

INTRODUCTION TO THE 58TH BIBLEBOOK

THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS (A.D. 64)

A. The recipients of the letter to the Hebrews.	1
B. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews.	3
C. The date of writing the letter to the Hebrews.	4
D. The purpose of the letter to the Hebrews.	4
E. The theme and division of the letter to the Hebrews.	4
F. The main messages of the letter to the Hebrews.	6

A. THE RECIPIENTS OF THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS.

The Letter to the Hebrews is God's message to Jewish Christians who tended to slide back into Judaism¹. They looked backwards to the veiled Old Testament revelation instead of forwards to the unveiled New Testament revelation. *The Old Testament revelation remains veiled when it is read without the unveiled New Testament explanation. The veil is only taken away when a person turns to the Lord Jesus Christ and his completed work of salvation*².

Two principles follow out of this:

- Non-Christians and nominal Christians can only begin to understand God's revelation in the Bible when they turn to Jesus Christ and the New Testament revelation!
- The Old Testament revelation must always be interpreted in the light of the New Testament revelation!

From all the quotations from the Old Testament and cross-references to the New Testament it follows that the letter to the Hebrews is not an intruder into the New Testament! The letter to the Hebrews is an indispensable contribution to the whole Bible!

1. The people addressed.

The Jewish community in Rome consisted of Jews who had converted to Jesus Christ and Jews who remained followers of Judaism. The Jewish Christians who had become sharers in the heavenly calling (3:1), had faith that led to salvation (10:39), had hope in the fulfilment of God's promises (6:19), and showed love, but were slow to learn (5:11), needed someone to teach them the ABC of the Bible all over again (5:12), that is, were spiritually still babies in need to grow to maturity (5:11 - 6:3).

Nevertheless, *some of them participated in the New Testament revelation without being regenerated first (6:4-8)*. They were unfaithful to God's covenant and slid back into their traditional Judaism: they drifted away (from God's Word) (2:1), ignored such a great salvation (2:3), continued deliberately in sin (3:12; 10:26)³, continued in unbelief (3:12; 4:2), turned away from the living God who had revealed himself in Christ (3:12), became hardened in their hearts (3:13), did not persevere to the end (3:14; 4:11), fell short of attaining the promise to enter the rest (4:1), continued in disobedience (4:6-7,11), shared in the New Testament covenant without being born again and thus fell away (6:4-8), trampled Christ underfoot, treated the New Testament covenant as useless and insulted the Holy Spirit who offered them grace (10:29). They belonged to those who shrink back and are destroyed (10:39).

What precisely was understood by the term 'Hebrews' is not known. Nevertheless, from the internal evidence in the letter, it is natural to think of the addressees as Jewish Christians. Hebrews 6:1-3 says that the addressees already possessed the Old Testament foundation when they became Christians. Some foundational teachings from the Old Testament were:

- Repentance from dead works⁴
- The necessity of faith in God⁵
- Prescribed ceremonial purifications⁶
- The laying on of hands in commissioning and blessing people⁷
- The resurrection from the dead⁸
- Eternal judgement⁹

The first coming of Jesus Christ into the world and the preaching of the Gospel gave these foundational teachings of the Old Testament a fresh and fuller significance. These teachings are certainly also foundational teachings within Christianity.

¹ 'Judaism' means 'the religion of the Jews' after they rejected Jesus Christ as Messiah. Some of its roots sprung up after the Babylonian Exile (537 BCE).

² 2 Corinthians 3:14-16

³ Sin = missing God's goal

⁴ Ezekiel 18:11-13,30-32

⁵ Genesis 15:6; Habakkuk 2:4; cf. Hebrews 10:38

⁶ Numbers 19

⁷ Deuteronomy 34:9

⁸ Isaiah 26:19

⁹ Daniel 12:2

Gentile Christians never lived under the old covenant and would not need to be convinced that *the old covenant had been superseded!* But when Jewish Christians became believers in Jesus Christ, they were still living under the old covenant. Insisting that the old covenant had been antiquated and superseded by the new covenant (7:18; 8:6,13) would only make sense to people who were still trying to live under the old covenant or who were reverting back to it. These Hebrew Christians probably came under pressure from other Jews because they became Christians. They also came under pressure from the Gentile Christians, because they were not growing spiritually, were more and more giving up the distinctive Christian beliefs and were reverting back to Judaism, stressing only those foundational teachings of the Old Testament which were also a part of Judaism and certain Jewish sects.

The addressees were probably *Christians* that came from *non-conformist Jewish communities* like the Essenes and the community of Qumran and not so much from the traditional normative Judaism of Jerusalem and its temple rituals. When these Jews became Christians, they adopted some Jewish practices. Historians say that they could also be found in the Diaspora within countries to which Jews had been dispersed. According to the historian Josephus, such communities distinguished themselves from other Jews when they performed their sacrificial duties by the superiority of the purifications that they habitually practised.

It appears that the Jewish community in Rome preserved non-conformist features especially such as baptisms or ceremonial washings. When these Jews became Christians, some of these Jewish practices were taken over into the Christian community at Rome. According to Hebrews 6:2, the Hebrew Christians took a great interest in such *baptisms or ceremonial washings*. According to the Apostolic Tradition written by Hippolytus at the beginning of the third century CE (=A.D.), Christian baptism, as the central act of initiation into Christianity, took place on Sunday. However, on the preceding Thursday the candidate was also required to have a ritual bath for the removal of impurity! *This ritual of purification before baptism is not taught in the New Testament, but it may well have been a legacy from Judaism in Rome.* Therefore, if the letter to the Hebrews was sent to Rome, the reference to “instructions in ceremonial purifications”¹⁰ in Hebrews 6:2 may have had a more immediate relevance to their situation than might be readily apparent to a modern reader.

The addressees were probably a smaller group of conservative Jewish Christians that kept aloof from the main body of Christians. Hebrews 2:3 says that they were probably a group of Jewish Christians, who had never seen or heard Jesus in person, but had learned of him from people who had themselves listened to Jesus.

Hebrews 10:32-34 relates that after their conversion they had been exposed to persecution in which they had to endure public abuse, imprisonment and the looting of their possessions. Hebrews 6:10 and 10:34 says that they had especially helped other (non-Jewish) Christians, particularly those who suffered most during the persecutions.

However, Hebrews 5:11 to 6:6 shows that their growth as Christians had stopped and they were in danger of falling away from the Christian faith back into what they were before. It is very probable that they were reluctant to completely cut their ties with the Jewish faith, which still enjoyed the favour and protection of the Roman government. The writer, who either knew them or was aware of their situation, warned them seriously against falling away from the Christian faith altogether, because they would not be able to be brought back to repentance (6:6). They would fall into the hands of the living God (10:31), who is a consuming fire (12:29). He urged them to hold firmly to the confidence they had at first and to persevere doing the will of God. Then they would share in Christ’s glorious future (3:14), their hope would be very sure (6:11), they would receive what God had promised (10:36) and they would receive God’s kingdom that cannot be shaken (12:28).

The fact that the writer quoted only from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, makes it probable that the people addressed knew the Old Testament in the Greek translation called *the Septuagint* and that they were *Greek speaking Jews, called Hellenists*. From the internal evidence, it is also implied that their knowledge of the ancient sacrificial ritual of Israel was derived from reading the Old Testament rather than from first-hand contact with the temple service in Jerusalem.

Hebrews 10:25 says that some of them were in the habit of not meeting together with other Christians. This may point to the fact that they were a smaller group of conservative Jewish Christians not fellowshipping with the larger group of Gentile Christians in their area. They may have been a house-church within the wider fellowship of a city-church. They tended to neglect the bond of fellowship that bound them to other Christians outside their own small circle.

2. The destination of the letter.

In Hebrews 13:24 the writer sends greetings “from those from Italy”, which could mean that *the letter was either written from Rome or to Rome*. The church father Clement of Rome is acquainted with this letter in 96 CE and therefore, according to our extant literature, the first place where the letter to the Hebrews appears to have been known, was Rome. It is more likely that people who had originally come from Rome sent greetings to Rome via this letter.

