



HEBREWS 7–13

THE PRICE AND PROMISE OF THE TEMPLE

For introduction, see previous chapter Hebrews 1–6

The second half of Hebrews is spiritual “meat” and dives deeper in the comparisons between the superiority of Jesus to all other prophets, priests, and rituals that came before. Paul elaborates on many foreshadowings of Christ, including Melchizedek and animal sacrifices for sin. He expects his audience to be familiar with the Old Testament. As evidence to support his argument throughout the Epistle, Paul uses forty-five Old Testament quotations and several other references to Old Testament stories. He especially expected an understanding of the first five books of Moses or Torah (If you are unfamiliar with the stories, reading the context of the Old Testament is very helpful). He encourages the saints to accept God’s invitation to come boldly to the throne of God and strive to enter His presence—even if it requires suffering, chastening, and greater faith.

HEBREWS 7

Superiority of Melchizedek Priesthood

Hebrews 7:1-10

Hebrews 7:1a “For this Melchisedec [sic], king of Salem, priest of the most high God” In approximately 2000 BC, Melchizedek was the King of Salem (in Hebrew, “*shalem*/peaceful”). Records have been found from 1400 BC that reference “*Uru-Salem*/City of Peace.” As mentioned in Hebrews 5:6, Melchizedek means “*Mlkzdk*/King of righteous.” The Jewish-Roman historian Josephus recorded, “Melchizedek the Righteous King, for such he really was; on which account he was [there], and called the city Jerusalem, which was formerly called Salem.”¹ When King David conquered the Jebusite city, he made it his capital and “city of David.”²

2000 BC

Melchizedek’s City of Salem→

Jebusites, Jeru-Salem→

1,000 BC

Jerusalem “City of David”

The Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 14 adds sixteen more verses regarding Melchizedek (Genesis 14:25–40, LDS Bible appendix). We learn that as a child, Melchizedek stopped the mouths of lions and quenched fires. He and his righteous city were allowed to join the translated city of Enoch. Joseph Smith later taught that Melchizedek was a King after the order of heaven.³ This adds new meaning to Abraham 1:1–4 when Abram “sought for the blessing of the fathers and for appointment unto the priesthood.” The “blessings of the fathers” stemmed from Adam to Enoch, and all those afterward who received the hope of exaltation through the priesthood covenants. Just as Enoch prepared a people of righteousness, so did Melchizedek. And just as Noah and his wife were left behind to start anew as righteous parents, so were Abraham and Sarah asked to remain on earth, to bless the earth, and to raise a righteous posterity.

We learn more about Melchizedek in the Book of Mormon in Alma 13:1–19. Melchizedek’s people “waxed strong in iniquity . . . but Melchizedek having exercised mighty faith, and received the office of the priesthood according to the holy order of God, did preach repentance unto his people . . . and Melchizedek did establish peace in the land . . . therefore, he was called the prince of peace . . . and he did reign under his father” (Alma 13:18–19; also see D&C 84:6–26 and 107:1–4). In Hebrews 5:6, I looked at the possibility of Shem “the great high priest,” referring to Melchizedek, too (D&C 138:41).

Hebrews 7:1b–2 “who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him, to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all” The Old Testament introduces Melchizedek in the story of Abraham’s slaughter of the kings. Four Assyrian kings conquered Sodom and Gomorrah, and took many captive including

Abram's nephew, Lot, and his household.⁴ When Abram heard, he took his community of 318 men and pursued them for five days and nights.⁵ To free his nephew and family Genesis describes Abraham's men as slaying some of the Assyrians and driving the rest in a body to Damascus. Abram brought back "all the goods" and then paid tithing on the booty to Melchizedek (Genesis 14:16).

Hebrews 7:3 *"For this Melchizedek was ordained a priest after the order of the Son of God, which order was without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; And all those who are ordained unto this priesthood are made like unto the Son of God; abiding priest continually"* (JST) This section of Hebrews is confusing for other Christians to understand—was Melchizedek born without parents? The JST additions separate the man from the priesthood. We are so blessed to have the clarification of the JST. We understand that it is the power of the priesthood that is without beginning or end.

Hebrews 7:4 *"Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils"* Paul highlights three aspects of Melchizedek's greatness, and then contrasts him with Jesus to show the latter's superiority.

- Received tithes from Abram (Hebrews 7:4–5)
- Blessed Abram with the priesthood promises (Hebrews 7:6)
- Lives on beyond mortality (Hebrews 7:8)

Hebrews 7:7 *"Indisputably, the lesser is blessed by the greater"* (BSB) The lesser refers to Abraham who was blessed by the greater, Melchizedek. The blessing comes through the power of the priesthood. Throughout this discussion Paul refers to three priesthoods: Levitical, Abrahamic (patriarchal, including eternal marriage) and Melchizedek. The following comparison is from John W. Welch's research.⁶

See figure on following page.

Hebrews 7:8 *"mortal men collect the tenth; but in the case of Melchizedek, it is affirmed that he lives on"* (BSB) Levites receive tithes and die, but there is one that lives on beyond mortality who received tithes. This verse is understood in light of the JST to refer to the translation of Melchizedek and his city. It gives additional meaning to the new Jerusalem as well (Revelation 21:2).

Hebrews 7:9–10 *"For when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the loins of his ancestor"* (BSB) Paul speaks figuratively, since Levi's seed came from his Grandfather Abraham, then Levi in a sense paid tithes to Melchizedek, too. The whole argument is to show that the Levitical priesthood is lower or secondary to the Melchizedek priesthood.

Levitical and Melchizedek Priesthoods As Compared in Hebrews 7

LEVITICAL	MELCHIZEDEK
Begins and ends	"Without beginning of days nor end of life" (7:3)
Mortal	"Immortal, made like unto the Son of God" (3)
Revocable	"Abideth a priest continually" (3)
Hereditary	"Without father, without mother" (3)
Limited to the tribe of Levi	Open to those outside the tribe of Levi (14)
Commanded according to the law	Blessed according to righteousness (1-2)
Takes tithing from their brethren	Receives tithing with a blessing (6)
In Abraham	Over Abraham (4, 6, 10)
Receives blessings through Abraham	Gave blessings to Abraham (6)
Not the final priesthood	Another priest beyond the Levitical (11, 15)
Governs the lower law	Governs the higher law (11-12)
After the law of carnal commandments	After the power of endless life (16)
Cannot make perfect	Brings in a better hope (19)
Made priests without an oath	Made priests with an oath (20-21, 28)
Law administered without an oath	Law administered with oaths (21, JST)
Temporal	Eternal, "for ever" (21, 28)
Old testament	Surety of a better testament (22)
Many priests needed because they die	Based on Jesus who will not die (23)
Changeable	Unchangeable (24)
Limited reconciliation of God and man	Able to intercede to the uttermost (25)
Highest Priest in this order is fallible	Highest Priest in this order is holy, undefiled (26)
Offers sacrifices to heaven for his own sins	Highest Priest higher than the heavens (27)
Daily sacrifices required	One sacrifice for all time (27)
With infirmity	"Consecrated for evermore" (28)

Jesus Superior to Melchizedek

Hebrews 7:11–28

Hebrews 7:11 “Now if perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood . . . why was there still need for another priest to appear—one in the order of Melchizedek” (BSB) The clincher of Paul’s argument comes together with the point that the Levitical priesthood does not have to power to save us. Jesus was not from Aaron but was a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Perfection can only come from the connection with God through His ordinances of highest priesthood, not from the lesser priesthood of the administering of angels.

Hebrews 7:12 “when the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also” (NIV). When Moses’ Israelites refused to receive the higher law and ascend the mount to see God, they also refused the higher priesthood. Instead, they asked Moses to be an intermediary for them. They settled on the preparatory or Levitical priesthood with the administering of angels (or messengers) rather than taking full responsibility themselves. As the law was changed so, too, was the power available from their shared priesthood. The lower law of burnt offerings and cleansings were to prepare them for later entering into the Lord’s presence. Paul’s premise is based on the need for a saving power greater than sacrificial rites as explained in the following chapter.

Hebrews 7:14 “Our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood” The promises of another high priest had nothing to do with the tribe of Levi, but rather the tribe of Judah. Hence, the promised Messiah would not hold the Levitical priesthood as a son of David.

