



HEBREWS 7–13

THE PRICE AND PROMISE OF THE TEMPLE

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The second half of Hebrews is spiritual meat and dives deeper into the superiority of Jesus to all other prophets, priests, and rituals that came before.¹ 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, we find forty-five Old Testament quotations and several other references to Old Testament stories. He especially expected an understanding of the Five Books of Moses, or Torah. 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 the Melchizedek Priesthood—Heb 7:1–10

Heb 7:1. “For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God.” In approximately 2000 BC, Melchizedek was the king of Salem (in Hebrew, *shalem* means “peaceful”). Records have been

found from 1400 BC that reference *Uru-Salem*, or the “City of Peace.” As mentioned in Heb 5:6, the name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness.” 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.”² When King David conquered the Jebusite city, he made it his capital and called it the “city of David.”³

The Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 14 adds sixteen more verses regarding Melchizedek (Gen 14:25–40). 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.⁴ This adds new meaning to Abr 1:1–4, which describes Abram seeking “the blessing of the fathers and for appointment unto the priesthood.” The “blessings of the fathers” were passed from Adam to Enoch and to all those afterward who received the hope of exaltation through the priesthood covenants. Like Enoch, Melchizedek prepared a people of righteousness. And just as Noah and his wife were left behind to start anew as righteous parents, Abraham and Sarah were asked to remain on earth to bless the earth and raise a righteous posterity.

We learn more about Melchizedek in Alm 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 . . . in his days; therefore he was called the prince of peace, . . . and he did reign under his father.”⁵ In Heb 5:6, it is possible that Shem, “the great high priest,” refers to Melchizedek, too (D&C 138:41).

Heb 7:1–2. “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 Abraham’s nephew, Lot, and his household.⁶ When Abraham heard, he took his community of 318 men and pursued them for five days and nights.⁷ Genesis describes Abraham’s men as slaying some of the Assyrians and driving the rest in a body to Damascus. Abraham brought back “all the goods” and then paid tithing on the booty to Melchizedek (Gen 14:16).

Heb 7:3 (JST). “For this Melchizedek was ordained a priest after the order of the Son of God, which order was ~~W~~without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; ~~but~~ And all those who are ordained unto this priesthood are made like unto the Son of God; ~~abideth~~ abiding a priest continually.” Without the JST additions and restored doctrines, this section of Hebrews is confusing—was Melchizedek born without parents? The JST additions separate the man from the priesthood. We understand that it is the power of the priesthood that is without beginning or end.

Heb 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 Melchizedek with Jesus to show the latter’s superiority:

- Melchizedek received tithes from Abram (Heb 7:4–5)
- Melchizedek blessed Abram with the priesthood promises (Heb 7:6)
- Melchizedek lives on beyond mortality (Heb 7:8)

Heb 7:7 (BSB). *“indisputably, the lesser is blessed by the greater.”* “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: the Levitical, Abrahamic (patriarchal, including eternal marriage), and Melchizedek.

Heb 7:8 (BSB). *“mortal men collect the tenth; but in the case of Melchizedek, it is affirmed that he lives on.”* Levites receive tithes and die, but there is one who received tithes and lives on beyond mortality. 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 (Rev 21:2).

Heb 7:10 (BSB). *“For when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the loins of his ancestor.”* Paul speaks figuratively. Since Levi’s grandfather was Abraham, 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.

Jesus superior to Melchizedek—Heb 7:11–28

Heb 7:11 (BSB). *“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.”* The clincher of Paul’s argument is the point that the Levitical Priesthood does not have the 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.

Heb 7:12 (NIV). *“when the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also.”* When the 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 was the power available from the priesthood. The lower law of burnt offerings and cleansings was to prepare the people for later entering into the Lord’s presence. Paul’s premise is the need for a saving power greater than sacrificial rites, as explained in the following chapter.

Heb 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 had to do with the tribe of Judah. Hence, the promised Messiah would not hold the Levitical Priesthood as a son of David.

