of Jesus Christ and His covenant. At least some of the original recipients of the book were evidently considering a return to Judaism. The Hebrews author endeavored to convince his readers of the folly of leaving the perfect for the imperfect.

Although there are several “warning sections” in the book, the one in Hebrews 5:11-6:20 is particularly interesting. The author acknowledged the “work and labor of love” of his readers and encouraged them to “show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end” (6:11). However, as he discussed the high priesthood of Jesus, he recognized a problem with his readers.



They had become “dull of hearing” (5:11). It wasn’t that they needed hearing aids, but they had become lazy, sluggish. The word translated “sluggish” in 6:12 (“lazy” in the NIV) is the same word translated “dull” in 5:11. They had become spiritually dull and indifferent. As a result, they were not growing spiritually and were actually in need of someone to teach them again the first principles.

What makes this warning section so interesting is the seriousness of the statement in 6:4-6. We’re reading about Christians who just didn’t grow as fast as they should, right? Why, then, did the Hebrews author warn about the consequence of “crucifying the Son of God again” and putting Him “to an open shame”?

The author clearly was describing Christians in 6:4-5. Note the descriptive phrases he used. They have been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, become partakers of the Holy Spirit and tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come. The Holy Spirit is only promised to believers!

Can the author possibly mean that Christians who fall away (if they fall away”) cannot be restored (“renewed to repentance”)? Are they lost forever? Some have understood this passage to be teaching exactly that.

Note, however, that these Christians have not just stumbled and fallen because of temporary weakness. They have rejected Jesus Christ just like those who crucified Him in the first place and thus “crucify Him afresh” (KJV, ASV). As ones who have experienced (“tasted”) the blessings of a relationship with Christ, by rejecting Him they “put Him to an open shame.” How can such individuals be “renewed to repentance” while they have rejected the one Person through Whom they can return to the Father??

More importantly for us, why did the Hebrews author pen such a stern warning to Christians who had become lazy and were not growing spiritually as they should? Should we understand this passage to be a warning about the connection between spiritual laziness and eventual apostasy?

Are we growing spiritually or are we in a “holding pattern”? Is it necessary for someone to teach us again and again the same first principles, never moving on to the “solid food” suitable for those who are spiritually mature? Babies are cute, but there is grave danger in remaining a perpetual baby spiritually.

If you're not growing, you're dying. Let's be growing.

God bless the reader,  
Allen

**Date: February 18, 2010**  
**Reading: Hebrews 7-8**

Although Jesus has been identified as a high priest several times already in Hebrews (2:17; 3:1; 4:14-15; 5:5-6, 10), chapter six ends with the proclamation that Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek (vs. 20).

There are several consequences of the priesthood of Jesus. The Hebrews author pointed out that His priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood inasmuch as Melchizedek was superior to Abraham. Melchizedek blessed Abraham and “beyond all contradiction” the lesser is blessed by the greater (7:1, 7). In addition, Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, another indication of the priestly king’s superiority, and it could even be said that Levi, descendant of Abraham, also paid tithes through Abraham “so to speak” (7:9).

Jesus, Son of David, was of the tribe of Judah, “of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood” (7:14). Jesus couldn’t be a priest under the Mosaic Law since the priesthood had been given to the Levites. Since the people of Israel received the Mosaic Law under the Levitical priesthood, if there is to be a new priesthood (after the order of Melchizedek), then the law must be changed also (7:12).

Jesus’ priesthood necessitated a new law. Unlike the Levitical priests who became priests “according to the law of a fleshly commandment” (i.e., becoming a Levitical priest depended upon being a descendant of a priest), Jesus was made a priest “according to the power of an endless life” (7:16) and with the oath of God (7:20-21).

We learned in chapter six that God’s oath is one of two “immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie” (6:18). When God made Jesus a priest with an oath, it was an immutable, i.e., unchangeable, declaration. Since the priesthood of Jesus was guaranteed, so was the “bringing in of a better hope” (7:19), that is, Jesus became the guarantee (“surety” – NKJ) of a better covenant (7:22)!

When a Christian prays for forgiveness of his sins, Jesus acts as his intercessor (7:25). Imagine that! The Son of God, Deity Himself, acts on our behalf to effect our forgiveness.

Count your many blessings, one by one. See what God hath done! We are so blessed to have the Son of God as our High Priest and the Mediator of a better covenant (8:6)!