Hebrews 7:15–16 “this point is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears . . . by the power of an indestructible life” (BSB) The priesthood of Melchizedek was not the carnal laws (Mosaic laws), but had the “power of Endless [God’s] life.” (KJV)

Hebrews 7:17 “Thou *art* a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec [*sic*]” Paul quotes Psalm 110:4 here and in verse 21. This was known as a Messianic verse.

Hebrews 7:18–19a “the former commandment is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect)” (BSB)) The former, Mosaic rituals which were performed by the lineage of Levitical priesthood holders, must now be set aside for a better option.

Hebrews 7:19–21 “For the law *was administered without an oath and made nothing perfect, but was only the bringing in of a better hope; by the which we draw nigh unto God. Inasmuch as *this high priest was not without an oath . . .*” (JST) The better hope is introduced that will lead us to perfection. The JST explains that “the law” was “only” to bring the Israelites to the truth, while the oath and covenant came from the perfect High*

Priest, Jesus. The word “oath” is used four times in the New Testament, all in the last part of this chapter. It refers to the oath and covenant of the higher priesthood. The word, “*horkómosia/oath*” means an affirmation on the oath or taking of an oath. It gains even more importance in that it was offered “by the One who said to Him, ‘You are a priest forever’” (Psalm 110:4). It is an oath from the Father. The restoration refers to God the Father’s offer as the “oath and covenant” of the Melchizedek priesthood (D&C 84:39, 40). From the time of King David, the Israelites knew the prophecy that the Messiah was a priest forever. Jesus fulfilled the promise of a better covenant.

Hebrews 7:22 “Jesus made *the* surety of a better testament” (JST) The word *testament* in Greek is also translated “covenant.” The two words are almost synonymous. Jesus became the new covenant—and through Him there are many priests in heaven because the promises of the priesthood lives on eternally.

Hebrews 7:23–25 “because Jesus lives forever, He has a permanent priesthood . . . He is able to save completely . . . He always lives to intercede for them” (BSB) The Greek can be translated, “*permanent, perpetual, or unchangeable.*” The same idea is repeated in verse 28. Some Christians have misunderstood “*unchangeable*” because they do not understand priesthood (and have used it against us). Jesus makes an “*intercession*” refers to a Roman/Hebrew practice for the legal appealing to another for aid, and therefore there must be two separate beings referred to (clarification of a separate Godhead again). Paul teaches that Jesus will be our intercessor with God the Father if we climb up the mount and to receive their promises.

Hebrews 7:26–27 “For such a high priest became us, *who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made ruler over the heavens; And not as those as those high priests, who offer up sacrifice daily, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people: for he needed not to offer sacrifice for his own sins, for he knew no sins; but for the sins of the people. And this he did once*” (JST) Jesus is the holy, “innocent” (BSB) One, the only undefiled High Priest. The changes clarify that Jesus did not need to make daily sacrifices in the Temple as the Aaronic High Priest did on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). Furthermore, He only needed to offer Himself once as the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

Hebrews 7:28 “the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever” The “oath and covenant of the Melchizedek priesthood was available to certain individuals from the time of Adam (i.e. D&C 107:41; 2 Nephi 6:2; Alma 4:20; etc.), but after Jesus, the oath and covenant became available to Christian disciples. In the Restoration all worthy of making temple covenants are able to be clothed and anointed with the oath and covenant. Paul summarizes the promises of the Father to Jesus for his qualifications: through an oath His Son was *consecrated* forever.

HEBREWS 8

Superiority of The New Covenant

Hebrews 8:1-13

Hebrews 8:1-3 “We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of . . . the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched . . . also to offer . . .” All other High Priests were types of Jesus—walking through the veil to the Holy of Holies and offering sacrificial blood for the sins of the people. The Holiest Place represented Jesus’ throne room. The mercy seat appeared like Jesus’ empty tomb, with two angels on either end of the throne where God dwelt. Moses’ tabernacle was a type of God’s sanctuary where the Lord will serve as our High Priest. Jesus offered the greatest gift and sacrifice, His life.

Hebrews 8:4 “*Therefore while he was on earth, he offered for a sacrifice his own life for the sins of the people. Now every priest under the law, must needs, offer gifts, or sacrifices, according to the law*” (JST) The KJV explains that Jesus did not follow the pattern of the Aaronic reigning priest. The JST adds that Jesus followed the heavenly pattern of sacrifice. His gift was not an animal, but his sinless life.

Hebrews 8:5 “**They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things ‘ . . . make everything according to the pattern’**” (ESV) The tabernacle and ordinances were patterned after the heavenly order shown to Moses on Sinai. This was understood hundreds of years before Paul as we read in the Book of Mormon. As taught by King Benjamin, “many signs, and wonders, and types, and shadows showed he unto them, concerning his coming; and also holy prophets spake unto them concerning his coming; and yet they hardened their hearts, and understood not that the law of Moses availeth nothing except it were through the atonement of his blood” (Mosiah 3:15). Abinadi explained that the sacrificial rituals, Aaronic priesthood ordinances, and “all these things were types of things to come” (Mosiah 13:31).

Hebrews 8:6 “**the ministry Jesus has received is . . . superior . . . the covenant of which he is mediator is superior . . . the new covenant is established on better promises**” (NIV) Another title and role of Jesus is our “Mediator/*mesités*/an arbitrator, intermediary, a go-between, or agent of something good”⁷ Because of His atoning sacrifice and gift of redemption, Jesus could be The Mediator or middleman who brought harmony between our perfect God the Father and fallen humanity. The fact that God has a Mediator, speaks of separate beings in the Godhead.

Need for a New Covenant

Hebrews 8:7-13

Hebrews 8:7 “**If that first covenant had been without fault, no place would have been sought for a second**”

(BSB) Paul shows that even Jeremiah understood that they needed a new covenant because even in the past, over generations, the Children of Israel did not live their covenants with God. Verses 8–12 cite Jeremiah 31:13–34, in which he prophesies that the new covenant will be part of God’s disciples’ hearts and minds.

JEREMIAH 31:13–34

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

HEBREWS 8:8–12

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

Hebrews 8:13 “In saying, ‘new,’ He has made obsolete the first; and that which is growing old and aging is near vanishing” (BLB) Paul concludes by defending the new covenant. God has made the old one obsolete. The people of God will find forgiveness, but in order to receive the greatest blessings, they must make and live new covenants. At the fulfillment of the new covenant, all on earth will know the Lord (Hebrews 8:11).

HEBREWS 9

Mosaic Ordinances Prefigured Christ's Ministry

Hebrews 9:1-28

Hebrews 9:1-5 “the first *covenant* had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle made . . . candlestick . . . table . . . shewbread . . . second veil . . .” Paul reviews Moses’ tabernacle with each sacred piece foreshadowing their Messiah. (We find Moses’ directions in Exodus 25-27.). The sizes below are for Moses’ Tabernacle (the later temples were larger). A cubit was approximately 18 inches (from elbow to fingertip, ranging from 17-20 inches).⁸

TABERNACLE DETAILS

Holy Place—first sanctuary room covered in gold, 30’x 15’x 15’ (20x10 cubits)

Lampstand/Candlestick/ Menorah
Six branches extending from central trunk.

Table of Incense—18”x18”x36” square wood, covered in gold (in the tabernacle this was in front of the veil, in Hebrews it is after)

SYMBOLISM

Sacred space for holiness and preparing to enter into the presence of the Lord with the three furnishing symbolizing prayer, bread and wine, and light

Tree of life and light, leading the way back to the presence of God

Incense was lit before sunrise at and 3:00 p.m. The smoke, like prayers, ascending to heaven

SCRIPTURES

Hebrews 9:2; Exodus 26:33; 28:29; Leviticus 10:18

Hebrews 9:2; Exodus 25:14, 31-40; Leviticus 24:1-4; 1 Kings 7:49

Hebrews 9:2; Exodus 30:1-10; Psalm 141:2; Luke 1:9

Table of Shewbread—wooden table covered with gold. 36” x 18,” and 27” high. for 12 shewbread/ unleavened cakes, in two piles with frankincense on each row and a pitcher of wine. Eaten by the priest every Sabbath

The 12 shewbread and 12 Israelite tribes were perpetually presented before God as an offering and service. Christians interpret this as sacrament symbols, or the Bread of Life.

