

## Hebrews 1-6 Ep 226



In this outline are a few links to some of my favorite books that have really helped me understand the context and content of the scriptures. [Click here to see all of my favorite books on Amazon](#). As an Amazon Affiliate, I do earn a small commission from qualifying purchases (at no extra cost to you).

### Hebrews

#### Authorship

Michael Dennis Rhodes, an LDS scholar of Classical Greek and emeritus professor of ancient scripture at BYU has given this view of the authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews:

The question of who actually wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews has been debated from at least the early second century AD and continues unresolved up to the present time.<sup>1</sup> Since the text itself does not say who the author was, and the external evidence is meager and ambiguous, this question cannot be answered with certainty. The title found in KJV that assigns the Epistle to Paul is not found in any early Greek or Latin manuscript. The shorter, rather vague title πρὸς Ἑβραίους (pros Hebraious), “to [the] Hebrews,” which is found in all extant Greek manuscripts, is almost certainly an editorial label added later rather than part of the original composition.<sup>2</sup> Most Latter-day Saints believe the author was Paul. This view is often based on Joseph Smith’s references that unite the Apostle with the Epistle.<sup>3</sup> Noteworthy, however, is the absence of any statement by the Prophet that he had spiritual confirmation or any other evidence as to the authorship of this work. It is most likely that, due to the general belief in his day that the Epistle was written by Paul, the Prophet never questioned the idea or sought divine validation or further instruction in this regard.

Therefore, among Latter-day Saint scholars, ample disagreement and debate concerning the author continue due to the lack of an “official” Church position on the subject. Many General Authorities and Apostles have used the phrase “the author of Hebrews” instead of “Paul” when

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<sup>1</sup> Michael D. Rhodes, “Some Thoughts on the Authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” paper presented at New Mormon Ideas about Mark and Hebrews, Fourth Annual BYU New Testament Commentary Conference, Provo, Utah, July 29, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), p. 4–5.

<sup>3</sup> “The Elders of the Church in Kirtland, to Their Brethren Abroad,” Evening and the Morning Star 2 (March 1834): 143, online as “Letter to the Church, circa March 1834,” The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-the-church-circa-march-1834/2>. For the logic on this, see Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1973), 3:133.

referencing Hebrews.<sup>4</sup> There are differences between Latter-day Saint scholars concerning who wrote Hebrews ranging from those who continue to support Pauline authorship to those who support other candidates such as Apollos.<sup>5</sup> The Church has not issued a definitive statement declaring an official position on who wrote Hebrews.

Another scholar has written:

The document known as the Epistle to the Hebrews is the most elegant and sophisticated, and perhaps the most enigmatic, text of first-century Christianity. Its author is unknown and the circumstances of its composition remain mysterious. Its argumentation is subtle; its language refined; its imagery rich and evocative. Such complexity has led to widely varying assessments of the work's fundamental aims.<sup>6</sup>

The notable Latter-day Saint scholar Hugh Nibley called it “the great Christian tract on the Atonement” that “begins with an exhilarating prospect: ‘God . . . hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds’” (1:1-1).<sup>7</sup>

Craig Keener wrote:

From a stylistic perspective, it is impossible to attribute the letter to Paul; of other New Testament writers, it is closest to Luke’s literary abilities, but the style is not Lukan. The writer seems to be an influential person traveling in the same circles as Timothy (13:23) and well heeded by this audience, who are probably in the eastern Mediterranean. Silas would thus be a natural candidate (cf. Acts 16:37, in Rome about 64) and probably a scribe (1 Pet 5:12) would have the educational level necessary for such a letter. It is more commonly suggested that the writer is Apollos, whose Alexandrian rhetorical and possibly philosophical training would have suited him especially well to write such a letter; he was certainly respected as Paul’s peer in the Pauline churches. (He seems to have been moving from Rome toward the east or south a few years before Hebrews was written—Tit 3:13—but he could have returned.) Other suggestions, like Barnabas or Priscilla, are possible but have less evidence to commend them than the proposals of Silas and Apollos.<sup>8</sup>

**If not Paul, then who may have written this?**

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<sup>4</sup> Terrence L. Szink, “Authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in [How the New Testament Came to Be: The 35th Annual Brigham Young University Sidney B. Sperry Symposium](#), ed. Kent P. Jackson and Frank F. Judd Jr. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 243–59.

<sup>5</sup> Examples of those in favor of Pauline authorship are Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 197; and Szink, “Authorship,” 243–59; and examples of those not in favor are Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment, [Making Sense of the New Testament: Timely Insights and Timeless Messages](#) (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 446–47; Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, Eric D. Huntsman, and Thomas A. Wayment, [Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament](#) (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 254–56.

<sup>6</sup> Harold Attridge, [Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews](#), Fortress Press, 1989, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Draper and Michael Rhodes, [Epistle to the Hebrews: New Testament Commentary](#), BYU Studies, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Craig S. Keener, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament](#), IVP Academic, 2014, p. 637.

The next logical question after we discuss the reasons why Paul may have not written Hebrews is: if not Paul, then who could be the author of Hebrews?<sup>9</sup> Throughout the years, at least sixteen individuals<sup>10</sup> have been suggested as potential authors. Out of these suggested authors, several<sup>11</sup> have existing writings that we can compare to the text of Hebrews. Stephen has also been proposed based on the speech attributed to him in Acts 7. On the other hand, several of the proposed authors of the text do not have extant writings.