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

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

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

Heb 7:19–20 (JST). “*For the law was administered without an oath and made nothing perfect, but was only the bringing in of a better hope ~~did~~; by the which we draw nigh unto God. And inasmuch as this high priest was not without an oath.*” The better hope that will lead us to perfection is introduced. 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 Greek *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’” (Heb 7:21 BSB, quoting Ps 110:4). It is an oath from the Father. In the Restoration we refer 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.

Heb 7:22 (JST). “*Jesus made ~~a~~ the surety of a better testament.*” 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 live on eternally.

Heb 7:24–25 (NIV). “*because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood . . . he is able to save completely . . . he always lives to intercede for them.*” 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, which refers to a Roman and Hebrew practice of legally appealing to another for aid, and therefore this verse must refer to two separate beings (which is further clarification of a separate Godhead). Paul teaches that Jesus will be our intercessor with God the Father if we climb up the mount to receive their promises.

Heb 7:26–27 (JST). “*For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than ruler over the heavens; ~~Who needeth not daily, And not as those high priests, to offer who offered up sacrifice daily, first for his their own sins, and then for the people’s: 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.~~*”

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 (Lev 16). Furthermore, He only needed to offer Himself once as the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

Heb 7:28 (BSB). *“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 only to certain individuals from the time of Adam, but after Jesus, the oath and covenant became available to Christian disciples.⁸ 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: through an oath His Son was *consecrated* forever.

Hebrews 8

Superiority of the new covenant—Heb 8:1–13

Heb 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.”* 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 Holy of Holies represented Jesus’s throne room. The mercy seat appeared like Jesus’s empty tomb, with two angels on either end of the throne where God dwelt. Moses’s tabernacle was a type of God’s sanctuary where the Lord will serve as our Great High Priest. Jesus offered the greatest gift and sacrifice: His life.

Heb 8:4 (JST). *“~~For if he were~~ Therefore while he was on the earth, he offered for a sacrifice his own life for the sins of the people. Now every ~~he should not be a priest under the law, seeing that there are priests that must needs~~ offer gifts, or sacrifices, according to the law.”* 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.

Heb 8:5 (ESV). *“They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. ‘See that you make everything according to the pattern.’”* The tabernacle and ordinances were patterned after the heavenly order shown to Moses on Sinai. This was understood hundreds of years before Paul’s time. 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” (Mosi 3:15). Abinadi explained that the sacrificial rituals, Aaronic Priesthood ordinances, and “all these things were types of things to come” (Mosi 13:31).

Heb 8:6 (NIV). *“the ministry Jesus has received is . . . superior . . . the covenant of which he is mediator is superior . . . the new covenant is established on better promises.”* Another title and role of Jesus is Mediator (*mesités*, “an arbitrator, intermediary, a go-between, or agent

of something good”).⁹ Because of His atoning sacrifice and gift of redemption, Jesus could be the Mediator who brought harmony between our perfect Father and fallen humanity. The fact that God has a mediator speaks of separate beings in the Godhead.

Need for a new covenant—Heb 8:7–13

Heb 8:7 (BSB). *“if that first covenant had been without fault, no place would have been sought for a second.”* Paul shows that Jeremiah understood that the people 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 Jer 31:33–34, in which Jeremiah prophesies that the new covenant will be part of disciples’ hearts and minds.

Heb 8:13 (BLB). *“In saying, ‘new,’ He has made obsolete the first; and that which is growing old and aging is near vanishing.”* 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 (Heb 8:11).

Hebrews 9

Mosaic ordinances prefigured Christ’s ministry—Heb 9:1–28

Heb 9:1–3. *“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’s tabernacle and each sacred symbol foreshadowing the Messiah (see Ex 25–27). The sizes below are for Moses’s tabernacle (the later temples were larger). For reference, a cubit was approximately eighteen inches (measured from elbow to fingertip, ranging from seventeen to twenty inches).¹⁰

Heb 9:6–7 (BSB). *“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.”* 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 (3:00 p.m.). Priests were chosen for this responsibility by lots, and their assignments were either to light the candlestick and incense or to help with removing old ashes, bread, and the like.¹¹ We read of this as a once-in-a-lifetime experience for Zachariah, when the angel Gabriel visited him (Lk 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).