¹⁰ βαπτισμων διδαχης

Moreover, Timothy, who is mentioned in Hebrews 13:23, was well known in Rome. The book of Romans shows that the church at Rome had a Jewish-Christian base¹¹.

The church was probably founded by Jews and converts to Judaism, who had become Christians during Pentecost in 30 CE and had afterwards returned to Rome¹². Throughout the following years, more and more Gentiles had become Christians in Rome, so that by the time the letter to the Romans was written in 57 CE, the Gentile Christians were in the majority. As a whole the church at Rome had accepted the implications of the Gentile world-mission, but a small conservative enclave within the church at Rome clung to the more conservative principles of traditional Judaism.

According to Romans 1:7 the Letter to the Romans was sent to the church in Rome¹³ and according to Hebrews 10:25 the Letter to the Hebrews was sent to this conservative Jewish Christian enclave or house-church in Rome¹⁴, or at least to those Jewish Christians in the church at Rome who were in the habit of not meeting together with the other Christians in Rome (10:25).

B. THE WRITER OF THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS.

1. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews is unknown.

We do not know for certain to whom the letter to the Hebrews was written. It is to a Jewish Christian community and the best possibility is at Rome. We certainly do not know who wrote the letter to the Hebrews. The tradition of the early Christian Church from the end of the fourth century CE ascribed it unanimously to Paul. Before that, there was uncertainty and speculation only. Although people have argued that it could have been Clement of Rome, Luke (according to Calvin), Barnabas, Apollos (according to Luther) or even Priscilla and Aquila, we must conclude that we do not know who wrote the letter to the Hebrews.

2. The theory that Paul wrote the letter to the Hebrews.

This theory was originated by Clement in about 190 CE in Alexandria in Egypt and was consequently accepted in the whole Christian Church in the east. However, the Christian Church in the west only ascribed it to Paul from the end of the fourth century onwards. In the west, the Muratorian Canon (170 CE), Irenaeus (170 CE), Hippolytus (240 CE), and Gaius of Rome did not regard Paul as the writer. Eusebius (300 CE) remarks that even in his day some of the Romans did not consider Paul as the writer. Jerome (384 CE) and Augustine (354-430 CE) swayed opinion in the west towards accepting Paul as the writer, not because they were convinced, but because of the practical reason that its canonicity was bound up with the belief in its apostolic authorship.

While the third Synod of Carthage in 397 CE still made a distinction between the 13 letters of Paul and the letter to the Hebrews, only the sixth Synod of Carthage in 419 CE ascribed all 14 letters to Paul.

3. The reason why Paul cannot be the writer of the letter to the Hebrews.

Hebrews 2:3 says, "This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed *to us* by those who heard him, namely, the apostles." Thus, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says that he was not an apostle who had heard the Lord Jesus Christ himself, but that he was *a second-generation Christian, a disciple of the apostles* and had heard the message of salvation from them. In contrast, Paul says that he had heard the gospel directly from Christ¹⁵.

While the writer to the Hebrews exhorted his readers to remember those who are persecuted or imprisoned (10:32; 13:3), Paul asked his readers to remember his chains (imprisonment)¹⁶.

While the writer to the Hebrews exhorted his readers to imitate the faith of their leaders (13:7), Paul exhorted his readers to imitate his life¹⁷.

While the writer to the Hebrews generally uses the name 'Jesus' only, Paul generally uses the name 'the Lord Jesus Christ'.

While the writer to the Hebrews uses only the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament in his quotations, Paul uses both the Hebrew original as well as the Greek translation in his quotations.

While Paul used the spoken form of Greek in his letters, *both Luke and the writer to the Hebrews use the literary form of Greek* in their writings, which was not better Greek, but a different form of Greek.

Conclusion. We don't know who wrote the letter to the Hebrews. Only God knows. But according to 2 Timothy 3:16, the writer was definitely inspired by the Holy Spirit and wrote to us what God wanted us to know, believe, be and do.

¹¹ Romans 11:13,18

¹² Acts 2:10-11

¹³ in 57 CE

¹⁴ in 64 CE

¹⁵ Galatians 1:11f

¹⁶ Colossians 4:18

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 11:1

C. THE DATE OF WRITING THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS.

Because the writer and the addressees are uncertain, the date when and place where the letter was written is also uncertain.

In Hebrews 13:23 the writer states that Timothy, who was a junior fellow worker of Paul, had been released from prison. This means that the letter was written during the first century CE.

According to Hebrews 9:6-9 and 10:1-5, it seems that the readers were aware that gifts and sacrifices were still being offered in the temple at Jerusalem. Therefore the letter must have been written before 70 CE when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed.

In Hebrews 8:13 the writer to the Hebrews says that the old covenant, which was made obsolete by the new covenant, was “ageing and would soon disappear.” This would be very true especially in the period immediately preceding 70 CE.

In Hebrews 2:3, the writer speaks of himself and his hearers as belonging to the disciples of the apostles. They were therefore *second-generation Christians*, who heard the message of salvation from the disciples of Jesus and saw the miracles of the apostles after 30 CE.

According to Hebrews 10:32-34, they had experienced persecution and this could refer to the expulsion of the Jewish Colony from Rome by the emperor Claudius in 49 CE. The historian Suetonius wrote that Claudius expelled them because “they were constantly indulging in riots at the instigation of *Chrestus*”! A large scale eviction of this nature would inevitably have been accompanied by public insult, persecution, imprisonment and widespread looting by the people of Rome. However, Hebrews 12:4 says that these Christians had not yet been called to suffer death for their faith, as was the case during the persecution under Nero in 64 CE.

Therefore, we conclude that the letter to the Hebrews was most probably written to especially the Jewish Christians in Rome not long before the outbreak of persecution against Christians in Rome in 64 CE.

D. THE PURPOSE OF THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS.

The writer warns against falling away from the Christian faith, back into Judaism. The Hebrews were originally Jews, who had become Christians. But due to various unknown pressures, they were not growing spiritually to maturity (5:11-14). Instead, of going forwards, they were going backwards. They were beginning to give up the distinctive teachings of Christianity and were only emphasising those teachings, which were also the foundational teachings of Judaism (6:1-3). The writer warns them against the consequences of falling away from the Christian faith. This is a serious warning to modern liberal Christians.

The writer teaches that the new covenant had antiquated the old covenant and had superseded it. The distinct New Testament teachings had fulfilled, cancelled and abolished the distinct Old Testament teachings. The new covenant gives new meaning and new content to the concepts in the old covenant. The New Testament lies hidden in the Old Testament; and the Old Testament is revealed (unfolded explained) in the New Testament. The Old Testament contains the shadows, but the New Testament the realities. The Old Testament contains the prophecies, but the New Testament the fulfilments. The Old Testament contains the types (illustrations), but the New Testament the antitypes. That is why the Old Testament revelation should always be interpreted in the light of the New Testament revelation.

E. THE THEME AND DIVISION OF THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS.

The writer exhorted his readers to persevere in the new covenant and grow to spiritual maturity.

1. The theme of the letter

“God’s final revelation is in Jesus Christ.”

(God previously - during the Old Testament period - spoke through the prophets.
But in these last days - in the New Testament period - he spoke through Jesus Christ).

or:

“An exhortation to have faith in Jesus Christ
and not fall away from the distinct Christian teachings.”

2. The division of the letter

The book may be divided into two parts as follows:

Part 1. Hebrews 1:1 to 10:18.

TEACHINGS: JESUS CHRIST IS WORTHY OF OUR FAITH.

It consists of four sections:

- a. Section 1. Hebrews 1:1 to 2:18.
Christ reveals God’s final revelation
(He speaks God’s final word).

God speaks his final word (revelation) through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is superior to the Old Testament prophets through whom he spoke¹⁸ (1:1-4). Jesus Christ is superior to angels (1:5-14). The 1st practical warning not to ignore this revelation (2:1-4). The humiliation and exaltation (glory) of Jesus Christ (2:5-9). Jesus Christ is the Saviour and High Priest of his people (2:10-18).

b. Section 2. Hebrews 3:1 to 4:13.
Christ is God's Son over God's house
(The true home of the people of God).