Of these candidates, the females are usually dismissed by scholars as the author refers to himself using a masculine participle in Heb. 11.32.<sup>12</sup> After a thorough analysis of each potential author, a respected scholar concludes that “[Apollos] is perhaps the least unlikely choice among the conjectures that have been proposed.”<sup>13</sup>

So, what can we ultimately conclude? Around eighteen hundred years ago, Origen declared, "But who the author of the epistle was, God knows the truth."<sup>14</sup> As another scholar rightly pointed out, "Even today, we have not made much progress beyond Origen's admission of ignorance."<sup>15</sup>

### Context

Although some scholars question this, the audience seems fairly obviously predominantly Jewish; they are apparently under pressure to give up their Christian distinctives (either from the synagogue or from Gentile persecution of Christians). Although the Hellenistic Jewish thought in the letter would fit a number of locations including Corinth and Ephesus, the actual seizure of their property in earlier days (10:34) does not fit Corinth or Ephesus (against one commentator, who perhaps fancifully but nevertheless quite skillfully constructs a case for this letter being written to Corinth and 1 Corinthians responding to some features in it). But Hebrews 13.23 suggests an audience in the Pauline circle (i.e., not in Alexandria, though Apollos was from there). The early persecution fits Thessalonica and possibly Philippi in Macedonia, although a community in Asia Minor or Syria with more ethnic Jewish representation might fit better. Wherever the readers are located, they resonate with the intensely Greek rhetoric and interpretation of Judaism that come naturally to this author; the closest parallels are with Philo of Alexandria. (That the letter also has parallels with the Dead Sea Scrolls in Judea and apocalyptic motifs should not be surprising; we must construct a composite picture of ancient Judaism

<sup>9</sup> Paul Ellingworth gets into the possible authors of the text in [The Epistle to the Hebrews \(The New International Greek Testament Commentary\)](#), Eerdmans, 1993, p. 13-21.

<sup>10</sup> [Final Report 2011: Who wrote the Letter to the Hebrews?](#) Accessed 7.15.23. The report lists these ten possible authors: Barnabas, Clement of Rome, James, John, Jude, Luke, Mark, Matthew, Paul, and Peter. Some sources cite Timothy as the possible author of Hebrews. Martin Luther suggested that Apollos wrote Hebrews. Adolf von Harnack in 1900 has suggested that Priscilla (a female of Jewish heritage and the wife of Aquila, a missionary, and a friend of Paul) was the author of Hebrews. [Authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews](#), accessed 7.15.23. For Ruth Hoppin's argument regarding Priscilla's possibility of being the author of Hebrews, see: [Priscilla's Letter: Finding the Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews](#), Lost Coast Press, 2009. Others note that Aristion, Philip, or Silas may have written Hebrews. [Who wrote the book of Hebrews?](#) Accessed 7.15.23.

<sup>11</sup> We have the writings of Mark, Paul, Luke, Matthew, Barnabas, Peter, Clement of Rome, and Jude. John is rather difficult, depending on how one views the writings of John.

<sup>12</sup> γὰρ με [διηγούμενον](#) ὁ χρόνος “for the time would fail me [to tell](#)” (Heb. 11.32). This participle is in the masculine form. If it read διηγουμένη, then it would be in the feminine form.

<sup>13</sup> Ellingworth, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 21.

<sup>14</sup> Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 6.25.14

<sup>15</sup> F.F. Bruce, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 2

based on as many diverse sources as possible. But the clear Philonic parallels point to \*Hellenistic rhetorical training. The writer is not on the level of Philo but is clearly a Hellenistic Jew.)

### Overview

Paul is at his theological best in Hebrews...as an inspired theologian, Paul takes the revelations of the past, the dead letter of the ancient law, and ties it into the living Christianity of the present. He shows how the gospel grew out of the preparatory law which prevailed in Israel and which in fact had as its purpose the preparing of the way before the coming of that Prophet who led Israel of old and was the Author of both covenants...In Hebrews we learn that Jesus was made a little lower than Elohim; that he has precedence over the angels; that he took upon himself mortality to bring salvation to man.

In Hebrews our understanding is refreshed with the knowledge that salvation is available through his intercession; that he sacrificed himself for the sins of the world; that by his blood the saints are sanctified.

In it we are taught that the Mosaic ordinances prefigured his ministry; that his gospel was offered to ancient Israel; that he is the Mediator of the new covenant.

There is no other Biblical source for detailed knowledge of the Holy Priesthood; of Christ's status as the great High Priest and the Apostle of our profession; of the oath which God swore that his Son would be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

And nowhere else in the Bible do we find the oath and covenant of the priesthood set forth; or that through this priesthood the gospel is administered; or that it is the power whereby eternal life is gained.<sup>16</sup>

In sum, the witness of Hebrews is that those who are determined in their faith and endure to the end will find themselves sustained and assisted along the way. The means will come through the enabling power emanating from the throne of grace (4:16) occupied by the Father and Son. Through their combined power, the faithful community of the righteous will find place in the eternal city (11:10; 12:22).<sup>17</sup>

In this podcast, Bryce discussed three main themes in Hebrews:

1. The new covenant is better than the old one the Jews used to live by.
2. The author of Hebrews admonishes the reads to be better.
3. The author demonstrates why the new covenant is better, and why Jesus is a better way than following the Mosaic law.

## Hebrews 1-6

### Outline

#### I. Introduction to the Superiority of Christ (Chapter 1)

##### A. God's Revelation through His Son (1.1-2)

<sup>16</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, [Doctrinal New Testament Commentary](#), 3 vols. Bookcraft, 1965-1973, 3:133-135.

<sup>17</sup> Draper and Rhodes, [Epistle to the Hebrews](#), BYU Studies, 2021, p. 4.

“By whom also he made the worlds” δι’ οὗ καὶ τοὺς αἰῶνας· ἐποίησεν (1.2)

Another translation of this could read: “through whom also he made the eternities” (my translation).