God bless the reader,  
Allen

**Reading: Hebrews 7-9**

“Satisfaction guaranteed...or your money back!” “If you are not totally satisfied...for any reason...just call this number and we’ll refund 100% of your money!”

Wow! How can I lose? Thirty days later, I am dialing that number, only to discover that it is “no longer in service.” Or when I try to access that website to get my money back, my friend Google tells me that no such site exists – my money has disappeared into cyberspace!!



Now I don’t want to impugn any particular businesses or salespersons, but sometimes the “guarantees” we receive aren’t worth the pixels with which they are written! You have to read those “guarantees” pretty carefully or you may find out, when seeking repairs or a refund, that according to the “fine print” the “guarantee of satisfaction” is not good in any of the contiguous 57 states.

What guarantee do we have that we are, in fact, living under a better covenant? The Hebrews writer points to the High Priest Jesus as our “surety” (guarantee; 7:22).

God appointed Aaron, the brother of Moses, as the first high priest of Israel. From that point forward, the provisions of the Old Law determined who would be the next high priest when the current one died. Each successive high priest came into that “office” by means of “the law of a fleshly commandment” (7:16) and the law stipulated that the high priest should be of the tribe of Levi.

Jesus, of course, was from the tribe of Judah, a tribe concerning which Moses “spoke nothing concerning priesthood” (7:14). He was made high priest, however, after a different order – the order of Melchizedek (7:17, 21). As the Hebrews writer had already explained, Jesus and Melchizedek are similar in that both have endless lives, Melchizedek only apparently, but Jesus, as deity, in reality (7:3, 16).

The Hebrews writer also observed that the Old Law and Levitical priesthood were tied together, since the Old Law was given under the Levitical priesthood (read 7:11 carefully!). If the priesthood is changed (“another priest rises” – 7:15), then there must be a change of law also (7:12).

Not only HAS there been a change in the priesthood (Jesus is now high priest after the order of Melchizedek), but, unlike the Levitical high priests, Jesus was made high priest with an oath, the oath of God (7:20-21). God’s oath is unchangeable, immutable (read 6:13-18 again). The priesthood of Jesus, therefore, is not going to change and His priesthood necessitates a new law or covenant. Jesus stands as our High Priest and thus also a guarantee of a new and better covenant (7:22).

God has guaranteed that we are living under a new and better covenant and that’s a guarantee you can trust!

Just as an aside, Hebrews chapter nine is perhaps THE pivotal text of the book in understanding how the Levitical sacrificial system foreshadowed the work of Jesus the Christ as both high priest and sacrifice.

You’re going to enjoy today’s reading...I guarantee it...or your money back...all of it!

Happy reading,  
Allen

**Date: February 19, 2010**

**Reading: Hebrews 9-10**

God gave Moses detailed instructions for building the tabernacle. It had to be constructed a specific way because it was the “copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (8:5). The Hebrews author rehearsed the layout of the tabernacle, briefly referencing the ritual of the Day of Atonement (9:7-8). All of this, even the work of the Old Testament high priest, was designed to teach us about the work of the ultimate high priest, Jesus Christ.

Jesus serves in the “greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands” (9:11). Like the Old Testament high priest, Jesus entered the Most Holy Place with blood. Unlike the Levitical high priest, however, it was His own blood which Jesus brought into the presence of God (9:12).

The Levitical high priest killed each of the two sacrifices in the court of the tabernacle on the Day of Atonement. He carried the blood into the Most Holy Place and sprinkled it on the ark of the covenant, on the mercy seat, i.e., in the presence of God.

In similar fashion, Jesus shed His own blood here on earth, the better and perfect sacrifice. His work as high priest, however, was not finished until He entered into heaven itself, “to appear in the presence of God for us” (9:24). He arose from the dead, cheating the grave of its victory, and ascended into heaven to complete His work as our intercessor.

Although there are similarities between the work of Jesus as our heavenly High Priest (4:14) and the Old Testament high priests, there are also some striking contrasts.

Jesus did not have to enter the Most Holy Place year after year, nor did He offer the blood of another (9:25). He didn’t need to offer blood for His own sins because He was sinless (7:27-28; 9:7; 4:15). Instead He offered Himself “once at the end of the ages” (9:26) and, having offered a sacrifice which could actually provide propitiation for sin, He is seated at the right hand of God (9:28; 10:12-14, 18; 1:3).

“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus...let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (10:19-22).