Jesus Christ is superior to Moses (3:1-6). The 2nd practical warning not to harden their hearts against this revelation, that is, a warning that the rejection of Jesus Christ is more serious than the rejection of Moses (3:7-19). A warning that "the true Rest of God" may be forfeited (4:1-10). An exhortation to make every effort to enter into the true Rest of God (4:11-13).

c. Section 3. Hebrews 4:14 to 7:28.
Christ is the great High Priest.
(A better high priesthood).

An encouragement to confidently approach Jesus Christ (4:14-16). The qualification of the high priesthood in general (5:1-4). Christ's qualifications for the high priesthood (5:5-10). The 3rd practical warning not to remain spiritually immature (5:11-14). A serious warning against falling away from the Christian Faith (6:1-8) An encouragement to persevere (6:9-12). An encouragement about the steadfastness of God's promise (6:13-20).

The teaching that Jesus Christ belongs to a better high priestly order, the order of Melchizedek: The greatness of Melchizedek (7:1-10). The imperfections of the priesthood of Aaron (7:11-14). The superiority of the new priesthood (7:15-19). The new priesthood is superior because of God's oath (7:20-22), because of its permanence (7:23-25) and because of the character of Christ (7:26-28).

d. Section 4. Hebrews 8:1 to 10:18.
Christ is the Mediator of a better covenant.
(A better covenant, better sanctuary and better sacrifice)

The high priesthood of Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary is superior to the Old Testament priesthood. The new covenant is superior to the old covenant (8:1-6). That is why the first covenant was abolished at the first coming of Christ (8:7-13). The sanctuary (temple) under the old covenant (9:1-5) and the ritual in that sanctuary applied temporarily only until the time of the new order (9:6-10). In contrast, Christ's high priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary obtains eternal redemption (9:11-14). It consists of the shedding of his blood as a ransom for sins (9:15-22). It is the perfect and final sacrifice (9:23-10:18). The Old Testament shadows have been replaced by the New Testament realities (10:1)!

[Part 2. Hebrews 10:19 to 13:25.](#)
[EXHORTATIONS: HAVE FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST](#)
[AND DO NOT FALL AWAY FROM THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.](#)

It consists of four sections:

a. Section 1. Hebrews 10:19-39.
The indispensable character of unswerving faith.

An exhortation to worship God through Jesus Christ (10:19-25). The 4th practical warning not to commit the sin of deliberate apostasy (10:26-31). A call to perseverance (10:32-39).

b. Section 2. Hebrews 11:1-40.
The nature of faith and examples of the running-contest of faith.

The nature of faith (11:1-3). Examples of faith before the time of the patriarchs: The faith of Abel, Enoch and Noah (11:4-7). The faith of the patriarch Abraham (11:8-12). The ultimate destination of those who believe (11:13-16). More about the faith of the patriarchs (11:17-22). The faith of Moses (11:23-28). The faith exercised during the exodus from Egypt and settlement in Canaan (11:29-31). More examples of people of faith during the Old Testament period (11:32-38). The teaching that the faith of God's Old Testament people will only be made perfect together with God's New Testament people (11:39-40)!

c. Section 3. Hebrews 12:1 to 13:21.
The fruits of faith.

An exhortation to persevere in the footsteps of faith of Jesus Christ, who is the Pioneer and Perfecter of faith (12:1-3). An exhortation to accept God's discipline (12:4-11). An exhortation to get up and live a holy Christian life in dependence of God's grace (12:12-17). An encouragement that the heavenly Jerusalem is much better than the earthly Jerusalem (12:18-24). The 5th practical warning not to reject (refuse) this final revelation of God (12:25-29).

¹⁸ 1 Peter 1:10-12

d. Section 4. Hebrews 13:22-25.

Concluding exhortations and Post Script.

Exhortations: to love brothers, to entertain strangers, to remember prisoners, to honour Christian marriage and to avoid sexual immorality and the love for money (13:1-6). More exhortations: to imitate the faith and example of leaders (13:7-8), to bring true Christian sacrifices (13:7-16) and to obey the leaders of the church (13:17). A request for prayer (13:18-19). A prayer and doxology (13:20-21). Some personal notes (13:22-23). Final greetings and a benediction (13:24-25).

F. THE MAIN MESSAGES OF THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS.

1. A Change in God's speaking to people (chapter 1-3)

The writer shows the finality of Christianity by comparing it with what preceded it. He shows the superiority of Jesus Christ (his person and work) above all other servants and spokesmen of God. Jesus Christ is greater than all prophets, even greater than the greatest prophet in the eyes of the Jews (Moses)¹⁹, above all angels and above all high priests. *God speaks and acts through Jesus Christ, the God-Man.*

He shows in chapter 1 that Jesus Christ is GOD and in chapter 2 that Jesus Christ is MAN. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Creator and Maintainer of the creation. And yet, he became the Son of Man, who humbled himself to the point of death. While all other prophets still lie in their graves, God raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him above the heavens. Now he is seated on God's throne on the right hand of God and lives for ever as the Representative of people with God.

The writer warns that God will reject everyone who rejects this revelation of God in Jesus Christ²⁰. He will suffer the terrible judgement of the living God (10:26-31; 12:25-29).

2. A change in the final destiny (the Rest) for God's people (chapter 4).

a. The Day of Rest in the beginning.

After the creation in six symbolic creation days, God completed his work of creation on the seventh day of creation and he rested²¹. He blessed the seventh day of every week to be a day of rest in order to celebrate the completion of God's work of creation.

For the word 'rest' on the seventh day of creation²² God used the Hebrew word 'shabat' (rest, stop creating) or the Greek word 'katapauó' (rest). *The seventh day of creation has no closing formula* (as the six other days of creation: "There was evening and there was morning – the ... day"). Thus God's Rest began on the seventh day of creation and has since then never ended! *This Rest was present during the whole Old Testament period and is still present during the New Testament period. It continues and may be shared with everyone who responds to it by faith and obedience.*

Although God's Rest began after the completion of creation and continues until now, Jesus says, "My Father is always at his work, to this very day, and I, too, am working²³! Thus, God's Rest does not mean that God became tired and had stopped working! He stopped creating! The Sabbath day celebrates God's Rest, that is, it celebrates the completion of creation. It does not celebrate 'doing nothing'. Jesus asked people who were not allowed to do many things on a Jewish Sabbath: "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or do evil, to save life or to kill?"²⁴

In the New Testament Christians keep the first day of the week as a day of rest in order to celebrate the completion of God's work of re-creation, namely, God's work of salvation through the resurrection from the dead of Jesus Christ²⁵ and the application of this work of salvation by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit²⁶.

b. The Promised Land as Rest.

At entering the Promised Land under leadership of Joshua (1407 BCE) the Israelites found 'rest' from their long wandering and life as aliens and strangers²⁷. But due to their unbelief and disobedience the majority of the Israelites did not enter the Promised Land ("that rest") (4:2,6)!

c. The presence of God as God's Rest or the Eternal Rest.

Much later, in the period 1000-400 BCE the psalmist writes: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts ... as in the desert. There your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did. For forty years I was angry with that generation. I said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray and they have not known my ways'. So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my Rest'²⁸."

¹⁹ and above the greatest prophet in the eyes of Muslims (Muhammad)

²⁰ Luke 10:16

²¹ Genesis 2:1-2.