Table 1. Symbolism in Moses's tabernacle

Tabernacle feature	Symbolism	Scriptures
Holy Place —first sanctuary room covered in gold, 30 x 15 x 15 feet (20 x 10 cubits)	Sacred space for holiness and preparing to enter the presence of the Lord. Contains three furnishings symbolizing prayer, bread, wine, and light.	Heb 9:2; Ex 26:33; 28:29; Lev 10:18
Lampstand/candlestick/menorah —six branches extending from a central trunk	Tree of life and light, leading the way back to the presence of God.	Heb 9:2; Ex 25:14, 31–40; Lev 24:1–4; 1 Kng 7:49
Table of incense —18 x 18 x 36 inches of square wood covered in gold (in the tabernacle this was in front of the veil, but Hebrews describes it behind the veil)	Incense was lit before sunrise and at 3:00 p.m. The smoke, like prayers, ascended to heaven.	Heb 9:2; Ex 30:1–10; Ps 141:2; Lk 1:9
Table of shewbread —wooden table covered with gold, measuring 36 x 18 x 27 inches high. Held twelve shewbread, or unleavened cakes, in two piles with frankincense on each row and a pitcher of wine, which were eaten and drunk by the priest every Sabbath	The twelve shewbread and twelve Israelite tribes were perpetually presented before God as an offering and service. Christians interpret this as a sacrament symbol, or the Bread of Life.	Heb 9:2; Ex 26:36; 39:36; 40:23; Lev 24:5–9; Num 4:7; Mt 26:26–27; Mk 14:22–23; Lk 22:17–19
Most Holy Place, or Holy of Holies —square room behind the veil covered in gold, measuring 15 x 15 x 15 feet (exterior measurements 10 x 10 x 10 cubits)	God's throne room, the most sacred space of all.	Heb 9:3; Ex 26:33–34; 30:8–10; 40:3; Lev 16:2–3, 12–34
Ark of the covenant —a wooden box overlaid with gold, measuring 45 x 27 x 27 inches and containing manna in a gold jar, Aaron's staff that budded, and stone tablets of the 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's empty tomb on Resurrection morning. Mary Magdalene saw two angels sitting on either end of the site where Jesus's body lay and was resurrected.	Heb 9:4–5; Ex 16:32–34; 25:10–22; 26:33–34; 30:6; 34:27–28; 37:6, 9; Num 17:1–11; Deu 9:10–11; 10:1–5; Jn 20:12

Heb 9:8–9 (BSB). “*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.*” The symbols witnessed to Paul that the high priest’s annual service was only preparation for 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 dealt only with the symbols of meat and washings as an elementary preparation. These symbols pointed to the time of the Messiah as “an illustration for the present time” (BSB).

Heb 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’s kingdom is 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.¹²

This fulfillment was echoed in the Book of Mormon by many voices, including Alma’s:

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.¹³

Heb 9:12–14 (DRB). “*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?*” 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’s offering. All aspects of the sacrifices represented Christ.

Heb 9:15 (NIV). “*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.*” This verse is a beautiful description of the atoning role of our Redeemer. Each of the next six uses of *testament* is changed in the JST, NIV, and RSV. In Greek, *diathéké*, “testament or covenant between two parties,” can also mean “a legal document or will.” This is how the word is used in verses 16 and 17.

Heb 9:18–20 (BSB). “*the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. For when Moses . . . took the blood of calves . . . saying, ‘This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep.’*” Moses’s testament, or covenant, was also sealed with animal blood, typifying Christ’s Atonement. Moses sprinkled the people and tabernacle with blood to sanctify them, symbolizing the future power of purification through Jesus’s blood and body. Paul’s quote is from Ex 24:8. The Jews erred in seeking salvation wholly through the symbolic blood of animals.

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

Heb 9:23–26 (JST). “*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 ~~end-meridian-of-the-world~~ time.*” 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 of verse 26, Paul refers to his time as “the end of the world,” but the JST changed it to reflect our understanding of time.

Heb 9:28. “*Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin.*” Paul understood that after we live and die, our judgment comes and we will be accountable for our thoughts and actions. Jesus is the end and answer to the law of Moses. Paul promises those 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—Heb 10:1–18

Heb 10:1–2 (BSB). “*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?*” This is 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 (see also Col 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 whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal. (Alm 34:13–14)

Heb 10:2 (NIV). “*worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins.*” 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 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, we have misused God's plan.