Elder Maxwell taught:

'Worlds without number' have been created (Moses 1:33; see also John 1:3; Heb. 1:2; 2:3; D&C 93:10). These gospel truths are very significant assurances for us, situated as we are on this tiny 'speck of sand' at the outer edge of a minor galaxy, the Milky Way. Without the gospel's fulness, we would appear to be living during one tick of the geological clock and in the midst of unexplained vastness. Nevertheless...a universal God is actually involved with our small, individual universes of experience! In the midst of His vast dominions, yet He numbers us, knows us, and loves us perfectly (see Moses 1:35; John 10:14).<sup>18</sup>

B. Christ's Exalted Status and Authority (1.3-4)

“express image of his person” χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως (1.3)

The First Presidency taught:

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is 'the express image' of His Father's person (Hebrews 1:3). He walked the earth as a human being, as a perfect man, and said, in answer to a question put to Him: 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father' (John 14:9). This alone ought to solve the problem to the satisfaction of every thoughtful, reverent mind. The conclusion is irresistible, that if the Son of God be the express image (that is, likeness) of His Father's person, then His Father is in the form of man; for that was the form of the Son of God, not only during His mortal life, but before His mortal birth, and after His resurrection. It was in this form that the Father and the Son, as two personages, appeared to Joseph Smith, when, as a boy of fourteen years, he received his first vision. Then if God made man-the first man-in His own image and likeness, he must have made him like unto Christ, and consequently like unto men of Christ's time and of the present day. That man was made in the image of Christ, is positively stated in the Book of Moses: 'And I, God, said unto mine Only Begotten, which was with me from the beginning, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and it was so...And I, God, created man in mine own image, in the image of mine Only Begotten created I him, male and female created I them' (2:26, 27). The Father of Jesus is our Father also. Jesus Himself taught this truth, when He instructed His disciples how to pray: 'Our Father which art in heaven,' etc. Jesus, however, is the firstborn among all the sons of God the first begotten in the spirit, and the only begotten in the flesh. He is our elder brother, and we, like Him, are in the image of God. All men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother, and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity.<sup>19</sup>

Elder McConkie taught:

The resurrected Lord Jesus-having a tangible body of flesh and bones, a body which was felt and handled by the apostles in the upper room, a body that ate and digested food (Luke 24:36-43)-is in 'the express image' of his Father's 'person.' (Heb. 1:3.) So the Son appears and is in all respects

<sup>18</sup> Elder Neal A. Maxwell, “[Yet Thou Art There](#),” *Ensign*, November 1987.

<sup>19</sup> JOSEPH F. SMITH, JOHN R. WINDER, ANTHON H. LUND, from James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965-75, 4: 206.

like his Father; and conversely, the Father looks and acts and is in all respects like the Son. Their physical appearance is the same, both possess the attributes of godliness in their fulness and perfection; each would do and say precisely the same thing under the same circumstances. (Mormon Doctrine, pp. 294-295.) Hence the enigmatic and epigrammatic statement: 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.'<sup>20</sup>

Jesus is "being made so much better than the angels" τοσοῦτω κρείττων γενόμενος τῶν ἀγγέλων (1.4)

Spencer W. Kimball declared, "The heavens may be full of angels, but they are not like the Son of God."<sup>21</sup>

Some Diaspora Jewish writers attributed to the angels a role in creation, but early Christian writers routinely denied them such a role (Col 1:16), as did many Judean teachers. Here Jesus' exaltation grants him a title that entitles him to much more status than the angels: Son (1:5).<sup>22</sup>

C. Jesus' Superiority to the Angels (1.4-14)

"The firstbegotten" τὸν πρωτότοκον (1.6)

Since Christ was known as the "firstbegotten" before He came into the world, there must have been a pre-earth conception and birth of spirits in which Christ was the Firstborn.

"Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool" (1.13)

It is natural for the author to cite Psalm 110:1 because God's "right hand" is envisioned in terms of a place beside his throne (1:8; cf. possibly Wisdom of Solomon 9:4; 18:15). The full citation also includes God addressing the priest-king as Lord, similar to the citation in Heb. 1.8-9. The writer shows himself a master of Jewish exegetical technique.<sup>23</sup>

LeGrand Baker and Stephen Ricks write:

In the first verse of Psalm 110, the words, "sit thou at my right hand," was literally an invitation to the king to sit next to God, implicitly to sit upon the throne of God. The invitation was proffered here in conjunction with the ordination to the Melchizedek priesthood, but would not be realized until near the conclusion of the drama when the king would be crowned... Then Psalm 110 concludes, as do many of the psalms that pronounce a blessing, with a promise of invulnerability—the promise that he will be empowered to fulfill the assignment he received at the Council—described in terms of military power.<sup>24</sup>

## II. Jesus has conquered mortality (Chapter 2)

A. Warning against Neglecting Salvation (2.1-4)

"of the ones having heard to us it was confirmed" τῶν ἀκουσάντων εἰς ἡμᾶς ἐβεβαιώθη (2.3)

<sup>20</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. Bookcraft, 1965-1973, 1: 731.

<sup>21</sup> Spencer W. Kimball, "The Privilege of Holding the Priesthood," *Ensign*, Nov. 1975.

<sup>22</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 640.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 641.

<sup>24</sup> Baker and Ricks, *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord? The Psalms in Israel's Temple Worship In the Old Testament and In the Book of Mormon*, Eborn Books, p. 240-241. A free PDF version can be found [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

A significant argument against Paul being the author of Hebrews can be found in Hebrews 2.3. The verse states, πῶς ἡμεῖς ἐκφευξόμεθα τηλικαύτης ἀμελήσαντες σωτηρίας "How will we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?" The author continues, "This salvation was first spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard him." In this passage, the author of Hebrews explains that they learned about the gospel from individuals who personally heard Jesus. However, in Galatians 1.11-12, Paul confidently asserts the opposite, saying, "Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was preached by me is not from humans. For I did not receive it from nor was I taught it by any mortal person, but I received it by the means of revelation from Jesus Christ" (my translation).