²² Genesis 2:3

²³ John 5:17

²⁴ Mark 3:4; cf. Mark 2:27-28

²⁵ On the first day of the week, Matthew 28:1-6

²⁶ Also on the first day of the week, Leviticus 23:15-16; Acts 2:1

²⁷ Joshua 22:4

²⁸ Psalm 95:7-11

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews therefore says: “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God. For anyone who (through faith and obedience) enters God’s Rest, also rests from his own work” (they have stopped their sinful works). “Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that Rest, so that no-one will fail by following their example of (unbelief and) disobedience (4:9-11).” God’s Rest represents the Kingdom of God now and into eternity. In the presence of God the believer finds rest from all sin and struggle in this world. The final destiny of the believers is living in the presence of God in heaven and finally on the new earth.²⁹

The Greek text uses the substantive ‘sabbatismos’ (a Sabbath-rest)(4:9). *This Rest has nothing to do with the notion that Christians are commanded to keep the Saturday as a Sabbath. It also has nothing to do with the notion that the nation of Israel would in the future (1948) inherit the Holy Land in the Middle East!*

The Rest is not something God enforces on people or even gives to people, but is the Rest God himself enjoys. The Rest is the eternal reality of living in the presence of God in heaven before the second coming and in the presence of God on the new earth after the second coming. There everything will be restored³⁰, renewed³¹.

3. A change of priesthood (chapter 5-7).

The priesthood of Jesus Christ is unique and absolutely different and superior to all other priesthoods.

a. The priesthood of Jesus Christ is not based on the law, but on the gospel.

God prophesied that Jesus Christ would be a priest in the order of Melchizedek³² that would supersede (replace) the priesthood of Aaron (7:11). God confirmed his promise with an oath. The uniqueness of the priesthood of Jesus Christ is that he is both priest and sacrifice! “Christ through the Spirit offered himself unblemished to God ...” (9:14).

b. The priesthood of Jesus Christ is based on his perfect personality.

In the Old Testament, the high priest of Israel was not personally free from sin. But through an animal sacrifice for his own sins, he was *ceremonially set apart* from the other Israelites for the proper discharge of his sacred functions. But Jesus had no need to present a daily sacrifice, nor even a yearly sacrifice, either for his own sins or for the sins of his people. The perfect character of Jesus is shown in his sinless life on earth and his separation from sin in heaven. *Christ’s separation from sin is inward and moral, not merely outward and ceremonial.* Of all people who ever lived, only Jesus Christ was completely sinless. Hebrews 2:17-18 says that he lived among us and was tempted like all of us, yet without sinning. Therefore he can be and is *a merciful high priest, who can sympathise with all our weaknesses* (4:15). In his human nature, he remained completely separate from sin in all its forms and completely dedicated to God the Father. Although Jesus lived among sinners, received sinners, ate with sinners, was known as a friend of sinners, he is set apart from sinners! He is in a total different class than sinful man. *Christ’s separation from sin is total, because he is now in heaven.* He has withdrawn from sin in this world and sits exalted at the right hand of God³³. Hebrews 7:26-28 says, “Such a high priest meets our need - one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens ... perfect forever!”

c. The priesthood of Jesus Christ is based on his resurrection from the dead.

In the Old Testament, there were many high priests, because death prevented them from continuing in their office (7:23). Generation after generation, the high priests in Israel died and their office passed on to another high priest. Their high priesthood was *temporary!* But the high priesthood of Jesus Christ is far superior, because it is *permanent!* It is permanent, because he was resurrected from the dead, ascended into heaven and lives for ever! Hebrews 7:24 says, “Because Jesus lives forever, he has priesthood that does not pass on to another”³⁴. Hebrews 9:24 says, “He did not enter a man-made sanctuary, He entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence.” Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ, has Jesus Christ as his High Priest right at the right hand of God the Father. Because he lives forever, his saving power is available without end! His saving power cannot be hindered by any of the changing circumstances of this life. His task is to eternally save, protect and bless every Christian. The way to approach God the Father is always open, because in the presence of God, Jesus Christ represents his people as “a priest for ever” (7:17).

4. A change of covenant (chapter 8).

a. The new covenant is better than the old covenant.

²⁹ Revelation 21:1-3

³⁰ Acts 3:21

³¹ Revelation 21:5

³² Psalm 110:4

³³ Psalm 110:1

³⁴ It does not pass on to the pope, to so-called traditional ‘saints’, or on to any earthly priesthood.

In the Old Testament God made a covenant with Abraham (2167-1992 BCE)³⁵. The people of God during the Old Testament period had to respond to this covenant by faith³⁶. God also confirmed the covenant with Moses (1527 - 1407 BCE) and the people of Israel³⁷.

The patriarchs lived 215 years in Canaan (2092-1877 BCE) and the Israelites lived 430 years in Egypt (1877-1447 BCE)³⁸. Thus 645 years later, God added the Law (moral, ceremonial/ritual and civil law) to the covenant with Abraham in order to show people their transgressions and to lead them to faith in Jesus Christ and his work of salvation³⁹. The people during the Old Testament period should respond to this covenant by faith and obedience⁴⁰. In the letter to the Hebrews, the writer compares this covenant of the law in the Old Testament⁴¹ to the covenant of faith in the New Testament⁴².

In Exodus 24:1-8, this covenant of the law was confirmed by animal sacrifices and the sprinkling of blood on the altar, on the Book of the Covenant and on the people. Moses called it "*the blood of the covenant*", that is, the shedding of blood that ratified the covenant. Hebrews 9:18-22 refers to this same ratification of the covenant.

The prophet Jeremiah lived and prophesied between 627-550 BCE. In Jeremiah 7:23-26 we read how the people of Israel disregarded and disobeyed the covenant. God said, "From the time your forefathers left Egypt until now, day after day, again and again I sent you my servants the prophets. But they did not listen to me or pay attention. They were stiff-necked and did more evil than their forefathers". Prophet after prophet called the people of Israel to return to the covenant. In Jeremiah 11:10-11, God says, "Both the house of Israel and the house of Judah *have broken the covenant* I made with their forefathers. Therefore ... I will bring on them a disaster they cannot escape".

In Jeremiah 31, Jeremiah *predicts the inauguration of a new covenant. Hereby he in effect announces the impending dissolution of the old covenant together with the old order*. Hebrews 8:7-8 says, "If there had been *nothing wrong with the first covenant*, no place would have been sought for another covenant. What was wrong with the first covenant was that "the people of Israel had broken the covenant"! Hebrews 8:9 says, "Israel *did not remain faithful to God's covenant*"; the people of Israel broke it! Israel *did not* keep the covenant and they *could not* keep the covenant in their own power, because they were not regenerated (had not yet received the Holy Spirit).

Although the formulation of the covenant with Abraham remains the same throughout the ages, it is given a much deeper meaning and fulfilment in the New Testament, so that it is called "*a new covenant*".

God announced the new covenant through the prophets Jeremiah (627-550 BCE) and Ezekiel (593-571 BCE). Jeremiah 31:31-34 says that the new covenant would have the following characteristics: God would write his laws on the hearts of believers, their knowledge of God will be a matter of personal experience, and God will blot out their sins. Ezekiel 11:19-20 and 36:25-28 says that the new covenant consists of a new relationship with God: God will cleanse them from all their impurities, remove from them their heart of stone, give them a new heart and new spirit in them. God will put his own Spirit in them and move them to follow (obey) his decrees. The covenant is called 'a new covenant, because it *imparts a new heart through regeneration by the Holy Spirit!*

The superiority of the new covenant is founded on three important differences:

The first difference. The implanting of Gods laws in the heart is much better than merely memorising these laws! God commands the Israelites to write his laws (commandments) in their mind and in their heart and that they engrave them into the minds of their children⁴³. But even the memorising of Gods laws does not guarantee that they will also be carried out!

What was necessary, was *a new heart liberated from its enslavement to sin*. The people of God should not just know these laws, but also have the power (ability) to do them!