Hebrews 9:2;
Exodus 26:36; 39:36;
40:23; Leviticus
24:5–9; Numbers 4:7;
Matthew 26:26–27;
Mark 14:22–23;
Luke 22:17–19

Most Holy Place—Holy of Holies, square room behind the veil, 15’x15’x15’ (exterior measurements 10x10x10 cubits), covered in gold.

God’s throne room, the most sacred space of all.

Hebrews 9:3; Exodus
26:33–34; 30:8–10;
40:3; Leviticus 16:2–3,
12–34

Ark of the Covenant—a wooden box, 45” x 27” x 27” overlaid with gold, containing:

1. Manna in a gold jar
2. Aaron’s staff that budded
3. Stone tablets of covenant

Above the lid or “mercy seat” were two angels with wings touching

A golden box or ark with signs of God’s authority, power, covenant, and mercy. The box represented His throne. The lid acted as the seat of the throne and was called the mercy seat. Mercy was the foundation of His reign. The two angels pointed their wings and faces toward the middle. This shares a similar image of Jesus’ empty tomb on resurrection morning. Mary Magdalene sees two angels sitting on either end of the site where Jesus laid and was resurrected.

Hebrews 9:4–5;
Exodus 16:32–34;
25:10–22; 26:33–34;
30:6; 34:27–28; 37:6,9;
Numbers 17:1–11;
Deuteronomy 9:10–
11; 10:1–5;
John 20:12

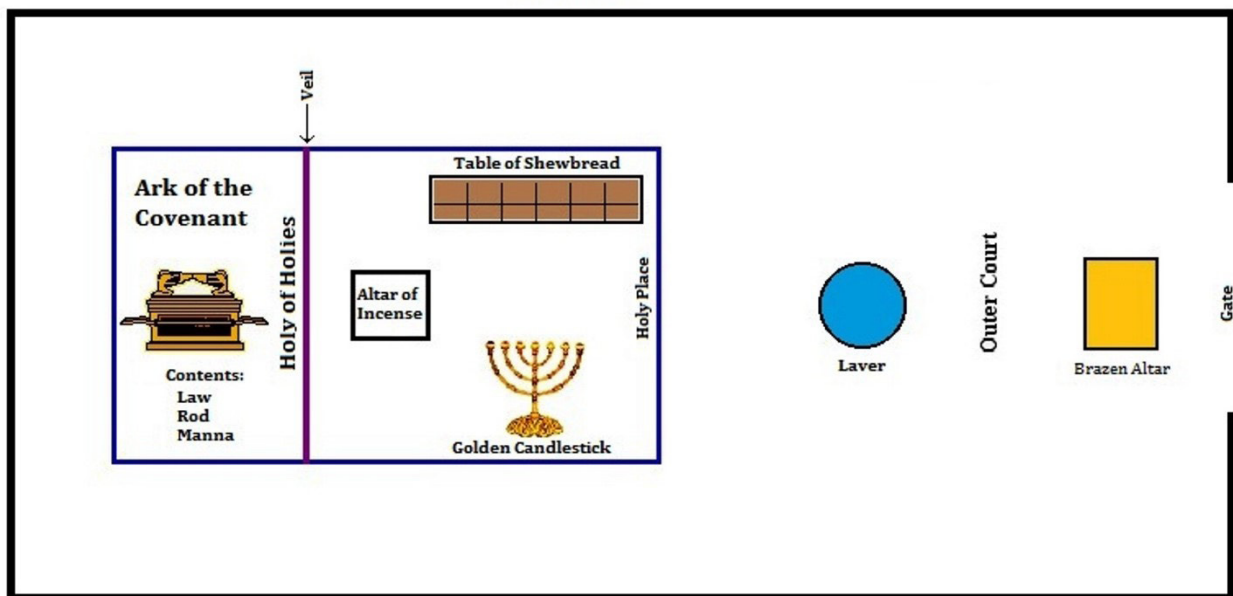
Hebrews 9:6–7 “the priests entered regularly into the first room to perform their sacred duties. But only the high priest entered the second room . . . once a year, and never without blood” (BSB) A few select priests were allowed to go into the Holy Place every morning before sunrise, and in the afternoon at the hour of prayer (or 3:00 p.m.). Their turn was chosen by “lots” and their assignments were either to light the candlestick or, incense, or to help with removing old ashes, bread, and the like.⁹ We read of this as a once in a life time experience for Zachariah when the angel Gabriel visited him (Luke 1).

Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest had the sacred opportunity to make sacrifices for himself and his people before sprinkling the veil with blood, speaking with God at the veil, and then entering through the veil into the Holy of Holies (Lev 16).

Hebrews 9:8–10 “the Holy Spirit was showing that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed . . . because the gifts and sacrifices being offered were unable to cleanse the conscience of the worshiper” (BSB) The symbols witnessed to Paul that the high priest’s annual service was only in preparation of the real thing which occurred when Jesus acted as our Passover lamb, carried our sins and opened the way for humanity to return into the presence of God. The Jewish temple service only dealt with the symbols of meat and washings as an elementary preparation. They pointed to the time of the Messiah, as “an illustration for the present time” (BSB).

Moses' Tabernacle

Exodus 25



Hebrews 9:11 “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands” Jesus’ kingdom was not temporal or housed in an earthly building, but is a heavenly eternal kingdom. Christ, as the great High Priest, opened the veil for a whole kingdom of High Priests and Priestesses. Symbolically this happened as the veil was torn (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45).

This fulfillment was echoed in the Book of Mormon by many voices including Alma 25:15–16: “But notwithstanding the law of Moses, they did look forward to the coming of Christ, considering that the law of Moses

was a type of his coming, and believing that they must keep those outward performances until the time that he should be revealed unto them. Now they did not suppose that salvation came by the Law of Moses; but the Law of Moses did serve to strengthen their faith in Christ; and thus they did retain a hope through faith, unto eternal salvation, relying upon the spirit of prophecy, which spake of those things to come.” (Also, see Mosiah 13:29–30; 2 Nephi 25:24–27; etc.)

Hebrews 9:12–14 **Neither by the blood of goats or of calves, but by his own blood . . . the blood of Christ, who by the Holy Ghost offered himself unspotted unto God, cleanse our conscience from dead works, to serve the living God?”** (DRB) Paul touches on the Jewish temple rituals to show step-by-step how they were only a shadow of things to come—each testifying of Jesus’ offering. We see Jesus as the symbol from the blood of unblemished first-born male animals to no broken legs. All represented Christ.

Hebrews 9:15 **“Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed”** (NIV) This verse is a beautiful description of the atoning role of our Redeemer. Each of the next six uses of “*testament*” are changed in the JST and NIV, RSV, etc. In Greek, “*diathéké*/testament/covenant between two parties,” can also mean a legal document or a “will.” This is how the word is used in verses 16 and 17.

Hebrews 9:18–21 **“The first covenant was not put into effect without blood. For when Moses . . . took the blood of calves and . . . saying, ‘This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep’”** (BSB) Moses’ testament/covenant was also sealed with animal blood that typified Christ’s atonement. He sprinkled the people and tabernacle with blood to sanctify it, symbolizing the future power of purification through Jesus’ blood and body. Paul’s citation is from Exodus 24:8. The Jews erred in seeking salvation wholly through the symbolic blood of animals.

Hebrews 9:22 **“without shedding of blood is no remission”** The Israelite’s sacrifices were made for the remission or cleansing of the sins. Forgiveness comes through the sacrifice and blood of the Lamb of God.

Hebrews 9:23–26 **“. . . patterns of things in the heavens . . . For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands . . . Nor yet that he should offer himself often . . . but now once in the *meridian of time*”** (JST *italicized*) Earthly types and shadows are only “*patterns*” of things to come. Christ fulfilled the law by a single sacrifice of His precious perfect blood (a symbol of his mortality). In the KJV or verse 26, Paul refers to his time as “the end of the world,” but the JST changed it to our understanding of time (see above).

Hebrews 9:27–28 **“People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time . . . to bring salvation”** (NIV) Paul

understood that after we live and die our judgment comes where we will be accountable for our thoughts and actions. Jesus as the Christ/Messiah is the end and answer to the Law of Moses. Paul promises his audience that look forward to the second coming of the Lord that they will see Him when He comes the second time unto “salvation.” A similar promise is found in D&C 93:1, “Verily, thus saith the Lord: It shall come to pass that every soul who forsaketh his sins and cometh unto me, and calleth on my name, and obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, shall see my face and know that I am.” Whether this promise is received in this life or the next does not matter as long as it is received.