Heb 10:3 (BSB). *"those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins."* The annual reminder probably refers to the high priest's offerings and the scapegoat ritual on the Day of Atonement. Lev 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" (Lev 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" (Lev 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 animals 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 a redeeming gift.

Heb 10:5–7 (NIV). *"when Christ came into the world, he said: . . . 'I have come to do your will, my God.'"* This idea of sacrifices extending beyond animals to our hearts and efforts was not new to the Jews, as seen in Paul's quotation of Ps 40:6–8 from the Septuagint. The "body thou hast prepared me" may have multiple levels of meaning—including our Savior's body and the gift of our resurrected bodies (Hebrews 10:5). It might also have something to do with 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.

Heb 10:10 (JST). *"we are sanctified through the offering **once** of the body of Jesus Christ **once for all**."* All who accept Jesus's redemption through repentance are made holy through His great and last sacrifice, which was the will of the Father. The Greek work *hagiazó* means "consecrated, set apart as holy, hallowed, purified."¹⁴

Heb 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, or "priest" (BSB), is Christ. Paul's summary pulls his long argument together: Daily animal sacrifices could not save anyone but pointed to Jesus's sacrificial death. Jesus's 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 the footstool). Whether or not all humankind will desire eternal life, Jesus has made it possible for all to be perfected if it is their hearts' desire.

Heb 10:16–17 (NIV). *"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 Jeremiah again (Jer 31:33–34). Once the Lord's law is in our hearts and minds, we are on the

road to perfection. The power of Jesus's atoning sacrifice obliterated the need for another blood sacrifice. Complete repentance washes away and cleanses our past sins (D&C 58:42).

A call to persevere—Heb 10:19–31

Heb 10:19–20 (ABPE). *“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.”* This Aramaic translation retains the name Yeshua, which is what Jesus would have been called by His peers. The veil has multiple symbolic meanings. In the Israelite tabernacle, it separated priests from God. At Jesus's death the temple veil was rent, just as His own flesh was torn for us. The veil symbolizes Jesus's body, as it becomes the means for humanity to enter into the presence of God. Paul's 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.

Heb 10:22–23 (ABPE). *“Let us approach [the veil] therefore 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.”* 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 walked once a year in Judaism. He invites all washed and purified 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.

Heb 10:24–25 (BSB). *“spur one another on to love and good deeds. Let us not neglect meeting together . . . all the more as you see the Day approaching.”* 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 in our Sabbath worship, ministering, seminary, institute, and so forth.

Heb 10:26–29 (BSB). *“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.”* Paul emphatically warns those who have made sacred covenants and then deliberately sinned that they will suffer. The consequences of living (or not living) the higher law are eternal. He also warns that those who break higher covenants will face direr 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. 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.

Heb 10:30–31 (ESV). *“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 (Deu 32:35–36; Ps 135:14). A righteous and thorough judgment is part of God's plan. The Prophet Joseph learned through revelation,

“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).

Heb 10:32 (NIV). “*Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering.*” 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).

Heb 10:34 (ISV). “*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.*” The KJV implies that 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 place the experience probably in Caesarea, where he was imprisoned for two years (Act 24:22–23).

Heb 10:35 (NKJV). “*do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.*” Seeking the promises of the Lord requires patience, not only because it is a narrow and difficult (or “strait”) path but also because Satan’s minions work against the Saints. If we can maintain our trust in God’s plan, He will implement the training required to perfects the Saints.