The second difference. The knowledge of God is a personal an intimate experience that goes far beyond the national acknowledgement of God! Already the second generation of Israelites in Canaan did not know the Lord or what he had done⁴⁴. Even before their exile to Assyria (586 BCE), the prophet Hosea (754-714 BCE) said that *there was no*

³⁵ Genesis 12-22

³⁶ Genesis 15:6

³⁷ Exodus 6:1-6

³⁸ Galatians 3:17

³⁹ Galatians 2:15-25 (50 CE)

⁴⁰ Exodus 19:4-6

⁴¹ the first covenant

⁴² the second covenant

⁴³ Deuteronomium 6:6-7 (1407 BCE)

⁴⁴ Judges 2:10

faithfulness, nor knowledge (acknowledgement) of God in the land of Israel⁴⁵. There was only an ignoring of God's law⁴⁶. God desired mercy towards people and acknowledgement of God rather than sacrifices and offerings⁴⁷. And the prophet Jeremiah (627-550 BCE) explained "knowing God" as "doing what was right and just" and "defending the cause of the poor and needy"⁴⁸. Thus, in the old covenant, *the knowledge of God* was simply a national acknowledgement of God, reflected in some appropriate conduct⁴⁹.

However, *in the new covenant 'knowing God' is a personal and intimate experience*. Each individual of God's people will possess this knowledge, because of the new heart each person receives. "They will all know me" (8:11). It is a knowledge of God, which grows until it reaches perfection when Christians see Christ face to face⁵⁰.

The third difference. The experience and assurance of forgiveness of sins is more than the daily sacrifices of atonement for sins. The desire to know God and to be forgiven was known in Israel⁵¹, but became essential to the new relationship with God under the new covenant!

Under the old covenant, God was incomparably a pardoning God, blotting out transgressions⁵², sweeping away sins like the morning mist⁵³, treading sins underfoot and hurling all iniquities into the depths of the sea⁵⁴. He is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness to thousands. He forgives wickedness⁵⁵, rebellion⁵⁶ and sin⁵⁷. However he does not leave the guilty unpunished⁵⁸.

Under the new covenant, forgiveness and eternal acquittal is written into the very terms of the covenant. God says, "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more" (8:12; 12:17). When God remembers sins, his holiness takes action against sins and he punishes sins⁵⁹. But if God does *not remember* (or bring into remembrance) the sins of people, then it is *because his grace has determined to forgive them*, not in spite of his holiness, but in complete harmony with his holiness, righteousness and love. He will never bring our sins against us on the Final Judgement Day! Therefore the writer of Hebrews teaches that the new covenant is '*a better and superior covenant*' than the old covenant (7:22; 8:6), because of whom Jesus Christ is and what he has done. He is the Mediator of the new covenant, fulfilling all the shadows of the Old Testament and making complete salvation a reality for every believer! The above three promises are 'the better promises' (8:6) on which the new covenant is based. Based on the completed salvation work of Jesus Christ, God first regenerates people and puts his laws in their hearts. Then they will all know God personally. Finally, God will remember their sins no more!

b. The covenant is extended to all the nations.

The Old Testament defines 'the covenant' as: God says, "I will be your God and you will be my people"⁶⁰. The Old Testament already prophesied the extension of the covenant to all nations⁶¹". The covenant was made with Abraham and repeated to 'the house of Israel'⁶². According to the prophet Isaiah (740-680 BCE) the covenant included the 'foreigners' (the non-Jews) who had bound themselves to the LORD⁶³. Isaiah also prophesied that God would make the Messiah "a covenant and light for all the nations"⁶⁴!

Throughout the New Testament God promises Christians from all nations, "I will be their God and they will be my people"⁶⁵! The Bible teaches that in the new heaven and new earth Christians from all the nations will be "God's people" and God himself will dwell with them⁶⁶!

⁴⁵ Hosea 4:1

⁴⁶ Hosea 4:6

⁴⁷ Hosea 6:6

⁴⁸ Jeremiah 22:15-16

⁴⁹ 1 Samuel 2:12

⁵⁰ 1 Corinthians 13:12

⁵¹ Psalm 51:1-15

⁵² Isaiah 43:25

⁵³ Isaiah 44:22

⁵⁴ Micah 7:18-19

⁵⁵ Wickedness means to twist the truth of God.

⁵⁶ Transgression means rebellion against God.

⁵⁷ Sin means to miss God's goal.

⁵⁸ Exodus 34:6-7. The guilty are those who do not repent or do not want to repent and consequently their sins remain.

⁵⁹ Revelation 16:19

⁶⁰ Leviticus 26:12

⁶¹ Genesis 22:17-18

⁶² Jeremiah 31:33-34

⁶³ Isaiah 56:3-8

⁶⁴ Isaiah 42:6

⁶⁵ 2 Corinthians 6:16

⁶⁶ Revelation 21:3

In the New Testament Jesus Christ inaugurated the new covenant with the cup at the Lord's Supper, and called it "the blood of the (new) covenant which is poured out for many"⁶⁷. With these words Jesus announced the replacement of the covenant. The old covenant with Israel/Judah was replaced with the new covenant made with all Christians from all nations, including the natural nation of Israel. The New Testament teaches that the new covenant had made the old covenant obsolete (8:13).

The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross in the New Testament certainly had the effect, which Jeremiah said the new covenant would have. In Romans 8:3-4, Paul says, "What the law was powerless to do ... God did by sending his Son in the likeness of sinful men (in the likeness of a human being that could sin) ... to be an offering. So he condemned sin (of people) in the flesh (in the righteous body of Jesus) ... Thus the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us ... who live according to the Spirit".

⁶⁷ Mark 14:24

It is absolutely clear that the new covenant has been extended to people regenerated by the Holy Spirit in every nation! *'The age of the Law and Prophets' of Israel (the Old Testament religion) is past! 'The age of the Son' (the New Testament religion) is here and is here to stay!* "By calling this covenant 'new', God has made the first covenant obsolete; and what is obsolete and ageing will soon disappear" (8:13)! The old covenant disappeared 2000 years ago!

**5. A change from the shadows to the realities (chapter 8,10).
The relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament.**

Hebrews 7:19 teaches, "The law (the Old Testament revelation / the Torah and particularly the ceremonial law) *made nothing perfect.*" Hebrews 8:5 teaches that the earthly sanctuary and its ceremonies were *only a copy and shadow* of what is in heaven. Hebrews 9:8-10 teaches that the Holy Spirit showed that while the first tabernacle/tent was still standing, the way into the Most Holy Place/heaven had not yet been revealed. The Old Testament ceremonies and sacrifices were not able to clear the conscience of the worshipper, but were only external regulations that applied until the time of the new order. Hebrews 10:1 teaches, "*The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming - not the realities themselves.* For this reason it (the law) can never ... make perfect those who draw near to worship". "Everyone trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ and have fallen away from grace"⁶⁸ .

The Old Testament revelation contains the shadows, while the New Testament revelation contains the realities of these shadows! The Old Testament covenant, priesthood, sanctuary, festivals and offerings were foreshadowing the realities of the New Testament. The Old Testament types or illustrations pointed forward to the New Testament antitypes or fulfillments. The Old Testament reveals God's preparation and the New Testament reveals God's fulfilment.

The New Testament reveals *the new covenant*. It teaches that Jesus Christ fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies and shadows. The Old Testament order is no longer applicable! Christians no longer have *priests*, because Jesus Christ is their *only High Priest*. Christians no longer worship God in *an earthly sanctuary*, but *in spirit and truth*⁶⁹. Christians do not have to observe the *Saturday as a sabbath day*, but set it aside as Jesus taught⁷⁰. Christians no longer have to *pray 3 times a day*, but pray as Jesus taught⁷¹. Christians do not have to *fast as the Jews* did⁷², but may if they want to⁷³. Christians do not have to go on *3 pilgrimages a year* to Jerusalem⁷⁴. Christians do not celebrate the Old Testament *festivals*⁷⁵, but especially the Day of the Lord (Sunday)⁷⁶ and the Lord's Supper⁷⁷. Christians are not *circumcised* in their bodies⁷⁸, because they have been circumcised in the heart by the Holy Spirit⁷⁹. Christians no longer perform *purification ablutions*⁸⁰, because the blood of Christ has washed away all their sins⁸¹. As a sign of their baptism with the Spirit⁸² and the washing away of all their sins⁸³ Christians have been baptised with water⁸⁴. Christians bring no *animal sacrifices*, because the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross was the perfect *sacrifice once for all* (9:26). Christians no longer have to bring *tithes* for the upkeep of the temple, but give what they have decided in their heart to give⁸⁵. Christians no longer refrain from *eating ritual unclean food*, because Jesus declared all food 'clean'⁸⁶. They may eat all kinds of food, because nothing outside a man can make him unclean⁸⁷.