HEBREWS 10

Christ’s Sacrifice Once and for All

Hebrews 10:1-18

Hebrews 10:1-2a “The law is only a shadow of the good things to come, not the realities themselves . . . If it could, would not the offerings have ceased?” (BSB) This is the Paul’s concluding argument. After debating the same subject over three chapters, he concludes that Jesus is superior to all Levitical and other High Priests. For the fourth time, Paul explains to the Jewish-Christians that the animal sacrifices were only a pattern, type, or shadow and could never take away any sins (also see Colossians 2:17).

Paul’s audience needed to understand what Amulek explained in the Book of Mormon:

It is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice, and then shall there be, or it is expedient there should be, a stop to the shedding of blood; then shall the law of Moses be fulfilled; yea, it shall be all fulfilled, every jot and tittle, and none shall have passed away. And behold, this is the whole meaning of the law, every white pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal (Alma 34:13-14).

Hebrews 10:2b “worshippers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins” (NIV) In most English translations, this phrase may communicate that mortals need not feel guilt or need to repent more than once. This is a misunderstanding of “guilt” (BSB) that can actually lead one to repentance and ultimately, forgiveness. With each new fracturing of God’s laws, the Spirit may prompt us to be “conscience of sins” (KJV). If guilt is received as a motivating force to lead to repentance, it is a blessing. The reminder to change or refine our mortal ways can become a helpful step along the path toward the great gift of forgiveness. Repentance is a gift of love. However, if we exaggerate our guilt after repentance and forgiveness, then we have misused God’s plan.

Hebrews 10:3 “those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins” (BSB) The annual experience probably refers to the High Priest’s offerings and the “scapegoat” ritual on the Day of Atonement. Leviticus 16:5–22 explains that once a year, the sins of the whole congregation of Israel were placed on the head of the goat, “to make an atonement” (Leviticus 16:10). Aaron (or the subsequent High Priest) placed both his hands on the head of the goat and “confess[ed] over him all the iniquities of the Children of Israel and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat” (Leviticus 16: 21). Then the goat was sent off into the wilderness. Another goat and bull were offered as a sin offering. Then Aaron took the blood from the slain animal and sprinkled it on the veil before entering into the Holy of Holies. I believe that this is symbolic that Jesus was the “Anointed One,” anointed by His Father to carry our sins as redeeming gift.

Hebrews 10:5–9 “When Christ came into the world, he said . . . ‘I have come to do your will, my God.’” (NIV) This idea of sacrifices extending beyond animals to our hearts and efforts was not new to the Jews, as Paul quotes Psalm 40:6–8 (LXX). The “body thou hast prepared me” (10:5, KJV) may have multiple levels of meaning—including our Savior’s body, and the gift of our resurrected bodies. It might also mean something about a listening ear as the RSV translation reads: “thou hast given me an open ear” (RSV). Paul explains that the will of the Father can change. God needs us to do different things at different times.

Hebrews 10:10 “we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (NIV) All who accept Jesus’ redemption through repentance are made holy through His great and last sacrifice, which was the will of the Father. When we are “made holy,” we are “sanctified” (KJV), or “*hagiazó*/consecrated/set apart as holy, hallowed, purified.”¹⁰

Hebrews 10:11–14 “And every priest standeth daily ministering . . . But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice . . . perfected for ever them that are sanctified” This “*man*” (KJV), or “priest” (BSB), is Christ (RSV). Paul’s summary pulls his long argument: Day-after-day animal sacrifices could not save anyone but pointed to Jesus’ sacrificial death. Jesus’ enemies are Satan and his devils. They will have no power over death or anything else when Christ makes them completely subservient to Him (the imagery of “footstool”). Whether or not all mankind will desire Eternal Life, Jesus has made it possible for all to be perfected if they really have it as their hearts’ desire.

Hebrews 10:15–18 “I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds . . . Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more” Paul teaches the Hebrews by quoting another of their beloved prophets: Jeremiah 31:33–34. Once the Lord’s law is in our hearts and minds, then we are on the road to perfection. The power of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice obliterated the need for another blood sacrifice and left the weight on our individual hearts feel the need to sacrifice our sins and repent. Complete repentance washes away and cleanses our past sins (D&C 58:42).

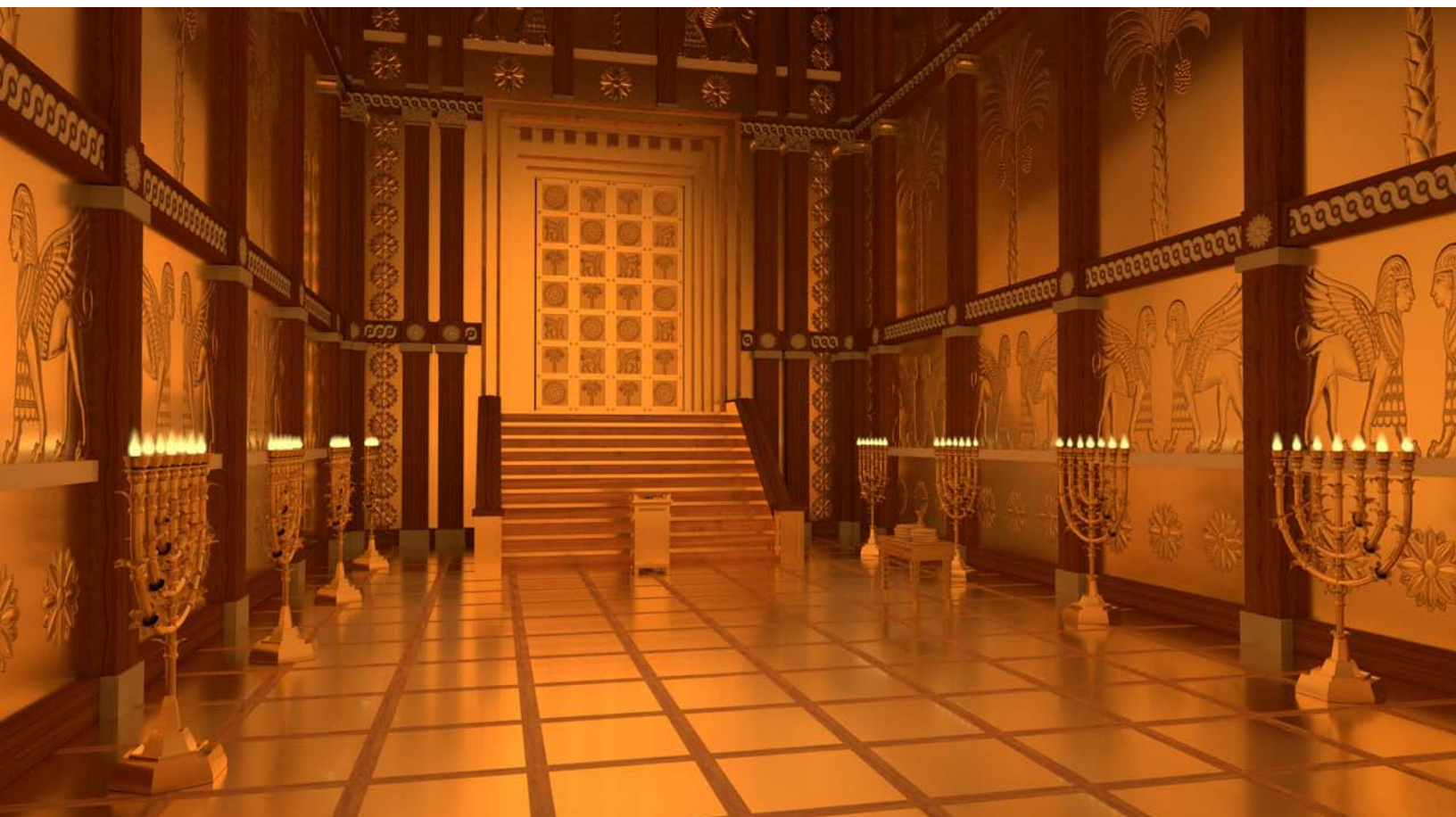
A Call to Persevere: An Appeal to Hold Firm

Hebrews 10:19-31

Hebrews 10:19-20 “we have boldness in the entrance of the holy place by the blood of Yeshua. And the way of The Life who made us new is now within the veil which is his flesh” (ABPE) This Aramaic translation retains the name Yeshua which is what Jesus would have been called by his peers. The veil has multiple meanings. In the Israelite tabernacle, it separates priests from God. At Jesus’ death the temple veil was rent, just as His own flesh was torn for us. The veil symbolizes Jesus’ body, as it becomes the means for humanity to enter into the presence of God. Paul’s order and imagery speaks of repenting, making covenants, and taking on the name, blood, and signs of Christ through receiving His redeeming atonement, in order to pass into the Most Holy Place to commune with God.