#### B. Jesus' Humanity and Role as Savior (2.5-18)

"Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honor" (2.7)

"To make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings" τὸν ἀρχηγὸν τῆς σωτηρίας αὐτῶν διὰ παθημάτων τελειῶσαι (2.10)

That Christ had been made lower but then exalted shows him as the forerunner of the righteous who would inherit the coming world (1:14; 2:5). The term *archegos*, translated "pioneer" (niv) or "captain" (kjv), means "pioneer" (nrsv), "leader" (cf. gnt), "founder" or "champion." The term was used for both human and divine heroes, founders of schools or those who cut a path forward for their followers and whose exploits for humanity were rewarded by exaltation. "For whom . . . and through whom are all things" was a phrase Stoics used to describe the supreme God, but the idea fit Jewish thought about God and divine Wisdom and was widely used by Diaspora Jewish writers, including Paul (1 Cor 8:6). The Septuagint uses the author's term for "perfect" for the consecration of a priest; some contemporary Jewish texts also speak of a righteous person's life crowned with martyrdom as being "perfected" thereby.<sup>25</sup>

"Perfect through sufferings"

President Kimball taught:

There are those today who say that man is the result of his environment and cannot rise above it. Those who justify mediocrity, failure, immorality of all kinds, and even weakness and criminality are certainly misguided. Surely the environmental conditions found in childhood and youth are an influence of power. But the fact remains that every normal soul has its free agency and the power to row against the current and to lift itself to new planes of activity and thought and development. Man can transform himself. Man must transform himself.<sup>26</sup>

αρχηγον and stories of descent

In Heb 2:10, Jesus is referred to as τὸν ἀρχηγὸν of our salvation,<sup>1</sup> and in Hcb 12:2 he is called ' the ἀρχηγὸν and perfecter of faith.' Interpreters are divided as to the precise understanding of ἀρχηγος in Hebrews, though they commonly assert that ancient Greek myths of descent, such as those of Heracles and Orpheus, lie behind this imagery.<sup>1</sup> BDAG lists three possible meanings for ἀρχηγος: (1) "one who has a preeminent position, leader. ruler.. prince;" (2) "one who begins someth[ing] that is first in a series,

<sup>25</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 642-643.

<sup>26</sup> President Spencer W. Kimball, "[The Abundant Life](#)," *Ensign*, Oct. 1985.



('instigator' if with a negative connotation); and (3) "one who begins or originates," an 'originator' or founder.<sup>127</sup>

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil (2.14)

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that Jesus 'descended in suffering below that which man can suffer; or, in other words, suffered greater sufferings, and **was exposed to more powerful contradictions than any man can be**' (*Lectures on Faith* 5:2). Because Jesus knew more he felt more; he understood more; he suffered more; and he could be tempted more than any other person. It seems that the number and severity of the temptations that one experiences are in proportion to one's knowledge and perception. A person with greater capacity may be called on to endure greater temptations. On the other hand, the joys and the rewards for that same person are also greater... The foregoing passages of scripture show that Jesus denied himself of things that his mortal nature may have desired and yet were wrong for him; and he became spiritually strong as a result of that denial.<sup>28</sup>

### III. Christ's Faithfulness as the High Priest (Chapters 3-4)

#### A. Comparison to Moses and Jesus' Superiority (3.1-6)

For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house (Heb. 3.3)

The epistle to the Hebrews was **probably written to Jewish Christians who were struggling with the issue of the Law of Moses and its fulfillment in the gospel of Christ**. This epistle is an extended essay on the superiority of Christ and the gospel to Moses and the institutions of the Mosaic Law. The author emphasizes the superiority of Christ to angels (Heb. 1-2) and to Moses (Heb. 3), his superiority as a high priest to the Jewish high priests (Heb. 4-5), the superiority of his Melchizedek Priesthood to the priesthood of Aaron (Heb. 7), and the superiority of his sacrifice and covenant to those of the Mosaic Law (Heb. 8-9).<sup>29</sup>

Paul uses comparison in this argument. Keener explains:

Comparison (synkrisis) was central to much ancient argumentation; comparing one favorably with another who was already honorable would increase one's honor further. In many Jewish traditions Moses was the greatest person in history, and in others he was certainly one of the greatest (i.e., next to Abraham). Jewish and Christian writers used the argument that the builder was greater than what was made (v. 3) to note that the Creator was greater than his creation (as in v. 4). This writer identifies Jesus as the Creator. Ancient writers often developed arguments based on wordplays; this writer plays on two senses of "house": God's "household" (3:2) and a building (3:3-4).<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Eric Mason, [\*You Are a Priest Forever: Second Temple Jewish Messianism and the Priestly Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews \(Studies on the Text of the Desert of Judah\)\*](#), SBL Press, 2014, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> Robert J. Matthews, *Behold the Messiah*, Bookcraft, 1994, 254-255.

<sup>29</sup> Stephen E. Robinson, "[The Law after Christ](#)," *Ensign*, Sept. 1983.

<sup>30</sup> Keener, [Background](#), p. 644.



#### B. Warning against Unbelief and Entering God's Rest (3.7-19)

#### C. The Promise of Entering into God's Rest (4.1-11)

Entering into God's "rest" is a major theme of Hebrews chapter 4. The Lord defined what this is in D&C 84:

20 Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, **the power of godliness is manifest**. 21 And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh; 22 For without this no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live. 23 Now this **Moses plainly taught to the children of Israel** in the wilderness, and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God; 24 **But they hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence**; therefore, the Lord in his wrath, for his danger was kindled against them, swore that they should not enter into his rest while in the wilderness, **which rest is the fulness of his glory**. (D&C 84:20-24, emphasis added).