God's people during the Old Testament period was generally limited to the faithful chosen believers within the natural nation of Israel. 'The Israel of God' consisted of 'a remnant' from all the natural people in Israel⁸⁸. God's Old

⁶⁸ Galatians 4:4

⁶⁹ John 4:23-24

⁷⁰ Mark 2:27-28; Mark 3:4; cf. Exodus 23:12 (get refreshed on that day); Leviticus 23:3 (meet others in a sacred assembly)

⁷¹ Daniel 6:10; Matthew 6:5-15

⁷² Zechariah 8:19; Luke 18:12

⁷³ Matthew 6:16-18

⁷⁴ Deuteronomy 16:16

⁷⁵ Leviticus 23; Colossians 2:16-17

⁷⁶ Acts 20:7

⁷⁷ Luke 22:19-20

⁷⁸ Galatians 5:3

⁷⁹ Romans 2:28-29

⁸⁰ Like Muslims still have to do 5 times a day.

⁸¹ 1 John 1:7

⁸² Acts 10:47-48

⁸³ Acts 22:16

⁸⁴ Mark 1:8

⁸⁵ 2 Corinthians 9:6-7

⁸⁶ Mark 7:19

⁸⁷ Mark 7:15-23; 1 Timothy 4:3-5

⁸⁸ Romans 9:6,28-29

Testament people is *continued* in the New Testament on a *higher plane* (of realities instead of shadows)⁸⁹ and *extended* to include believers from every nation on earth⁹⁰!

Since the first coming of Christ and the completion of the Canon of the Bible, Christians must study the Old Testament by looking at the realities of the shadows and the fulfillments of the prophecies in the New Testament. The Old Testament revelation must always be interpreted in the light of the New Testament revelation.

6. A change of the sanctuary (Hebrews 8:1-5).

Moses had to build a sanctuary according to the pattern shown to him on Mount Sinai. Although this sanctuary was a *shadow copy*, it must not be viewed in terms of the philosophy of Plato, as a copy of some archetype or eternal idea in heaven. ‘The heavenly realities’ are not glorified archetypes of things on earth, but are *the spiritual realities that cannot be fathomed by limited people on earth*. The real heavenly sanctuary is not a more ideal type of sanctuary, but represents *the holy and majestic presence of God*. Isaiah 8:14 says, “He (God) will be a sanctuary for you ...”

The writer uses the known things on earth, which people can imagine, to describe the realities in heaven, which people cannot even imagine! The writers of the Bible books, like Ezekiel, Hebrews and Revelation, use symbolic and *apocalyptic language* to describe the realities of the spiritual order. The writer reveals the realities in heaven in terms of ‘the heavenly Jerusalem’ that would descend as ‘the new Jerusalem’ onto the new earth after the Second Coming of Christ⁹¹.

In Hebrews 12:22-24, the writer describes the realities in heaven (the heavenly Jerusalem) as: the presence of God the Father, the Judge of all people, with Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the new covenant, at his right hand. The throne of God is surrounded by uncountable number of angels in joyful assembly, and also by the Church Triumphant (the victorious Church) in heaven, which consists of the spirits of righteous men, that is, believers who had already died. In ‘the new Jerusalem’ on the new earth there will be no stone temple building. “Behold, the tabernacle (tent) of God is with men and he will tabernacle with them. ... And I did not see a temple building in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple!”⁹²

Also on earth now, Christians need no earthly temple or building to worship God. “God does not live in houses made by men”⁹³. Because the curtain in the earthly temple had been torn from top to bottom after the death of Jesus Christ⁹⁴, Christians who live on earth no longer need an earthly building to worship God or earthly priests to represent them before God. They have direct and permanent access to God through Jesus Christ, their Mediator (4:16). On earth Christians themselves are “being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit”⁹⁵. Christians live on earth in the direct spiritual presence of God. They no longer worship God through the Old Testament ceremonial law, its sacrifices, tithes, ablutions and food rules, but in spirit and in truth. They are themselves a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God, like “doing God’s will in the body” (10:9)⁹⁶, “confessing the Lord” and “singing songs of praise” (13:15)⁹⁷.

7. A change of the sacrifices (Hebrews 9-10).

a. Jesus Christ sacrificed his own body instead of animals (10:5-7).

The Old Testament priests in the order of Aaron brought animal sacrifices. But Jesus Christ gave himself as a living sacrifice for the sins of his people (9:12-14). The Psalmist, who knew the uselessness of animal sacrifices, dedicated his own life to God for the obedient accomplishment of his will⁹⁸. The words of the Psalmist are recognised as the language of Christ, when he came into the world (10:5-7). In the body, which God prepared for him, he fulfilled the will of God. It is this consecrated body and obedient life which Jesus Christ offered up to God that is the completely acceptable sacrifice to God which effectually cleanses his people in their heart and conscience.

b. Jesus Christ sacrificed himself once-for-all (10:11-12).

While the Old Testament priests in the order of Aaron had to sacrifice *repeatedly*, Jesus Christ sacrificed himself *once-for-all*. The Old Testament sacrifices had to be repeated because they were *imperfect* and could not meet the real need of the people. But the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is completely *perfect* and therefore was brought once-for-all time. The complete redemption and cleansing effects in the lives of the followers of Jesus Christ has been a matter of plain experience for 2000 years! Such a sacrifice as Jesus Christ brought needs no repetition. It is once-for-all time!

c. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is completely effective (9:11-15; 10:4-17).

⁸⁹ Colossians 2:17

⁹⁰ Galatians 6:14-16; Revelation 5:9-10

⁹¹ Revelation 21:1-2

⁹² Revelation 21:3 and 21:22-23

⁹³ Acts 7:48-49; Acts 17:24

⁹⁴ Matthew 27:51

⁹⁵ Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:5

⁹⁶ Matthew 6:10

⁹⁷ Ephesians 5:19-20

⁹⁸ Psalm 40:6-8

It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (10:4). But the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from acts that lead to death (9:14)⁹⁹. His death on the cross is a ransom for *all sins committed during the first covenant* (9:15) and a ransom for *all sins of believers under the second covenant*¹⁰⁰. His death *obtained eternal redemption* for us, his people (9:12).

Thereby believers are *justified* (9:14)¹⁰¹ and *sanctified* (10:10)¹⁰² and glorified (made perfect)(10:14)¹⁰³. Thereby God has written his laws in our mind (10:16). And thereby he will not remember our sins and lawless acts anymore, that is, he will never bring our sins against us in the Final Judgement Day (10:17). We can and may draw near to God with a sincere heart and in full assurance of faith (4:16; 10:19-22).

8. The true nature of faith (chapter 11).

a. Faith.

“Faith is the continual assurance of things hoped for. Faith is the permanent conviction (proof) of things not people cannot see” (11:1).

The word ‘assurance’¹⁰⁴ is *not objective* in the sense of giving ‘substance’ or ‘essence’ or ‘actual being or reality’ (1:3) to the hopes of Christians, *but subjective in the sense of having ‘the conviction’ that the things we hope for will in the future be realities.*

The word ‘conviction’¹⁰⁵ means the ‘evidence’ or ‘proof’ that the invisible things belong to the spiritual order and that they are still invisible because they belong to the future, like the fulfilment of God’s promises. Physical eyesight produces evidence (and therefore conviction) of visible things, but *faith is the organ which enables people to see the invisible order* (11:27)¹⁰⁶.

Faith consists of three elements (11:6-8): knowledge, trust and action¹⁰⁷.

- To know the truth (God’s character, words, deeds, promises, threats, etc). For example, Noah heard God’s warning and Abraham God’s calling.)
- To trust (accept) that these truths are meant for you. For example, Noah and Abraham believed what God said.
- To act upon (live out) these truths. For example, Noah built an ark and Abraham travelled without knowing where he was going).

b. Without faith it is impossible to please God.