Hebrews 10:22-23 “Let us approach [the veil] with a true heart and the confidence of faith . . . having bathed our bodies in pure water, And let us grasp firmly . . . for he who has promised us is faithful” (ABPE) Continuing at the point of the veil, Paul admonishes the saints who have been washed, and spiritually cleansed to “draw near” (KJV) to those promises. Paul offers all worthy Christian saints the opportunity to walk the path that only the one anointed high priest did once a year in Judaism. He invites all washed and “purified/sprinkled” (JB200/KJV) saints to “hold fast” through faith in His name to pass through the veil to the Most Holy Place, and commune with God. We can trust in God’s promises.

3D rendering of The Holy Place, facing the entrance to the Holy of Holies. in Solomon’s Temple Image via Brian Olsen, Photogent.com.



Hebrews 10:24–25 “Spur one another on to love and good deeds. Let us not neglect meeting together . . . all the more as you see the Day approaching” (BSB) Much of the gospel of Jesus Christ is about helping our fellow pilgrims progress. We must “consider one another” with love. That can be done when we meet together—our Sabbath worship, ministering, seminary, institute, etc. President Nelson did just that in General Conference when he warned, “Do the spiritual work to find out for yourselves, and please do it now. Time is running out.”¹¹

Hebrews 10:26–29 “If we deliberately go on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no further sacrifice for sins remains . . . one deserves to be punished who has trampled on the Son of God” (BSB) Paul emphatically warns those who have made sacred covenants and then deliberately sin that they will have to suffer. The consequences of leaving the higher law are eternal. He also warns that those who break higher covenants will have more dire consequences than if they broke the Law of Moses. However, Paul’s ultimatum is not quite complete—repentance is available if the sinner stops sinning and completely submits to God’s will again through repentance. The Lord added this important qualification when he stressed this same point in a revelation through Joseph Smith, “if they would not repent they must suffer even as I” (D&C 19:17). Repentance is the saving grace and gift of mercy.

Hebrews 10:30–31 “. . .The Lord will judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” Paul quotes two phrases on God’s judgment (Deuteronomy 32:35–36; Psalm 135:14). A righteous and thorough judgment is part of God’s plan. The Prophet Joseph learned through revelation that: “the mystery of godliness, how great is it! For, behold, I am endless, and the punishment which is given from my hand is endless . . . Endless punishment is God’s punishment” (D&C 19:10–12).

Hebrews 10:32–33 “Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering” (NIV) Once the Jews were converted to Christianity, they endured persecution so that they were “made a gazingstock” (KJV), or “public spectacle (NAS) and “publicly exposed to abuse” (RSV).

Hebrews 10:34 “You sympathized with the prisoners and cheerfully submitted to the violent seizure of your property, because you know that you have a better and more permanent possession” (ISV) In the KJV, it sounds as if the Hebrew saints helped Paul in prison, “ye had compassion of me in my bonds.” However, most other major English translations change this verse from first person to third person. If it refers to Paul, it helps us date the experience probably to Caesarea where he was imprisoned for two years (Acts 24:22–23).

Hebrews 10:35–36 “Do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward” (NKJV) Seeking the promises of the Lord requires “patience” (KJV), “perseverance” (NIV), and “endurance” (NASB) not only because it is a narrow and difficult (or “strait”) path, but also because of Satan’s minion’s working against the saints. If we can maintain our trust in God’s plan, He will implement the training required to perfect the saints.

Hebrews 10:37–39 “He who is coming will come and will not delay . . . But we do not belong to those who shrink back . . . but to those who have faith and are saved” (NIV) Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:3–4 (also, cited in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11). Many translations of verse 38, use the singular, “My righteous one” (BLB), and others use the plural, “the just shall live by faith” (JST). The whole assembly of righteous will follow the “Righteous One.” The message is that Paul trusts his audience will not “draw back” but will live by faith.

HEBREWS 11

The greatest discourse on faith in the Bible

Faith Defined as Action

Hebrews 11:1–3

Hebrews 11:1 “Now faith is the *assurance* of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (JST *italicized*) The only word changed in the JST was the KJV “substance” for *assurance*. Interestingly, decades later, many modern English translations also changed to that same word. This adds powerful clarity to the definition.

Hebrews 11:2–3 “This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command” (NIV) The Creation heads the list of the results from faith. The KJV includes the plural, “worlds were prepared” rather than “universe.” That Creation took place under the direction of the Godhead and Michael the archangel. President Joseph Fielding Smith included, “Noah, Abraham, Moses, Peter, James, and John, Joseph Smith and many other ‘noble and great ones’ played a part in the great creative enterprise.”¹² This opens the doorway for many others, possibly including us. The *Lectures on Faith* begin: “with faith as the first principle in revealed religion, and the foundation of all righteousness; faith is ... the principle of action in all intelligent beings.”¹³

Faith of the Early Patriarchs

Hebrews 11:4–7

Hebrews 11:4 “By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous” (ESV) Paul adds the crucial element of faith to this Genesis story that adds to our understanding of both sacrifice and the level of Abel’s faith. Joseph Smith explained further:

By faith in this atonement or plan of redemption, Abel offered to God a sacrifice that was accepted, which was the firstlings of the flock. Cain offered of the fruit of the ground, and was not accepted, because he could not do it in faith, he could have no faith [in Jesus Christ], or could not exercise faith contrary to the plan of heaven. It must be shedding the blood of the Only Begotten to atone for a man; for this was the plan of redemption; and without the shedding of blood was no remission . . . consequently Cain

could have no faith; and whatsoever is not of faith is sin. But Abel offered an acceptable sacrifice by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God Himself testifying of his gifts. Certainly, the shedding of the blood of a beast could be beneficial to no man, except it was done in imitation, or as a type, or explanation of what was to be offered through the gift of God Himself; and this performance done with an eye looking forward in faith on the power of that great Sacrifice for a remission of sins.¹⁴

Hebrews 11:5 “By faith Enoch was translated . . . God . . . is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him”

Enoch was the seventh prophet from Adam, the son of Jared, father of Methuselah (Genesis 5:18–24). In the New Testament Jude 1:14 also mentions him. The Bible has extraordinarily little information on him, but we are blessed to have much more in D&C 107:48–57 and Moses 6–7. We learn he felt inadequate, “slow of speech” (Moses 6:31). Moses also suffered from this weakness, but while Moses used Aaron, Enoch overcame his weakness and became one of the “preachers of righteousness” (Moses 6:23). The Lord taught him to “open thy mouth, and it shall be filled, and I will give thee utterance, for all flesh is in my hands, and I will do as seemeth me good. Say unto this people: Choose ye this day, to serve the Lord” (Moses 6:32–33).

After approximately 400 years of preaching, Enoch and his people in the city of Zion were righteous enough to be translated.¹⁵ We read in Moses 7:69, “Zion was not, for God received it up into his own bosom; and from thence went forth the saying, ZION IS FLED.”¹⁶ Enoch and Zion were rewarded because of their diligence in seeking the Lord. Their faith led them to live the law of consecration and receive their salvation.

Hebrews 11:7 “By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in godly fear built an ark to save his family . . . and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith” (BSB) Noah (who is also the angel Gabriel) was not translated with the other righteous of Melchizedek’s city, but remained on earth to continue a righteous lineage. Through his great faith he became an “heir of righteousness,” or the promise of exaltation.