#### D. The Word of God and Its Discernment (4.12-13)

"All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4.13).

#### E. Jesus The Great High Priest (4.14-16)

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4.14-16).

"Let us hold fast our profession" (Heb. 4.14) could be translated also as "let us hold tight to the things that we confess about Jesus" or "let us stay true to our testimonies of Jesus!" (my translation).

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace" (Heb. 4.16).

The ark of the covenant symbolized God's throne in the Old Testament (e.g., 2 Sam 6:2; Ps 80:1; 99:1; Is 37:16; cf. Ps 22:3) and in the ancient Near East (where kings or deities were often portrayed as enthroned on winged figures). But the ark was unapproachable, secluded in the most holy part of the temple, which even the high priest could approach only once a year. Christ has opened full access to God to all his followers (10:19-20).<sup>31</sup>

### IV. Jesus, the Great High Priest (Chapters 5-6)

#### A. The Qualifications of a High Priest (5.1-4)

"no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God" (Heb. 5.4)

It is fascinating to see how the writer of Hebrews really followed the Old Testament law when it came to the succession of high priests. Back in their time, things were quite different in Palestine. The position of

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 645-646.

high priest became more of a political favor granted by the Romans.<sup>32</sup> But here's the thing: outside of Judea, this whole political influence wasn't really a concern. The writer actually puts a lot of emphasis on the system that God had appointed, as outlined in the Bible. It's interesting to see how their perspective on high priests was shaped by this divine system rather than the political landscape.

So, during the Second Temple Period, we see a fascinating mix of politics and religious leadership when it comes to the high priests. The powers that ruled Palestine in this period, in their political maneuvering, would sometimes appoint individuals to the position of high priest as a favor. Let me give you a couple of examples:

One particular appointment that caused significant turmoil was the installation of Menelaus as high priest in the 2nd century BC. Menelaus, a member of the Hellenistic Jewish community, secured the position through bribery and political maneuvering. His appointment was met with strong opposition from traditionalist Jews who viewed him as a symbol of Hellenistic influence and religious corruption. This sparked a series of conflicts and protests, with many devout Jews vehemently rejecting Menelaus' authority and practices.

The appointment of Menelaus as high priest led to a period of intense religious and political tensions within Judea, contributing to the larger context that eventually led to the Maccabean Revolt against the Seleucid Empire.

Another notable high priest that was appointed by the outside authority, in this case the Romans during their occupation of Israel, was Ananus ben Ananus. He held the position of high priest in Jerusalem around 62-63 CE and was the man who was responsible for executing James the brother of Jesus (also known as James the Just).<sup>33</sup> Now, Ananus's appointment didn't go over too well with the Jewish people. There was quite a bit of opposition and unrest surrounding his tenure.

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<sup>32</sup> The office, first conferred on Aaron by his brother Moses, was normally hereditary and for life. In the 2nd century BC, however, bribery led to several reappointments, and the last of the high priests were appointed by government officials or chosen by lot. According to tradition, 18 high priests served in Solomon's Temple (c. 960–586 BC) and 60 in the Second Temple (516 BC–AD 70). Since that time, there has been no Jewish high priest, for national sacrifice was permanently interrupted with the destruction of the Second Temple. High Priest, Britannica, accessed 7.16.23.

<sup>33</sup> Josephus's account of the death of James as follows:

Ananus, who, as we have told you already, took the high priesthood, was a bold man in his temper, and very insolent; he was also of the sect of the Sadducees, who are very rigid in judging offenders, above all the rest of the Jews, as we have already observed; when, therefore, Ananus was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity [to exercise his authority]. Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned: but as for those who seemed the most equitable of the citizens, and such as were the most uneasy at the breach of the laws, they disliked what was done; they also sent to the king [Agrippa], desiring him to send to Ananus that he should act so no more, for that what he had already done was not to be justified; nay, some of them went also to meet Albinus, as he was upon his journey from Alexandria, and informed him that it was not lawful for Ananus to assemble a Sanhedrin without his consent. Whereupon Albinus complied with what they said, and wrote in anger to Ananus, and threatened that he would bring him to punishment for what he had done; on which king Agrippa took the high priesthood from him, when he had ruled but three months, and made Jesus, the son of Damneus, high priest. Josephus. "20.9.1". *The Antiquities of the Jews*.

## B. Christ as the Perfect High Priest (5.5-10)

Though he were a Son, yet learned he **obedience** by the things which **he suffered** καίπερ ὢν υἱὸς ἔμαθεν ἀφ' ὧν **ἔπαθεν** τὴν **ὑπακοήν** (Heb. 5.8).

Classical Greek writers stressed learning through suffering, and the Old Testament and later Jewish wisdom traditions portray divine chastisement as a sign of God's love. The Greek paronomasia here, *emathen aph' hon epathen* "learned from the things he suffered," was already a common play on words in ancient literature. But the writer here challenges the Greek philosophic idea that the supreme God (with whom the writer in some sense identifies the Son—1:9; 3:3-4) was incapable of feeling, pain or true sympathy. Jesus' participation in human suffering qualified him to be the ultimate high priest.<sup>34</sup>

Elder Maxwell taught:

Suffering is a hard way to learn, but perhaps the only way for us to learn certain things, for deep insights do not come to an outsider; they come from being inside certain experiences. Obedience permits us to hear things we would not otherwise be able to listen to, because we would so easily be offended. In Proverbs we read that a wise reprover is heard only by 'an obedient ear.' (Proverbs 25:12.)<sup>35</sup>

And being made perfect, he became **the author** of eternal salvation unto all them **that obey** him καὶ τελειωθείς ἐγένετο τοῖς **ὑπακούουσιν** αὐτῷ πᾶσιν **αἴτιος** σωτηρίας αἰωνίου (Heb. 5.9).