Heb 10:37–39 (NIV). “*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.*” Paul quotes Hab 2:3–4 (which is cited in Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11). Many translations of Heb 10:38 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—Heb 11:1–3

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

Heb 11:2–3 (NIV). “*This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command.*” The Creation leads the list of the results of faith. The KJV includes the plural “worlds were prepared” rather than “universe.” The Creation took place under the direction of the Godhead and Michael the archangel. President Joseph Fielding Smith added, “Noah, Abraham, Moses, Peter, James, and John, Joseph Smith and many other ‘noble and great ones’ played a part in the great creative enterprise.”¹⁵ 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.”¹⁶

Faith of the early patriarchs—Heb 11:4–7

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

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.¹⁷

Heb 11:5–6. “**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 (Gen 5:18–24). In the New Testament, Jud 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 Mose 6–7. We learn he felt inadequate, “slow of speech” (Mose 6:31). Moses also suffered from this weakness, but while Moses used Aaron as a mouthpiece, Enoch overcame his weakness and became one of the “preachers of righteousness” (Mose 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” (Mose 6:32–33).

After approximately four hundred years of preaching, Enoch and his people in the city of Zion were righteous enough to be translated.¹⁸ We read in Mose 7:69, “God received [Zion] up into his own bosom; and from thence went forth the saying, Zion is Fled.”¹⁹ 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.

Heb 11:7 (BSB). “**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.**” 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”—in other words, he received the promise of exaltation.

Faith of Abraham and his children—Heb 11:8–22

Heb 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 call to establish a community of at least 320 converts (Gen 12:5; 14:14). Like Bedouins, they and 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, and many others. 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.²⁰ Likewise, we prove our faith when we follow the Spirit’s promptings and God’s commandments.

Heb 11:10 (NIV). *“he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”* As mentioned in Heb 7:1, Abraham wanted to join Enoch’s translated city of Zion, with Melchizedek and his city of righteousness heirs (others also sought this, according to 11:16). The Doctrine and Covenants also talks of the city of Enoch being “a city reserved until a day of righteousness shall come—a day 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).

Heb 11:11 (BSB). *“By faith Sarah, even though she was barren and beyond the proper age, was enabled to conceive a child, because she considered Him faithful.”* Sarah continued to believe she could bear a child when she was at least 90—but people lived longer at that time, and she did not die until age 127 (Gen 23:1).

Heb 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 their faith in Christ.

Heb 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,” in this context meant seeking a heavenly city or kingdom.

Heb 11:17–18 (NIV). *“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.’”* Abraham’s promise was obtained with complete faith and trust sustained through his family’s long suffering. His life’s choices reflected 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*” (Jac 4:5; em-

phasis added). In this case, though, Abraham fathered seven other sons but only one through Sarah (Gen 16:11; 25:1–2).

Heb 11:20–22 (BSB). *“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.”* The 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 firstborn of the queen wife (just as was Isaac). When Joseph was near dying, he instructed his posterity to bury his bones near his father, back in the promised land in Shechem (Gen 50:25; Jos 24:32).

Faith of Moses—Heb 11:23–29

Heb 11:23–29 (BSB). *“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 Pass-over and . . . passed through the Red Sea as on dry land.”* 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’s mission: first, Jesus became the paschal Lamb of God, and second, the crossing through the Red Sea was a type of baptism and new life (also see 1 Cor 5:7; 10:1–6).

Faith of the Israelites and Rahab—Heb 11:30–35

Heb 11:30 (BSB). *“By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days.”* The battle of Jericho is one of the best examples of nothing but the power of faith at work (Jos 6). The walled city was just over the Jordan river and was the lowest city on earth at eight hundred feet below sea level (Jos 3:16; 6). As soon as the Israelites crossed into the promised land, the oasis of Jericho was the first place they were instructed to conquer. The priests carried the ark of 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 (ram’s horns), the people shouted, and the thick stone walls fell “down flat” (Jos 6:6, 20).

Later, Jericho became the territory of Benjamin (Jos 18:12, 21). In the New Testament, Jesus visited the city before His final weeks in Jerusalem.²¹

Heb 11:31. *“By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not.”* Rahab was the prostitute (Hebrew *zona*) or possibly an innkeeper who helped the Israelite spies in their reconnaissance for the siege of Jericho (Jos 2:1; Jam 2:25). Because she protected the Israelite spies, she and her father’s household and all their possessions were saved (Jos 6:17, 23). Whatever her profession had been previously, her family joined the Israelites at that point and adopted an Israelite lifestyle (Jos 6:25).