Faith of Abraham and his Children

Hebrews 11:8–22

Hebrews 11:8–9 “By faith Abraham, when he was called . . . went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise” Abraham and Sarah left the civilization in Mesopotamia to follow God’s mission call to establish a community of at least 320 converts (Genesis 12:5; 14:14). Like Bedouins, they, their son, grandsons, and greatgrandchildren, traveled along the crossroads of the east—the land at the eastern boarder of the Mediterranean Sea—in “*tabernacles*” or “*tents*” (BSB). They traveled because they trusted God, not knowing where they would end up, but had strong faith as did the early pioneers, Lehi’s family, the Jaredites, etc. Abraham proved his faith by obeying. God then rewarded him with the blessings he sought, an heir “of the same promise,” sealed to Eternal Life (see D&C 7:6; 76:88; 137:7 and Abraham 1:2). Likewise, we prove

our faith when we follow the Spirit's promptings and God's commandments.

Hebrews 11:10 “he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God”

As mentioned in Hebrews 7:1a, Abraham wanted to join Enoch's translated city of Zion, with Melchizedek and his city of righteousness heirs (others also sought for this according to verse 16). The D&C also talks of the city of “Enoch . . . which was sought for by all holy men, and they found it not because of wickedness and abominations; and confessed they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth; but obtained a promise that they should find it and see it in their flesh” (D&C 45:11–14).

Hebrews 11:11 “By faith Sarah, even though she was barren and beyond the proper age, was enabled to conceive a child because she considered Him faithful” (BSB).

Sarah continued to believe when she was at least ninety—but people lived longer then, and she did not die until 127 (Genesis 23:1).

Sarai Overhearing the Renewal of the Promise by William Hole, 1925.



Hebrews 11:13 “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off . . . and embraced *them*, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” The great patriarchs and matriarchs of Israel died believing that God’s promises were waiting for them, through faith in Christ.

Hebrews 11:14–16 “ they seek a country . . . a better *country*, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city” Seeking a “*patris/country/fatherland*” meant they were seeking for a heavenly city or kingdom.

Hebrews 11:17–19 “By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice . . . even though God had said to him, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned’” (NIV) Abraham’s promise was obtained with complete faith and trust sustained through his family’s long suffering. His life’s choices spoke of his faith. In the KJV, Isaac is introduced as “his only begotten son,” to foreshadow Jesus. Interestingly, in the Book of Mormon, Jacob also gives this title to both Jesus and Isaac, “It was accounted unto Abraham in the wilderness to be obedient unto the commands of God in offering up his son Isaac, which is a similitude of God and his *Only Begotten Son*” (Jacob 4:5, italics added) In the case of Abraham, though, he fathered seven other sons, but only one through Sarah, his queen (Genesis 16:11; 25:1–2).

Hebrews 11:20–21 “By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning the future . . . By faith Jacob . . . blessed each of Joseph’s sons . . . By faith Joseph . . . spoke about the exodus” (BSB) Father’s blessings are inspired through faith and love. Paul traces the line of the leading patriarchs through Joseph, not Ruben or Judah, or another of the older brothers. This is because Joseph was the first born of the queen wife (just as with Isaac). When Joseph was near dying, he instructed his posterity to bury his bones near his father, back in the promised land in Shechem (Genesis 50:25; Joshua 24:32).

Faith of Moses

Hebrews 11:23–29

Hebrews 11:23–29 “By faith Moses’ parents hid him for three months . . . when he was grown, he chose to suffer oppression with God’s people . . . By faith he kept the Passover and . . . passed through the Red Sea as on dry land” (BSB) Of all the stories about Moses and his forty years leading the Children of Israel, Paul chose to highlight two events that shared parallels with Jesus’ mission: First, Jesus became the pascal lamb of God, and, second, the crossing through the Red Sea was a type of baptism and new life (also see 1 Corinthians 5:7; 10:1–6).

Faith of the Israelites and Rahab

Hebrews 11:30–35

Hebrews 11:30 “By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days” (BSB) The battle of Jericho is one of the best examples of nothing but the power of faith at work (Joshua 6).

The stone walled city was just over the Jordan river, the lowest city on earth, 800 feet below sea level (Joshua 3:16; 6). As soon as Israelites crossed into the promise land, the oasis of Jericho, was the first place they were instructed to conquer. The priest's carried the ark and the covenant as they circled the city once a day for six days and seven times on the seventh day. Then seven priests blew their shofars, or ram's horns, and the people shouted, thick stone walls fell "down flat" (Joshua 6:6, 20).

Later, Jericho became the territory of Benjamin (Joshua 18:12, 21). In the New Testament, Jesus visited it before His final weeks in Jerusalem (Mark 10:46; Luke 18:35; 19:1)

Hebrews 11:31 "By faith the harlot Rahab, perished not with them that believed not"

Rahab was the prostitute (Hebrew: *zonal*/ prostitute) or possibly an innkeeper, who helped the Israelite spies in their reconnaissance for the siege of Jericho (Joshua 2:1; James 2:25). Because she protected the Israelite spies in peace, she and her "father's household" and all of their possessions were saved (Joshua 6:17, 23). Her earlier kindness to Joshua was not forgotten, and the Lord instructed Joshua to reward her family. Whatever her profession had been previously, her family joined the Israelites at that point and adopted an Israelite lifestyle (Joshua 6:25).

Hebrews 11:32–35 "What shall I say more? . . . Gedeon . . . Barak . . . Samson . . . David . . . Samuel . . . wrought righteousness, obtained promises, . . . that they might obtain *the first resurrection*" (JST *italics*) Paul could have elaborated on many more Old Testament judges and prophets (some of whom we do not hold as honorable, such as Samson and Jephthae, but he saw them as examples of faith). The JST clarified that these great Israelites, or at least the women in verse 35, might obtain the "first resurrection" (Mosiah 15:22; 18:8; D&C 45:54; 76:64; Revelation 20:25; etc.).



Rahab Helping the Two Israelite Spies. Illustration by Frederick Richard Pickersgill, from the 1897 Bible Pictures and What They Teach Us by Charles Foster. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Faith of Judges and Prophets

Hebrews 11:37–38 “They were stoned, they were sawed in two . . . went around in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, oppressed, and mistreated . . . hid in caves . . .” (BSB) Tradition records that Isaiah was killed by King Manasseh of Judah by being “sawn.”¹⁷ Paul is still referring to Old Testament stories or traditions, so wearing goatskin and hiding in caves may refer to Elijah.

Hebrews 11:39 “These were all commended for their faith, yet they did not receive what was promised” (BSB) This verse is puzzling. I think this verse is saying that none of these Old Testament prophets were translated with the cities of Enoch and Melchizedek but stayed below to prepare for a heavenly reward. However, Elijah was translated, too. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that all the prophets had had the Melchizedek priesthood endowment and so the promises of exaltation would have been given to them, conditioned on their faithfulness. Abraham, Moses, Ezekiel, and Isaiah each record their throne theophany, which suggests they had received the surer word of prophesy. Perhaps Paul referred to the fact that all these great Israelite leaders lived the old law of sacrifice and did not receive the higher law of their Promised Messiah?

Hebrews 11:40 “God having provided some better things for *them through their sufferings, for without sufferings they could not be made perfect*” (JST *italics*) These changes add a startling importance to the power of suffering. The great and noble ones needed to learn more about God and perfecting their faith through suffering. No one will approach perfection without suffering. Jesus’ example as “the suffering servant” is our best example of enduring our trials and suffering valiantly (Isaiah 53:1–12).

Hebrews 12:1 “We are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders . . . And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (NIV) Paul summarizes his beautiful discourse on faith by referring to these great men and women’s examples as a “cloud of witnesses.” The encouragement to run with “patience” (KJV) may sound ironic, but other translations emphasize “endurance” (BSB) or “steadily” (JB), or “resolutions” (NEB). In order to run this race, we must rid ourselves of all excess baggage. Paul uses the apt image of sins as “entangling” our lives. Sins weigh us down physically and spiritually.

Hebrews 12:2 “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross . . .” To run a steady, faith-filled, pace requires focusing our minds and hearts on the Lord’s will, hoping to see Him at the end of the race. Jesus is the “*author and finisher*” of our faith (KJV), or the “pioneer and perfecter” (RSV, NIV), or the one “who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection” (JB). A “*finisher*” in Greek is one who completes or perfects something. It may also refer to the leader, founder or originator. Jesus becomes the One who perfects us as we draw near to Him.

To fulfill His Father’s plan, Jesus relied on His love for and faith in His Father. To give Him the strength to endure the pain and suffering of death—which was the redemption of our souls (D&C 19:18–19)—He looked forward to the future joy of humanity.