God bless the reader,  
Allen

**Date: September 30, 2009**

**Reading: Hebrews 10-13**

The Hebrews writer informs us that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (10:31). The author had just warned his readers about the consequences of “willful sin” (10:26-29).

He counseled the Hebrews to consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together,” but noted that some had, in fact, stopped assembling with the other Christians (vs. 24-25). These were not Christians who had simply missed an assembly, but rather individuals who were forsaking “the assembling” of themselves together with other Christians. They had abandoned the practice of meeting with the rest of the church.

The Hebrews were to encourage one another because of the consequences of rejecting the Christ. There is no longer any sacrifice for sins for those who “sin willfully” (vs. 26). All that remains is a “fearful expectation of judgment” and fiery indignation (vs. 27).

Historically, verse 26 has been interpreted in an extreme fashion to mean that any Christian who commits a sin, knowing that he was doing wrong, has no chance for forgiveness. Not to minimize the seriousness of sin, but the passage doesn’t seem to be talking about the repentant Christian.

The Hebrews writer helps us understand of whom he speaks in verse 29. Verses 28-29 are in the form of a “lesser to the greater” argument. Verse 28 presents the “lesser” case in which the punishment for rejecting Moses’ law was identified. Since the author of Hebrews has already presented his case for the superiority of Christ over Moses and the New Covenant over the Old Covenant, the punishment for rejecting the Son of God would naturally be “worse” (greater; vs. 29).

The person under consideration in verse 29 has done three things: trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant **by which he was sanctified** as a common thing and insulted the Spirit of grace. This is clearly not the weak, but repentant Christian. His sin is not one just of weakness or ignorance; he is rebellious, willful.

The Hebrews author was also clearly talking about a Christian. Only Christians are “sanctified” by the blood of the covenant!

There no longer remains a sacrifice for sins for the person of verse 29 because he has rejected the only availing sacrifice that God provided. He has depreciated the blood that provides forgiveness. The Holy Spirit revealed the divine plan for grace, but this person has “insulted” the Holy Spirit.

“Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy...?” God will take vengeance upon those who have trampled His Son underfoot as though the sacrifice of Jesus was an unimportant thing. We should remember that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hand of the living God!

Happy reading,  
Allen

**Date: February 20, 2010**  
**Reading: Hebrews 11-13**

In the last verses of chapter ten, the Hebrews author noted that his readers were in need of endurance. He also quoted from Habakkuk 2 (vs. 3-4) a statement to the effect that “the just shall live by faith.” He ended the chapter by affirming his confidence in his readers that they were among those who “believe to the saving of the soul.”

Those “tail-end” verses of chapter ten serve as a foundation for the examples of chapter eleven. The “argument” of the book was essentially finished in the middle of chapter ten; the remainder of the book is dedicated to encouraging his readers to persevere, to live by faith.

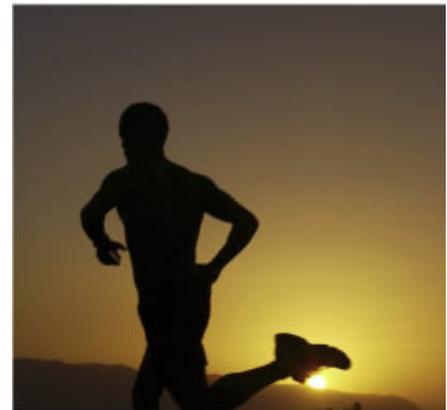
Describing the function of faith with reference to the unseen and things hoped for (in the future), the author put together a roll call of Old Testament individuals, men and women, who lived by faith. The connection between their faith and their obedience to God is emphasized by the formula he used to introduce them, one after another – “by faith so-and-so acted.”

Toward the end of chapter eleven, the Hebrews author moved from specific examples to groups and general references, but the point is the same throughout the chapter; these individuals “obtained a good testimony through faith” (11:39). Yet they did not receive the promise as those on this side of the cross have.

He wanted his readers to know that it is possible to “live by faith,” or, to borrow the figure he introduced in the beginning of chapter twelve, to run the race successfully.

That’s the challenge for us also. Beginning the race is one thing. Running with endurance is quite another. Many obey the gospel, but a much smaller number actually finish the race.

We must lay aside everything which will hinder us in our running, especially sin, which can tangle us up. We must look to the example of Jesus; He ran a difficult race, but kept His eyes on the goal and has been rewarded for His finish.



What “testimony” have we obtained by the way that we live? Let’s run with endurance!

God bless the reader,

Allen