Heb 11:32–35 (JST). *“And what shall I more say? . . . Gedeon, . . . Barak, . . . Samson, . . . David, . . . Samuel, . . . wrought righteousness, obtained promises, . . . that they might obtain a better the first resurrection.”* 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 Jephthah,

but whom he saw as examples of faith). The JST clarified that these great Israelites, or at least the women in verse 35, might obtain the first resurrection.²²

Faith of judges and prophets

Heb 11:37–38 (BSB). “*They were stoned, they were sawed in two, . . . went around in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, oppressed, and mistreated . . . hid in caves.*” Tradition records that Isaiah was killed by King Manasseh of Judah by being “sawn.”²³ Paul is still referring to Old Testament stories or traditions, so hiding in caves may refer to Elijah.

Heb 11:39 (BSB). “*These were all commended for their faith, yet they did not receive what was promised.*” This verse is puzzling. It seems to be 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 received the Melchizedek Priesthood endowment and thus the promises of exaltation would have been given to them, conditioned on their faithfulness. Abraham, Moses, Ezekiel, and Isaiah each record their throne theophanies, which suggest they had received the surer word of prophecy. All mortals must wait for heaven to receive God’s full rewards.

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

Hebrews 12

Heb 12:1 (NIV). “*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.*” Paul summarizes his beautiful discourse on faith by referring to the great examples of the individuals mentioned in chapter 11 as a “cloud of witnesses.” The encouragement to run with patience may sound ironic, but other translations emphasize “endurance” (BSB), “steadily” (JB), and “resolutions” (NEB). In order to run this race, we must rid ourselves of all excess baggage. Paul uses the apt image of sins entangling our lives. Sins weigh us down physically and spiritually.

Heb 12:2 (BSB). “*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 at 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 one “who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection” (JB). The

Greek for “finisher” refers to 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. For the strength to endure the pain and suffering of death—which was the redemption of our souls—Jesus looked forward to the future joy of humanity (D&C 19:18–19).

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.”²⁴

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

God disciplines His sons, and a warning against refusing God—Heb 12:4–11

Heb 12:4 (NIV). “*In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.*” Repentance can be very hard, 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.

Heb 12:5–6 (BSB). “*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.*” Paul quotes Pro 3:11–12 to remind the Saints to be submissive to God’s corrections. Our Heavenly Father’s plan includes correction as loving instruction. Divine chastisement is vital to our eternal growth. If we can submit to God’s direction without becoming resentful, “all these things shall give [us] experience, and shall be for [our] good” (D&C 122:7).

Heb 12:7 (BSB). “*Endure suffering as discipline.*” In other translations, “discipline” is rendered “chastening” (KJV) and “hardship” (NIV). Enduring in this way requires great faith. But if disciples can voluntarily cooperate with the hardships of life and trust the Father’s teaching methods, they will become legitimate heirs of the Father, “the father of our spirits” (Heb 12:9). This is a beautiful statement on our relationship with God in the premortal existence.

Heb 12:10 (BSB). “*God disciplines us for our good, so that we may share in His holiness.*” Paul compares God’s wise actions with the discipline we receive from our earthly parents. 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 [humankind]” (Mose 1:39).

Heb 12:11 (NIV). “*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.” If we do not learn from our divine tutorials, we have not benefited from the hardship. It takes a meek and humble person to not feel defensive or prideful while being reprimanded. 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 learn to respond to the promptings of our Master.

Heb 12:12–13 (NIV). “**strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees . . . so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.**” Paul cites Pro 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 trial. 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 paths of life.

An appeal for holiness—Heb 12:14–29

Heb 12:14–15 (NIV). “**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.**” 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 disciples for this experience. Yet the adversary thwarts holiness with bitterness. When bitterness takes hold of our heart, the Spirit leaves and we lose charity. Bitterness also affects all those who interact with us. Bitterness and hatred act like a force that spirals downward into the grasp of Satan.

Heb 12:16–17 (NIV). “**See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau. . . . Afterward, . . . when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected.**” 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, and later he regretted it. 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. Things will be different in the next life, but the timing of repentance does not necessarily change earthly consequences.