The “cross” was a sign of extreme *shame*. To the Jews and Romans, a crucified person was far from being chosen, anointed, or sent by God, but rather was cursed by God. One of the church fathers explained the cultural confusion: “They say that our madness consists in the fact that we put a crucified man in second place after the unchangeable and eternal God.”¹⁸

Hebrews 12:3 “Consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (BSB) This is very humbling. Jesus’ endurance not only allows Him to empathize with us, but it also sets an example for us. When we feel emotionally and spiritual exhausted from the trials of life, “consider” that Jesus endured what He did for us so that we would not “faint.”

HEBREWS 12

God Disciplines His Sons—Warning against Refusing God

Hebrews 12:4–11

Hebrews 12:4 “In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood” (NIV) Repentance can be the hardest thing we do, yet it pales in comparison to what the Lord endured to give us the opportunity to repent. Jesus is the ultimate sufferer. Remembering this helps us keep our problems in perspective and gives us strength to abandon our sins.

Hebrews 12:5–6 “My son, do not take lightly the discipline of the Lord, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you. For the Lord disciplines the one He loves . . .” (BSB) Paul quotes Proverbs 3:11–12, to remind the saints to be submissive to God’s corrections. Our Heavenly Father’s plan includes correction, as loving instruction. From an eternal perspective, divine “chastisement” is vital to our eternal growth. If we can submit to God’s direction without becoming resentful, “all these things will give us experience and be for our good” (D&C 122:7).

Hebrews 12:7–9 “Endure suffering as discipline” (BSB) or “chastening” (KJV), or “hardship” (NIV) This also requires great faith. But, if disciples can voluntarily cooperate with the hardships of life and trust the Eternal Father’s teaching methods, then those disciples become legitimate heirs of the Father, “the father of our spirits” (Hebrews 12:9). This is a beautiful clear statement on our relationship with God in the premortal existence.

Hebrews 12:10 “God disciplines us for our good, so that we may share in His holiness” (BSB) Paul compares God’s wise actions with the need for earthly parents to teach and disciple their children. We are reminded of our goal of “holiness” every time we see the doorway to a temple. Holiness is the process of sanctification. We are assured that everything God does for us is for our own good, “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of [humanity]” (Moses 1:39).

Hebrews 12:11 “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (NIV) If we do not learn from our Divine tutorials, we have not benefited from the hardship. It takes a very meek and humble person to not feel defensive or prideful during a reprimand. Yet when the Lord provides correction, it is often encouraging at the same time. Saints walk by faith asking, “what can I learn from this pain and correction?” Like a broken horse, humans can be trained to respond to the promptings of our Master.

Hebrews 12:12–13 “Strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees . . . so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed” (NIV) Paul cites Proverbs 4:26, to encourage those who suffer. He asks his audience to reach out in service to those in need. His context is spiritual or emotional trials, even though his example is a physical handicap. By giving aid, we make our paths straight and then those that follow have a clear path. When the saints endure God’s correction, they are in a position to help heal those in need along their daily paths of life.

An Appeal for Holiness

Hebrews 12:14–29

Hebrews 12:14–15 “Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up” (NIV) Paul commends the saints to spread peace and live in holiness in order to “see the Lord.” The purpose of the Lord’s chastening in the previous section is to purify one for this experience. Yet the adversary thwarts holiness with bitterness. When bitterness takes hold of one’s heart, the Spirit leaves and charity is lost. Bitterness also affects all those who interact with us. Bitterness and hatred act like a force that spirals downward into the grasp of Satan.

Hebrews 12:16–17 “See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau . . . Afterward, . . . when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected” (NIV) Esau is identified as a “profane” (KJV) person for not appreciating God’s priesthood. When we do not honor or value sacred gifts, we are profane too. The tragedy of Esau was that he missed the opportunity even though later he regretted it “with tears.” His birthright was the priesthood, but he traded it for a bowl of lentil soup. In this life, we must live with the consequences of earlier choices. I’m sure things will be different in the next life, but the timing of repentance does not necessarily change earthly consequences.

Hebrews 12:18–22 “You have not come to a mountain . . . But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly” (NIV) Paul returns to comparing Moses’ invitation to the early Children of Israel to ascend the mountain, with the early Christian’s opportunity. The mountain that Paul describes for the saints is not the scary experience that the Children of Israel feared (Paul quotes Exodus 19:12, 13, and Deuteronomy 9:19). The Christian invitation is to enter the glorious city of God. It still requires figuratively climbing the mountain (enduring trials, chastening, and striving for holiness) to see the heavenly throne of God with a Host of Angels. The “innumerable company of angels” (KJV) includes the millions of people who will be exalted according to Daniel 7:10 and Revelation 5:11.

Hebrews 12:23 “The church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect” (NIV) The church of the “*first born*,” is not reserved for first-born children, but refers to those who have been sanctified through Jesus’ atonement, “the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven” (RSV). Joseph Smith also added further commentary on verses 22 and 23:

Cain and Abel by Anton Robert Leinweber, 1910.



The Hebrew church came unto the Spirit of just men made perfect . . . to angels . . . to God and to Jesus Christ . . . what did they learn by coming to the spirits of just men made perfect? Is it written? No! The spirits of just men are made ministering servants to those who are sealed unto life eternal. And it is through them that the sealing power comes down.¹⁹

The object gained by this communication with the spirits of the just was the established order of the kingdom of God—the keys of power and knowledge were with them (the angels) to communicate to the saints.²⁰

Hebrews 12:24 “to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel” (BSB) When we think of Jesus as our Mediator, we see the Godhead as separate beings with distinct roles. The JST of Genesis 17:4–7 explains the apostate doctrine about the sprinkling of Abel’s blood. (See the appendix in the LDS Bible.)

Hebrews 12:25–27 “See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks . . . he has promised, ‘Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens’” (NIV) The promise is a quote from Haggai 2:6, about earthly upsets preceding the Second Coming. Paul’s commentary on the phrase, “yet once more,” emphasizes that created things can be moved, but there are things that will remain. Verse 25 also refers back to the Children of Israel’s earthly messenger who was Moses. But, if we refuse to listen to God, there is eternal danger at stake. Likewise, we must not refuse the counsel, commandments, and covenants of our Lord and God who speaks through His Apostles.

Hebrews 12:28 “Since we are receiving an unshakable kingdom, let us be filled with gratitude, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe” (BSB?) While the earth will shake, God’s kingdom will remain stable. In that kingdom, a grateful heart is a worshipful heart. Those who are reverent and acceptable before God, are included in the church of the firstborn, and city of Zion (Hebrews 12:2–23).

Hebrews 12:29 “For our God is a consuming fire” This idea is found in several Old Testament verses including Exodus 24:17; Deuteronomy 4:24; 2 Samuel 22:9; etc. Joseph Smith similarly taught that “God Almighty Himself dwells in eternal fire.”²¹ Section 133 describes the “consuming fire” of the Second Coming as “The presence of the Lord shall be as the melting fire that burneth and as the fire which causeth the waters to boil . . . the mountains shall flow down at thy presence...so great shall be the glory of his presence that the sun shall hide his face in shame” (D&C 133:41, 44, 49 also see D&C 101:25; Isaiah 64:2; and Joseph Smith—History 1:37). Section 76 describes the presence of the Savior, as comparable to the glory of the sun (D&C 76:70).

HEBREWS 13

After a long discourse on striving to enter into the presence of the Lord, Paul now gives a list of requirements. Striving for a life of holiness through sanctification requires obedience to these seven or eight points (one is duplicated). His list shares similarities with the points on a modern temple recommend.

General Christian Obligations

Hebrews 13:1-20

1. SERVE GOD BY LOVING AND SHOW KINDNESS TO OTHERS

Hebrews 13:1-3 “Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters . . . show hospitality to strangers . . . remember those in prison . . . and those who are mistreated” (NIV) One of the best ways to “serve God” is to love each other (Hebrews 12:28). In the reference to strangers who are actually angels, Paul may have referred to Abraham’s kindness to three angels (Genesis 18:1-8), or Lot, who did the same (Genesis 19:1). Joseph Smith taught that all angels who visit this earth have or will live on the earth as mortals. In asking us to remember those who are in prison or are mistreated, Paul acknowledges his personal appreciation for kindnesses shown to him. His message is one of compassion, to feel with others.