The Septuagint applies the word used here for "made perfect" to the consecration of priests.<sup>36</sup>

"We hold the salvation from sin is obtainable only through obedience, and that while the door to the kingdom of God has been opened by the sanctified death and by the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ, no man may enter there except by his personal and voluntary application expressed in terms of obedience to the prescribed laws and ordinances of the Gospel. Christ 'became the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him.' (Heb. 5:9.)"<sup>37</sup>

Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5.10).

Christ was made a high priest after the order of Melchizedek sometime prior to the creation of this world. He was a god prior to the creation. Note that the author of Hebrews is pointing us to what we are to be doing, how we are to obtain. Note the invitation "to all that obey him" (Heb. 5.9), "ye ought to be teachers" (Heb. 5.12), "let us go on unto perfection" (Heb. 6.1). The purpose of this discourse, in my opinion, is an invitation for us to see Christ, who he is, what he has done, and follow him.

LeGrand Baker and Stephen Ricks, writing of this "order of Melchizedek," and how this played out in the early Israelite temple drama of the First Israelite Temple, write:

<sup>34</sup> Keener, [Background](#), p. 646.

<sup>35</sup> Neal A. Maxwell, [Wherefore, Ye Must Press Forward](#), Deseret Book, 1977, p. 44.

<sup>36</sup> Keener, [Background](#), p. 646.

<sup>37</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith, *Church History and Modern Revelation*, 4 vols. [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1946-1949], 2: 60.

It was of the utmost importance that the drama show that the king (and through him, his subjects) received all the empowering ordinances that would enable him to fulfill his premortal covenants. Therefore we find in Psalm 110 that he was ordained to “the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek.” That was necessary because legitimate kingship is a subset of legitimate priesthood. One cannot be a king unless he is first a priest. That is, he can have priesthood without kingship, but not kingship without priesthood. The king’s ordination enabled him to perform all of the rites, covenants, and sacrifices of Solomon’s Temple services.

In our ancient scriptures, there are only three places where we find references to the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek. The first is Psalm 110 where the Lord confers that priesthood upon Israel’s king. The second is the book of Hebrews, where Paul twice quotes Psalm 110 in references to the Savior’s priesthood (5:6 & 7:17), then refers to it again several other times.<sup>38</sup> The third is Alma 13:15-18, where Alma teaches Zeezrom about priesthood legitimacy.

In the first verse of Psalm 110, the words, “sit thou at my right hand,” was literally an invitation to the king to sit next to God, implicitly to sit upon the throne of God. The invitation was proffered here in conjunction with the ordination to the Melchizedek priesthood, but would not be realized until near the conclusion of the drama when the king would be crowned.<sup>39</sup>

Baker and Ricks continue, illustrating how the editors of the Hebrew Bible managed to scrub much of the evidence of Israel’s kings being both kings and priests. This was a manner or type of the real king, Jehovah, the pre-earth Jesus who will one day take his throne on the earth as king of kings. Jesus is both a king and a priest, and one of the purposes of the Epistle to the Hebrews is to invite us, as saints to collectively and individually follow Jesus on this path of becoming kings and priests, queens and priestesses after the order of Melchizedek. We are to sit on the right hand of God, “having been called to this holy calling” (Alma 13.5) on account of our faith, so that we “might enter into his rest” (Alma 13.6), that we might be “sanctified,” that our “garments (may be) washed through the blood of the Lamb” (Alma 13.11) so that we might become “pure and spotless before God” (Alma 13.12) and bring forth fruit and “enter into that rest” (Alma 13.13) which “rest is a fulness of his glory” (D&C 84.24).

#### The Rest of the Lord

Elder Craig Zwick taught:

Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–1985) taught: “The rest of the Lord, where mortals are concerned, is to gain a perfect knowledge of the divinity of the great latter-day work. [President Joseph F. Smith said,] ‘It means entering into the knowledge and love of God, having faith in his purpose and in his plan, to such an extent that we know we are right, and that we are not hunting for something else; we are not disturbed by every wind of doctrine, or by the cunning and craftiness of men who lie in wait to deceive.’ It is ‘rest from the religious turmoil of the world; from the cry that is going forth, here and there—lo, here is Christ; lo, there is Christ.’ ... The rest of the Lord, in eternity, is to inherit eternal life, to gain the fulness of the Lord’s glory.”<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> They are Hebrews 5.10, 6.20, and 7.11.

<sup>39</sup> LeGrand Baker and Stephen Ricks, [\*Who Shall Ascend to the Hill of the Lord? The Psalms in Israel's Temple Worship In the Old Testament and in the Book of Mormon\*](#), Eborn Books, 2010, p. 239-240.

<sup>40</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (1966), 633.