Heb 12:18–22 (NIV). “**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.**” Paul returns to his comparison of Moses’s invitation to the early children of Israel to ascend the mountain with the early Christians’ opportunity. The mountain that Paul describes for the Saints is not the scary experience that the children of Israel feared (Paul quotes Ex 19:12–13 and Deu 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 Dan 7:10 and Rev 5:11.

Heb 12:23 (NIV). *“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.”* The church of the firstborn is not reserved for firstborn children but refers to those who have been sanctified through Jesus’s Atonement, “the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven” (RSV). Joseph Smith also added further commentary on verses 22 and 23:

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.²⁵

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 the angels to communicate to the Saints.²⁶

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

Heb 12:25–26 (NIV). *“See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks . . . but now he has promised, ‘Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.’”* The promise is a quote from Hag 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 to the children of Israel’s earthly messenger, Moses. 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.

Heb 12:28. *“we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us should have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”* The last phrase is also translated as “reverence and awe” (BSB). While the earth will shake, God’s kingdom will remain stable. Those who are reverent and acceptable before God are included in the church of the firstborn and city of Zion (Heb 12:2–23).

Heb 12:29. *“For our God is a consuming fire.”* This idea is found in several Old Testament verses, including Ex 24:17; Deu 4:24; and 2 Sam 22:9. Joseph Smith similarly taught that “God Almighty Himself dwells in eternal fire.”²⁷ D&C 133 describes the consuming fire of the Second Coming: “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. . . . And so great shall be the glory of his presence that the sun shall hide his face in shame.”²⁸ D&C 76:70 describes the presence of the Savior as comparable to the glory of the sun.

Hebrews 13

After a long discourse on striving to enter the presence of the Lord, Paul lists seven or eight (one is duplicated) requirements to progress in holiness through sanctification. Interestingly, his list shares similarities with the modern temple recommend interview.

Serve God by loving and showing kindness to others—Heb 13:1–3

Heb 13:1–3 (NIV). “**Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters . . . show hospitality to strangers, . . . remember those in prison . . . and those who are mistreated.**” One of the best ways to serve God is to love each other (Heb 12:28). In reference to strangers who are actually angels, Paul may have referred to Abraham’s three angels or Lot’s experience (Gen 18:1–8; 19:1). Joseph Smith taught that all angels who visit this earth have or will live on it 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.

Law of chastity—Heb 13:4

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

Financial responsibilities—Heb 13:5–6

Heb 13:5 (NLT). “**Don’t love money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, “I will never fail you. . . .’ The Lord is my helper.**” The combination of the words *tropos* and *aphilarguros*, translated “conversations” and “not covetousness,” are most often rendered as avoiding a love of money and being satisfied with what we 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 have, knowing that God will supply for our needs. As evidence for his argument, Paul quotes Deu 31:6 and Ps 118:6, 7. Both passages 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 D&C 119:3–5.

Sustain your leaders—Heb 13:7–8

Heb 13:7 (NIV). “**Remember your leaders . . . and imitate their faith.**” Paul’s encouragement to the Hebrews to remember their Church leaders goes beyond prayers and offerings and 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 recommend interviews, we are 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.²⁹

Heb 13:8. “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” The real leader and example of the Church is our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one we can completely follow since His nature is eternally good.

Avoid apostate teachings—Heb 13:9–14

Heb 13:9 (NIV). “Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings . . . which is of no benefit to those who do so.” The specific type of false teachings that Paul mentions here deal with dietary laws (which probably referred to the strict Jewish kosher habits that Christians stopped practicing after the Jerusalem Council; Act 15:19–21). Paul encouraged the Saints to follow their leaders in order to gauge what is true and to identify false leaders.

Heb 13:11–12 (BSB). “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.” 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 the blood of the Redeemer. The symbols all pointed to the promised Messiah who was crucified as the greatest martyr outside of the city wall, to the north of the altar (Lev 1:11). If disciples follow his example, they can receive a greater city: heavenly Zion or even Enoch’s city.

Live the new law of sacrifice—Heb 13:15–16

Heb 13:15–16 (BSB). “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.” 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 intellectually.

Obey and support leaders—Heb 13:17

Heb 13:17 (NIV). “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.” Paul speaks for all Church leaders when he says they watch over the Saints’ souls and must be accountable to

God for them. Many translations start this verse with a command to obey our leaders. Yet even when it is difficult to follow them, 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 counsel.