To remain ignorant or unbelieving and not seek God does not please God. God desires/wills that people seek him and believe in him (trust him, fellowship with him). People must believe that the God who revealed himself in the Bible (and not in other religions), exists and rewards those who seek him. God has revealed himself in three ways to people:

- Romans 1:20. All people in the world can know that God exists! “Since the creation of the world, God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature (.e. that God exists) – has been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made (the size, fantastic designs, beauty, order, life, etc. of his works of creation), so that men are without excuse”. All people in the world can understand that God exists and that he is very powerful.
- Romans 2:14-15. All people in the world possess God’s moral laws (most of the 10 commandments) in written form on their hearts and possess consciences that function as advocates or witnesses (accusing or defending their thoughts. They are able to know what is right and what is wrong.
- Romans 10:17-18. Very many people in the world have the opportunity to hear the Gospel/the Word of Christ, because preachers have gone out into all the world and by mass communication their message can be heard to the ends of the earth.

c. De race of the witnesses of faith.

The race of the witnesses of faith in the past have been recorded in chapter 11. Note the three elements: God’s Word, faith and action.

- When Noah received a warning from God that he was going to destroy the world at that time by means of a flood, he believed God’s Word and built an ark over a very long period (11:7). In this way he became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith

⁹⁹ 1 John 1:7

¹⁰⁰ Mark 10:45

¹⁰¹ Romans 3:24-25

¹⁰² 1 Corinthians 1:30

¹⁰³ Romans 8:30

¹⁰⁴ ἡ υἰοστροφία

¹⁰⁵ ὁ ἐλεγχος

¹⁰⁶ Romans 8:24-25

¹⁰⁷ All three verbs are in the continuous present time: knowing, believing and acting *constantly* or *again and again*.

Illustration: you must keep on pedalling in order to keep your bicycle upright

- When Abraham received a calling from God to emigrate to a country he did not know, he believed God's Word and went without knowing where he was going (11:8). He looked forward to the city with foundations of which God was the Architect and Builder (11:10). The heroes of faith expected a heavenly country (the heavenly Jerusalem)(11:16). And when he was tested by God, he believed God's command and that God was able to even raise someone from the dead. So by faith he sacrificed his only son, Isaac (11:17).

- When Moses was called by God to lead God's people out of Egypt, he by faith chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short while. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt. By faith he left Egypt, without fearing the king's anger, because he saw him who was invisible (11:24-27).
- By faith God's people passed through the Red Sea, the walls of Jericho fell, and they conquered kingdoms.
- By faith people administered justice, gained what was promised, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of flames, escaped the edge of the sword, turned weakness into strength, routed foreign armies, received back their dead, suffered torture, jeering, flogging and the chains of imprisonment. They were stoned, sawed in two, put to death by the sword, went about in sheepskins, were destitute, persecuted and mistreated, wandered in deserts and mountains and lived in caves and holes in the ground.

d. The Old Testament believers did not receive what had been promised.

The fulfilment of the promise took place during the New Testament period. God decided that the Old Testament believers (the faithful Jews) would not be made perfect without the New Testament believers (the Christians within all nations) (11:39-40)!

9. The people of God as Church of Christ and the Kingdom of God that will not be shaken (chapter 12).

a. God will shake the present universe once more.

Hebrews 12:25-26 says, "See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks", because God promises, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens"¹⁰⁸."

God spoke the rules of his covenant (the law) from the mount Sinai and then the mountain shook¹⁰⁹. During the 40 year journey through the desert the Israelites again and again failed to obey God's covenant laws. That caused much suffering. So now the (Jewish and other) Christians are also warned not to refuse God's voice (3:7ff).

In the Old Testament an earthquake is a sign of God's coming (approaching)¹¹⁰. The context of this verse points to God's objective: When God arises to defeat the rule of the heathen nations and to raise up the throne of David (the Messianic Kingdom during the New Testament period), then he makes Jerusalem and the temple¹¹¹ the centre of worship for all nations.

The writer interprets these words as the end of the present world order, just as the words in Revelation 20:11 and 21:1. In the end-time God will shake the present earth and heaven. They will wear out like a garment, be rolled up and exchanged (1:11-12). They will flee away before the face of the Judge on his throne and be replaced by the new heaven and new earth where righteousness will dwell¹¹².

b. The race of the witnesses of faith.

The witnesses of faith and their race during the Old Testament period is depicted in chapter 11. They are not sitting on a tribune watching the believers during the New Testament period run their race of faith¹¹³. Nevertheless, their testimonies of faith surround us and exhort us to run the race with perseverance and finish with faith¹¹⁴. That is why the believers must clothe themselves with the right sports clothing (throw off everything that entangles) and fix the eyes on the finishing line, namely Jesus, the Author (Beginner) and Perfecter (Finisher) of our faith (12:1-3)¹¹⁵.

c. Christians receive an unshakeable Kingdom.

Plato said that the present world is *eternal*. But Jesus Christ said that the present created world is *temporary*! The universe with its uncountable stars and planet earth will *pass away*, but Jesus Christ (13:8) and his Word¹¹⁶ will *remain forever*. The earth and the heavens will not stop to exist, but will be *exchanged* as an old garment (1:10-12). The created world including created people must be transformed and will be transformed, because "flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God". "*The perishable will be raised imperishable*"¹¹⁷.

The writer emphasizes the transcendence of this world order and contrasts it with the eternity of the Son of God and the new world order into which the Son is bringing his people (12:26-27).

¹⁰⁸ Haggai 2:6-7, LXX

¹⁰⁹ Exodus 19:18

¹¹⁰ Isaiah 2:19,21; Haggai 2:6-7

¹¹¹ The Church of Jesus Christ

¹¹² Matthew 24:35; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 6:12-14; Revelation 16:18-20; Revelation 20:11; Revelation 21:1

¹¹³ Isaiah 63:16. The believers in heaven do not know those still living on earth. But their testimonies of faith have been recorded for us.

¹¹⁴ John 4:34; John 17:4; Acts 20:24; Colossians 4:17; 2 Timothy 4:7

¹¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Corinthians 10:4-5; 2 Timothy 2:3-6

¹¹⁶ Matthew 24:35

¹¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:50,42

The moment people begin to believe in Jesus Christ, they receive the unshakeable Kingdom (kingship)¹¹⁸ in their hearts and lives¹¹⁹. This kingship is only the beginning. When Christians submit more and more areas of their lives to the rule of Jesus Christ, they will more and more experience this rule of Jesus in their hearts.

When Christians die, their *bodies return to dust* and their souls are translated alive into heaven where they will sit with Jesus on his throne and rule with him¹²⁰. Their souls will find Rest with God in heaven (4:10)¹²¹.

Later at the second coming their bodies will also be raised from the dead¹²². Then Jesus will *change* our lowly, natural bodies that are weak, without honour, and perishable *and transform them into* being like his glorious, spiritual body that is powerful, perfect and imperishable.¹²³ *Death is not the end, but a new beginning* of life with Jesus Christ on the new earth!

At the second coming of Jesus Christ the universe will “once more be shaken (wobble) (12:27), so that what cannot be shaken may remain”¹²⁴. God’s Kingdom in its final phase is the same as ‘the heavenly Zion’ or ‘the heavenly Jerusalem’ that will descend as ‘the new Jerusalem’ onto the new earth¹²⁵.

10. Christians are called to go outside the camp in order to bear the disgrace (stigma) of Christ (Hebrews 13:13-14).

a. ‘Outside the camp during the Old Testament period.

The sins of the Israelites were symbolically laden on the scapegoat and taken as far as possible outside the camp into the desert¹²⁶. Sins had to be removed far away from the camp of the people of Israel.

‘The camp’ is a symbol of the established religious order or fellowship of the Jewish Faith. During the Old Testament period, the Jews had become accustomed to think of ‘the camp’ and all that was inside it as ‘sacred’, while everything ‘outside the camp’ was ‘profane and unclean’, like ‘a pariah’ (lowest caste, outcast). They felt secure inside the camp amid its familiar institutions. Inside the camp the Jews were *insulated* from the outside world.

b. Outside the camp during the New Testament period.