From this we understand that in this life “the rest of the Lord” comes as we increase our knowledge of, and faith in, the reality of Jesus Christ, even to the assurance that He lives and loves us. “The rest of the Lord” in eternity is entering into the presence of the Lord.<sup>41</sup>

#### C. Warning against Falling Away and Encouragement to Maturity (5.11-14)

11 Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. 12 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. 13 For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. 14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

The writer complains that his readers’ knowledge of the Bible is inadequate to follow the rest of his argument. But he insists that they must become more biblically informed if they wish to persevere—and he proceeds to give them the rest of his argument anyway (6:13–7:28). Many Greek writers used “much to say” to indicate how important their topic was. Even philosophers agreed that one must begin with simple matters before leading students to the more difficult; but they were not above complaining about their pupils’ slowness to learn. Greek moralists also used “milk” and “solid food” figuratively, contrasting basic and advanced instruction. The “elementary principles” (nasb) or “elementary truths” (niv) are the rudiments or basics (summarized in 6:1-2); Greek writers often applied the term to the alphabet. Some writers frequently reproved their readers in similar ways (“You should be teachers by now!”) to stir them to learn what they should already know.<sup>42</sup>

Brother Richard Anderson wrote:

Like the Corinthians, the Hebrews had to go back and relearn the 'first principles' at a time when their gospel growth should have been advanced (Heb. 5:12-14). They were 'dull of hearing' (Heb. 5:11), which shows that Paul had particular information that worried him. What were their problems? One was living the gospel, a problem common to most branches of the Church in the letters. But the long arguments of reconversion center around Jewish ritual. The Hebrews overstressed the Levitical priesthood that operated the temple and the daily sacrifices that were superseded by Christ's great sacrifice.<sup>43</sup>

#### D. Warnings and Exhortations (Heb. 6.1-8)

“tasted of the heavenly gift” (Heb. 6.4)

“If they shall fall away... they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame” (Heb. 6.6)

One day Joseph Smith and Isaac Behunin were in conversation about apostates who were threatening and harassing the Prophet. Brother Behunin said: “If I should leave this Church I would not do as those

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<sup>41</sup> W. Craig Zwick, “[Enter into the Rest of the Lord](#),” *Ensign*, Feb. 2012.

<sup>42</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 646-647.

<sup>43</sup> Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, Deseret Book, 1983, p. 195-196.

men have done: I would go to some remote place where Mormonism had never been heard of, settle down, and no one would ever learn that I knew anything about it.”

Joseph answered: “Brother Behunin, you don’t know what you would do. No doubt these men once thought as you do. Before you joined this Church you stood on neutral ground. When the gospel was preached, good and evil were set before you. You could choose either or neither. There were two opposite masters inviting you to serve them. When you joined this Church you enlisted to serve God. When you did that you left the neutral ground, and you never can get back on to it. Should you forsake the Master you enlisted to serve, it will be by the instigation of the evil one, and you will follow his dictation and be his servant.”<sup>44</sup>

Writing about this passage, Draper and Rhodes explain:

The verb παραπίπτω (*parapiptō*), literally “to fall beside,” which is only found once in the New Testament in this passage, has the sense “to fail to follow through on a commitment, fall away, commit apostasy.” The force of the word is on the extent of the moving away; that is, it suggests a total break from the relationship. In a religious context, what the individual breaks is likely the covenantal bond with the Lord. *Parapiptō* can, therefore, be translated as “fall into apostasy.” Its form here as an aorist participle reinforces the idea of the completeness of the apostasy with its sundering of all connections with the Father and Son.

**to renew them again unto repentance / to restore them again to repentance:** With this phrase, the author finally notes what it is that is impossible for a once-enlightened person to be. The verb ἀνακαίνιζω (*anakainizō*) means “to restore” in the sense of returning something to a previous state... Here, with the use of the preposition εἰς (*eis*), “to, into,” it connotes entering into a state of rightness with God.

The way the author constructs this section leaves open the question, For whom is it impossible to make restoration to repentance? There are three possibilities. First, it could refer to members or leaders in the congregation who simply lack the power or influence to repent. Second, it could refer to God’s unwillingness to forgive the recalcitrant and rebellious soul. Admittedly, the Father has the ability to forgive any and all, but he has made it clear that he will forgive whom and only whom he chooses (D&C 64:10; compare Rom. 9:18; and D&C 56:14). For example, the wilderness generation so provoked him that he barred them from entrance into the Holy Land (3:7–4:13). Further, Esau, having sold his birthright, though his remorse was great, found that God would not allow the birthright to be restored (12:17). So too those who abuse the Son will find the Father barring heaven against them. Third, this section could refer to the person himself who has become hate filled and hardened to the point where repentance is impossible. The continual rebellion and hard-heartedness of the wilderness generation cost them entrance into the Holy Land. Under no circumstances would they yield to God. It is the same with those whom the author has in mind. Their hard-heartedness will not allow them under any circumstance to accept any divine help. It is the definitiveness of their rejection that makes repentance impossible. By repudiating the Lord, they have rejected his plan. Since there is no other means or way to salvation— and reliance and unity with Christ are demanded—repentance is

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<sup>44</sup> Daniel Tyler, in “Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith,” *Juvenile Instructor*, Aug. 15, 1892, pp. 491–92; punctuation and grammar modernized.

impossible for these souls. Though the second and third possibilities both have merit, insights from the Restoration suggest it is the latter of these two that best fits.<sup>45</sup>

“That which beareth thorns and briars is rejected” (Heb. 6.8)

The nouns ἄκανθα (akantha), “a thorny plant,” and τρίβολος (tribolos), “a thistle,” stand in contrast to the βοτάνη εὐθετος (botanē euthetos), “useful edible plants,” referred to above. The author’s image is not of weeds in general but those that, due to their spines and thorns, offer the greatest threat to removal. Since they provide no sustenance, they are ἀδόκιμος (adokimos), “worthless.”<sup>46</sup>

This is, to me, reminiscent of God’s curse upon Adam and Eve:

Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field (Gen. 3.18).