Pray for leaders—Heb 13:18–19

Heb 13:18–19 (BSB). *“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.”* 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—Heb 13:20–21

Heb 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 wellpleasing 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 with the phrase “through the blood of the everlasting covenant.” God’s peace comes from following Him as a shepherd into this eternal covenant. The word *katartizó*, “perfect,” also means “to complete, prepare” and is used as “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).”³⁰ In the temple context, it speaks of preparing the initiate to enter the presence of the Lord. As we equip ourselves with the Lord’s will we are becoming perfect, or our initiation becomes complete.

Conclusion

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

Heb 13:23–25 (NIV). *“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.”* 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 during 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.

Notes

- 1 For an introduction to Hebrews, see my previous commentary on Hebrews 1–6.
- 2 Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, 6.438.
- 3 As mentioned in Mt 2 and Lk 1, the City of David in the New Testament refers to Bethlehem, but that was not the case in the Old Testament, where it referred to Jerusalem.
- 4 Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 246.
- 5 Alm 13:17–18; see also D&C 84:6–26; 107:1–4.
- 6 These Assyrian kings included Chedorlaomer, Tidal, Amraphel, and Aroch.
- 7 Gen 14:14 mentions to Abraham’s trained servants, which probably were the male converts that traveled with Abraham’s household as described in Gen 12:5: “All their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran.” Elsewhere, *herdsmen* may refer to the same community.
- 8 See D&C 107:41; 2 Ne 6:2; Alm 4:20.
- 9 “*Mesités*,” *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/3316.htm>.
- 10 Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 400–402. Measurement came from an eighteen-inch cubit.
- 11 Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services as They Were at the Time of Jesus Christ*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell, 1908), 137–138.
- 12 Mt 27:51; Mk 15:38; Lk 23:45.
- 13 Alm 25:15–16; see also Mosi 13:29–30; 2 Ne 25:24–27.
- 14 “*Hagiazó*,” *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/37.htm>.
- 15 Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1954–1956), 1:74–75.
- 16 “Appendix 1: First Theological Lecture on Faith, circa January–May 1835,” p. 1, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/appendix-1-first-theological-lecture-on-faith-circa-january-may-1835/1>.
- 17 “Letter to the Church, circa March 1834,” p. 143, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-the-church-circa-march-1834/2>.
- 18 Mark L. McConkie, “Translated Beings,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York City, NY: Macmillan, 1992), 4:1485–1486: “Translated beings are not resurrected beings, though all translated beings either have since been or yet will be resurrected. . . . 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 Mose 7:18–21, 31, 63, 69; D&C 38:4; 45:11–14; 84:99–100; Gen 5:22–24; and JST, Gen 14:32–34.

19 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. . . . [He was] four hundred and thirty years old when he was translated.”

20 See D&C 7:6; 76:88; 137:7; Abr 1:2.

21 Mk 10:46; Lk 18:35; 19:1.

22 Mosi 15:22; 18:8; D&C 45:54; 76:64; Rev 20:25.

23 *The Ascension of Isaiah*, possibly written during the first century AD.

24 Markus Bochkmuehl, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 90.

25 Ehat and Cook, *Words of the Joseph Smith*, 254; D&C 77:11.

26 Donald Parry, ed., *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1994).

27 “History, 1838–1856, volume F-1 [1 May 1844–8 August 1844],” p. 20, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-f-1-1-may-1844-8-august-1844/26>. The text continues, “God Almighty himself dwells in eternal fire, flesh and blood cannot go there, all corruption is devoured by the fire—our God is a consuming fire—when our flesh is quickened by the Spirit, there will be no blood.”

28 D&C 133:41, 44, 49; see also D&C 101:25; Isa 64:2; and Joseph Smith—History 1:37.

29 Marc Bohn, “Terry Givens on What It Means to Sustain,” *Times and Seasons* (blog), February 3, 2016, <http://archive.timesandseasons.org/2016/02/terry-givens-on-what-it-means-to-sustain/>.

30 “*Katartizó*,” *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/2675.htm>.