For example, Jesus suffered was crucified outside the camp (13:12). During the New Testament period (in the letter to the Hebrews) the words ‘outside the camp’ pointed to the rejection of the messianic claims of Jesus Christ by the Jews, by Jerusalem and by Judaism. His rejection by the Jews was a token, a stigma. He was stigmatized^{read 127}; branded with shame. His crucifixion outside the gate of Jerusalem added to this stigma.

When a former Jew¹²⁸ becomes a Christian he must leave the Jewish camp with all its Jewish religious rituals¹²⁹ and go to Jesus Christ outside the camp and follow his completed work of salvation. And when a former non-Jew (heathen) becomes a Christian, he too must leave ‘his camp’ with all its worldly and religious rituals and go to Jesus Christ outside the camp and follow his completed work of salvation.

People who become a Christian, are now called to go ‘outside the camp’ and bear the disgrace Jesus bore (13:13). They are *called to step out of the established religious order and fellowship*. While the Jews claimed *Jerusalem inside the gates*, Jesus Christ claimed *the world outside the camp of Jerusalem*. Christians are called to go outside the camp and bear the disgrace of Christ

The future of a Christian is not with a small Jewish camp (the old order / the Old Testament religion), but with the worldwide mission of Jesus Christ¹³⁰ and his Body (the new order / the New Testament message and people). The future

¹¹⁸ **12:28a.** Therefore (δω)(cs), since we are receiving (παρалаαμβανοντες>παρалаαμβανω)(vppanmxp) a kingdom (η βασιλεια)(n-af-s) that cannot be shaken (ασαλευτος-ον)(a--af-s),

¹¹⁹ Luke 17:20-21

¹²⁰ Revelation 3:21; 20:1-4; 22:5

¹²¹ Revelation 14:13; cf. Philippians 1:21-23

¹²² Revelation 21:4; cf. 6:9 and Philippians 1:20-21

¹²³ Philippians 3:21 and 1 Corinthians 15:42-44,50-54

¹²⁴ **12:27.** The (το)(dnns) (word)(ρημα): Still (ετι)(ab) once more (απαξ)(ab) indicate (make clear) (δηλοι<δηλω)(vira--zs) the removing (η μεταθεσις)(n-af-s) of what can be shaken (σαλευομενων>σαλευω)(vpppgn-p) such as (ως)(cs) created things (πεποιημενων>ποιεω)(vprpgn-p) so that (ινα)(cs) what (τα)(dnnp /npnnpza) (μη)(ab) cannot be shaken (σαλευομενα>σαλευω)(vpppnn-p) may remain (μεινη<μενω)(vsaa--zs).

¹²⁵ Revelation 21:1-2

¹²⁶ Leviticus 16:20-22

¹²⁷ The unbelievers among the Jews said the following about Jesus: He (Jesus) was a despised Samaritan, demon-possessed (John 8:48) and raving mad (John 10:20). They stigmatized (labelled) Jesus as a wicked person.

¹²⁸ This is also true of former Muslims.

¹²⁹ Or the camp of the Muslims, the camp of Hindu’s, the camp of Buddhists, the camp of a particular church denomination, or the camp of any other religion or cult.

¹³⁰ Matthew 28:18-20

of Christians is also not with one or another Christian denomination, but with the crowd of Christian pilgrims who are 'aliens and strangers' in this world¹³¹.

Time and again during the New Testament period, individuals and churches had to come out of their secure and familiar camps and go out to the unknown and unfamiliar world to occupy new territory under the leadership of Jesus.

c. Christians are called not to settle down, but to be pilgrims and strangers.

"For here we *never* have an abiding city, but we *continually* seek after (the city which) is to come (13:14).

The Jews kept in their hearts clinging to their old securities, but *these securities themselves were insecurities!*

- The Old Testament Law was *changed* with the first coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah)(7:12)¹³², the perfect and eternal High Priest had arrived (4:14; 7:16,24-28), the perfect sacrifice had been brought (7:27; 10:14) and the old securities crashed!
- The curtain separating the presence of God from people was torn in two¹³³.
- The middle wall of separation (the ceremonial law)¹³⁴, the hostility between Jews and Gentiles, had been destroyed¹³⁵. By the end of the second temple king Herod had a great plain built, with wall and colonnade around it, the so-called 'forecourt of the heathen'. Gamaliel taught in this colonnade and priests leased places in the colonnade to money-changers for the temple tax and sellers of animals for sacrifices. The central sanctuary with the altar of burnt sacrifices stood in the middle and was accessible only to Jews, because uncircumcised people would defile it when they entered it. To avoid uncircumcised heathen from entering the temple, notice boards were placed metres away from the temple at the entrances in the middle wall with inscriptions in Greek that warned non-Jews not to trespass at the cost of their lives.
- The kingdom of God was taken away from the unrepentant Jews and given to Jews and Gentiles who would bear the fruit of the kingdom¹³⁶.
- The old covenant (old order) was fulfilled and abrogated at the first coming of Jesus Christ and replaced by the new covenant (the new order) (8:6-13).
- Israel. Gods 'believing people in the Promised Land (the rest) (4:8), are *NOT* continued today in the natural nation of Israel¹³⁷ that became a state in 1948. 'The Israel of God'¹³⁸. The true chosen believers in Israel during the Old Testament period, were *NOT terminated* at the first coming of Jesus Christ, and were *NOT substituted by/exchanged* for the Church during the New Testament period, but *continued* on a higher plane and *extended* to include all chosen believers from all the nations, including from the natural nation of Israel! The Israel of God (the remnant) was continued as the Church of Christ or Kingdom of God in the New Testament, 'the sabbath rest' for the people of God (4:9) in every country of the world.

The letter to the Hebrews was probably written about 64 CE, just before the persecution of Nero against Christians in Rome broke out. The external city of Jerusalem and the temple were doomed to be destroyed soon¹³⁹. They were actually destroyed in 70 CE. With the first coming of Jesus Christ the old order was terminated ^{140!}

The writer to Hebrews said that by leaving a 'city' which was doomed to pass away for a 'city with foundations whose Architect and Builder is God' (11:10), the Hebrew Christians would be the gainers.

Now at present (about 2000 years later) 'the heavenly city' was yet to come, but *everyone*¹⁴¹ who goes out (of the present world order and its institutions that will be shaken)(12:26-29) to Christ, is already enrolled in the heavenly register of citizens (12:23)¹⁴². 'The present 'world order' with its institutions will nevertheless be shaken and wobble (12:26-27) and 'the new Jerusalem' must still descend from heaven onto the new earth.

Man cannot find 'the permanent and eternal Rest' in any of the present institutions in the world: whether they are political, social or religious institutions. Christians are called not to settle down, but to *be pilgrims and strangers within the present world order* (11:13)¹⁴³. "Our citizenship is in heaven where the Lord Jesus Christ is"¹⁴⁴.

¹³¹ 1 Peter 2:11

¹³² The Law was fulfilled (Matthew 5:17); cancelled (Colossians 2:14); and abrogated (Hebrews 7:12)

¹³³ Matthew 26:51

¹³⁴ And the Muslim sharia

¹³⁵ Ephesians 2:15

¹³⁶ Matthew 21:42-44; Romans 11:16-24

¹³⁷ 1 Corinthians 11:18, the Israel according to the flesh/sinful nature. Cf. Romans 9:6, "Not all who are descended from Israel, are (God's) Israel."

¹³⁸ Galatians 6:14-18. God's Israel.

¹³⁹ Luke 19:43-44; Luke 21:20-24; John 2:19

¹⁴⁰ Cf. John 2:19-22

¹⁴¹ (whether originally Jew or Gentile)

¹⁴² Galatians 4:26

¹⁴³ 1 Peter 1:17; 1 Peter 2:11

¹⁴⁴ Philippians 3:20