2. LAW OF CHASTITY

Hebrews 13:4 “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral” (NIV) This is another example of Paul’s many positive statements that support marriage. The law of chastity has eternal significance.

3. FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Hebrews 13:5 “Don’t love money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, “I will never fail you . . . The Lord is my helper” (NIV) The combination of the KJV words, “conversations/*tropos*/a way, manner of life, character,” and “not covetousness/*aphilarguros*,” are most often translated to avoid a love of money, or to be satisfied with what you have. For example: “Put greed out of your lives” (JB), “Do not live for money” (NEB), and “Let your manner of life be without covetousness” (BLB). As disciples, we can be satisfied with whatever station we are in knowing that God will supply for our needs. As evidence for his argument, Paul quotes two Old Testament passages: Deuteronomy 31:6 and Psalm 118:6, 7. Both are filled with hope that we can trust in the Lord to provide for our needs. The same promise was repeated in the restoration in conjunction with the Law of Consecration in D&C 119:3-5.

4. SUSTAIN YOUR LEADERS

Hebrews 13:7 “Remember your leaders . . . and imitate their faith” (NIV) Paul’s encouragement to the Hebrews

to remember their church leaders goes beyond prayers and offerings: it extends to seeking similar faith, beliefs and conduct in life. We also need to “remember what kind of lives they lived and try to” do the same (CEV). In modern temple recommends, we asked to “sustain” church leaders. Terryl Givens addressed this subject:

The word sustain only appears in [modern] scriptures once . . . D&C 134.5, admonishes us to “sustain and uphold” the respective governments in which we reside. . . . I take “sustain” in that case to mean we support the general framework, share its common purposes, and work for its betterment. To sustain the elected leaders of a government would similarly mean to recognize their legitimately derived authority, and not work to undermine that authority, even if we voted for the other guy (or woman). So, adapting this scriptural usage to the sustaining of our own leaders, I take the same cues.²²

Hebrews 13:8 “**Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever [sic]**” The real leader and example of the church is our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one we can completely follow as His nature is eternally good.

5. AVOID APOSTATE TEACHINGS

Hebrews 13:9 “**Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings . . . which is of no benefit to those who do so**” (NIV) The specific type of false teachings that Paul includes here deal with dietary laws (which probably referred to the strict Jewish kosher habits that Christians stopped practicing after the Jerusalem Council, Acts 15:19–21). Paul encouraged the saints to follow their leaders in order to gauge what is true—as well as a means to identify false leaders.

Hebrews 13:10–14 “**Although the high priest brings the blood of animals into the Holy Place as a sacrifice for sin . . . Jesus also suffered . . . by His own blood**” (BSB) This is a theological tangent. Many of the Mosaic dietary codes were based on an avoidance of blood. So, Paul acknowledges the underlying sacred practices from the Jewish temple, but highlights that it was all done out of reverence for blood of the Redeemer. The symbols all pointed to the promised Messiah who was crucified as the greatest martyr out of the city wall, to the north of the altar (Leviticus 1:11). And if disciples follow his example, they can receive a greater city. The city is heavenly Zion or even Enoch’s city.

6. LIVE THE NEW LAW OF SACRIFICE

Hebrews 13:15 “**Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise . . . confess His name. And do not neglect to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased**” (BSB) Rather than animals, Christians offer personal sacrifices as we praise God, express gratitude, confess Him, do good, and help others. We can “share” (or in the KJV, “communicate”) what we have spiritually, emotionally, physically, financially, and educationally.

7. OBEY AND SUPPORT LEADERS

Hebrews 13:17 “Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you . . . Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden” (NIV) Paul speaks not only for himself, but for all church leaders when he says, “they” watch over your souls and must be accountable to God for us. Many translations start this verse with “obey” your leaders. Yet even when it is difficult to follow, respecting and submitting to them is one way we respect and submit to God. Nonetheless, this does not mean to obey blindly. Disciples can receive their own inspired confirmation of the leaders and their council.

8. PRAY FOR LEADERS

Hebrews 13:18–19 “Pray for us; we . . . desire to live honorably in every way. And I especially urge you to pray that I may be restored to you soon” (BSB). Paul tries to live honorably in everything he does. The second sentence provides evidence that this was written while Paul was in prison and hopes to see them soon.

Blessing

Hebrews 13:20–21

Hebrews 13:20–21 “Now the God of peace . . . Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ . . . Amen” Paul concludes with a beautiful prayer or blessing. When speaking of the Lord, he emphasizes the sacrificial nature of His Godhood, “through the blood of the everlasting covenant” (KJV). God’s peace comes from following Him as a shepherd into this eternal covenant. The word “perfect/*katartizō*” also means “to complete, prepare” and is used to “fit (join) together” and “prepare, perfect, for his (its) full destination or use, bring into its proper condition (whether for the first time, or after a lapse).”²³ In the temple context, it speaks of the preparing the initiate to enter in to the presence of the Lord. As we equip ourselves with the Lord’s will we are becoming “perfect” or our initiation becomes “complete.”

Conclusion

Hebrews 13:22 “Brothers and sisters, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for in fact I have written to you quite briefly” (NIV) Paul asks the saints to humbly and meekly accept his teachings and correction. His reference to “brief,” may refer to his short, personalized note from verses 22–25. It does not fit his long theological treatise of thirteen chapters.

Hebrews 13:23–25 “Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you . . . Those from Italy send you their greetings. Grace be with you all” (NIV) Timothy may have been imprisoned or possibly released from his mission or church responsibilities. Paul hopes for the two of them to travel together to visit the Hebrew saints. The greeting from the Italian saints suggests the author is in prison, which is consistent with the historical sources that reported Paul wrote the letter from his Roman imprisonment. The last words are often typeset in a different script, are not part of the Epistle, were added by later copyist, and are often inaccurate.

Header Image: 3D rendering of The Holy Place, facing the entrance to the Holy of Holies. in Solomon's Temple Image via Brian Olsen, Photogent.com.

ENDNOTES

1. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, VI.10:1.
2. As mentioned in Matthew 2 and Luke 1, the “City of David” in the New Testament refers to Bethlehem, but that was not the case in the Old Testament where Jerusalem received that title.
3. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 246.
4. These Assyrian Kings included: Chedorlaomer, Tidal, Amraphel, and Aroch
5. Genesis 14:14 refers to Abram’s “trained servants” which probably refer to the male converts that traveled with Abraham’s household as described in Genesis 12:5, “all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran.” Elsewhere his “herdsmen” may refer to the same community.
6. Welch and Hall, *Charting the New Testament*, 12–7.
7. Strong’s, #3316 “mesités.”
8. Koester, *Anchor Bible: Hebrews*, 400–402; measurement came from an 18-inch cubit.
9. Edersheim, *Temple*, etc.
10. Strong’s, #37, “hagiazó.” <https://biblehub.com/greek/37.htm> (accessed 10-23-19).
11. Russel M. Nelson, “Come Follow Me,” General Conference April 2019.
12. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:74–75.
13. Joseph Smith, Sydney Rigdon, etc., *Lectures on Faith* (Liberty Mo: Zion’s Camp Books, 1988), chapter 1.
14. Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 58.
15. Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (NYC, NY: Macmillan Publishing, 1992), Vol 4, 1485–1486. “Translated beings are not resurrected beings, though all translated beings either have since been or yet will be resurrected . . . (3 Ne. 28:8). . . . During the periods from Adam to Melchizedek, many faithful persons were translated. . . . Translated beings are assigned special ministries, some to remain among mortals . . .” For more, see Moses 7:18–21, 31, 63, 69; D&C 38:4; 45:11–14; 84:99–100; Genesis 5:22–24; and JST Genesis 14:32–34.
16. D&C 107:48–49, “Enoch was twenty-five years old when he was ordained under the hand of Adam; and he was sixty-five and Adam blessed him . . . four hundred and thirty years old when he was translated.”
17. *The Ascension of Isaiah*, possibly written during the first century AD.
18. Markus Bochkmuehl, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Press, 2001), 90.
19. Ehat and Cook, *Words of the Joseph Smith*, 254; D&C 77:11.
20. Donald Parry, ed., *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1994), chapter 17.

21. Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 367.
22. Terryl Givens, as quoted by Marc Bohn in Feb 2016, TimesandSeasons.org (accessed 10-23-19).
23. Strong's # 2675, *katartizó*, <https://biblehub.com/greek/2675.htm> (accessed 10-23-19).