Hebrew text: וְאָכַלְתָּ אֶת-עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה תִצְמִיחַ לְךָ יִרְדָּה וְיִקָּץ

Greek: ἄκάνθας καὶ τριβόλους ἀνατελεῖ σοι καὶ φάγη τὸν χόρτον τοῦ ἀγροῦ

The thorns and thistles of this fallen world are what we are left with should we reject the heavenly gift, fall away, and crucify the Son of God to ourselves. This opens up the question of sin, the question of how far can one go before the Atonement will not be efficacious in our lives (I take the position that the Atonement is infinite, but that we are the only thing that can limit it, in other words, God cannot help me if I do not want him to) as well as questions about the distinctions between the “unforgivable” and the “unpardonable” sin. For those interested in a deeper dive into these questions, I would recommend Draper and Rhodes’ work on the subject.<sup>47</sup>

E. Encouragement for Faithfulness (Heb. 6.9-20)

“For God is not unrighteous to forget your work” (Heb. 6.10)

“Be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Heb. 6.12)

That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us (Heb. 6.18).

In Hebrews 6.18, the author refers to δύο πραγμάτων ἀμεταθέτων "two immutable things" as an anchor of hope for believers. The specific nature of these "two immutable things" is a subject of interpretation and has been understood in different ways. Here are a couple of possible interpretations:

<sup>45</sup> Richard Draper and Michael Rhodes, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, BYU Studies, 2021, p. 320-322.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 324.

<sup>47</sup> Draper and Rhodes’ “Analysis and summary” and “Excursus on Unforgivable and Unpardonable Sins” is a valuable contribution to this subject. See pages 325-334 in their work *Epistle to the Hebrews*. They conclude their analysis with this: The Father and the Son will forgive only on condition of repentance. Repentance means a person changing his or her behavior from destructive to constructive. To forgive one who insists on being destructive—on thwarting God and working against his plan even to the point of willingly cutting down the Lord or his servants—would prove harmful in that it would encourage these hardened apostates in their activities. The two sins of shedding innocent blood and denying the Holy Ghost are continuous and outward manifestations of an inward condition. That condition is a refusal to repent no matter the cost. Therefore, because such a person refuses to repent, the Lord refuses to forgive him or her (see Mosiah 2:36–39).



1. God's Promise and Oath: One common interpretation is that the "two immutable things" refer to God's promise and oath. In the preceding verses (Hebrews 6.13-17), the author emphasizes God's promise to bless and multiply Abraham's descendants, and the confirmation of that promise through His oath. These two elements, God's promise and oath, are seen as unchangeable and reliable, serving as the foundation of believers' hope.
2. Jesus' Divine Nature and His Mediatorial Role: Another interpretation suggests that the "two immutable things" refer to the divine nature of Jesus and His role as the Mediator between God and humanity. This interpretation connects with the preceding verses that discuss Jesus as the forerunner who has become a high priest forever (Hebrews 6.20). The unchangeable and dependable nature of Jesus, being both divine and the eternal mediator, serves as the anchor of hope for believers.
3. God's promises to Abraham and the "one priest like unto Melchizedek." One scholar wrote:

Although God swore more than these two promises, the writer emphasizes here the two he has just mentioned: the one to Abraham and the one to the priest like Melchizedek. Greek philosophers believed that the gods were immutable, unchangeable; most Jewish people believed that their God was absolute and unchangeable in his character, yet he dealt with human beings as they were (Ps 18:25-26). The oath is thus important, although both Jews and Greek philosophers believed that the one who was truly God (as opposed to the mythical antics of Greek gods) did not lie.<sup>48</sup>

Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec (Heb. 6.19-20)

Marion G. Romney taught:

By making their calling and election sure, the Saints were to gain entrance ". . . into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." To this fact Peter bore powerful witness. He reviewed his experience on the Mount of Transfiguration with James and John, where, he says, they heard the voice of ". . . God the Father . . ." declare of Jesus, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Then by way of instruction that such an experience did not of itself make one's calling and election sure, he added, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy, . . ." (Ibid., 1:11, 17, 19.)

Speaking on Sunday, the 14th of May, 1843, the Prophet Joseph Smith took this statement of Peter for his text. From the Prophet's sermon I quote:

"Notwithstanding the apostle exhorts them to add to their faith, virtue knowledge, temperance, etc., yet he exhorts them to make their calling and election sure. And though they had heard an audible voice from heaven bearing testimony that Jesus was the Son of God, yet he says we have a more sure word of prophecy. . . Now wherein could they have a more sure word of prophecy than to hear the voice of God saying, This is my beloved Son, etc." Answering his own question, the Prophet continued "Though they might hear the voice of God and know that Jesus was the

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<sup>48</sup> Keener, [Background](#), p. 648.

Son of God, this would be no evidence that their election and calling was made sure, that they had part with Christ, and were joint heirs with Him. They then would want that more sure word of prophecy, that they were sealed in the heavens and had the promise of eternal life in the kingdom of God. Then, ***having this promise sealed unto them, it was an anchor to the soul, sure and steadfast.*** Though the thunders might roll and lightnings flash, and earthquakes bellow, and war gather thick around, yet this hope and knowledge would support the soul in every hour of trial, trouble and tribulation."

Then speaking directly to his listeners, the Prophet continued:

". . . I would exhort you to go on and continue to call upon God until you make your calling and election sure for yourselves, by obtaining this more sure word of prophecy, . . ." (*History of the Church*, 5: 388-389.)<sup>49</sup>

A week later, May 21, 1843, the Prophet preached another sermon on the same text, from which I quote:

"We have no claim in our eternal compact, in relation to eternal things, unless our actions and contracts and all things tend to this end. But after all this, you have got to make your calling and election sure. If this injunction would lie largely on those to whom it was spoken," he said, "how much more those of the present generation!" And then in conclusion, "It is one thing to be on the mount and hear the excellent voice, etc., etc., and another to hear the voice declare to you, You have a part and lot in that kingdom." (*Ibid.*, 5, 403.)

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<sup>49</sup> Marion G. Romney, *Conference Report*, 1965, p. 20-23, emphasis added.