

Hebrews 7-13 Ep 227



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 7 – 13

Themes of Hebrews 7-13

In Hebrews chapters 7-13, several main themes emerge, building upon the foundation laid in earlier chapters. These themes include:

1. **The Superiority of Christ's Priesthood:** The author of Hebrews continues to emphasize the superiority of the Melchizedek Priesthood as compared to the Levitical priesthood that the Jewish converts to Christianity were accustomed to. Chapters 7-10 specifically focus on how Jesus serves as the Perfect and Great High Priest, offering a better and eternal sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. His priesthood is after the order of Melchizedek, prefigured in the Old Testament and discussed in Alma 13.
2. **The Perseverance of Faith (πίστις - *pistis*):** The book of Hebrews encourages believers to persevere in their faith despite trials and challenges. Chapters 10-12 particularly emphasize the need for endurance, drawing examples from the faithfulness of Old Testament figures and emphasizing the ultimate example of Christ's endurance.
3. **The Sufficiency of Christ's Sacrifice:** Chapters 9-10 underscore the sufficiency and effectiveness of Christ's sacrificial death. Unlike the repeated animal sacrifices of the Mosaic Law outlined in the Hebrew Bible, Jesus offered Himself once for all in his perfect Atonement.
4. **The Call to Maturity:** Hebrews 5:12-14 (discussed last week) introduced the theme of spiritual maturity, which continues in chapters 7-13. The author urges the recipients of the letter to move beyond basic teachings and develop a deeper understanding of the Word of God, becoming teachers and leaders in their own right.
5. **Warning Against Apostasy:** Throughout these chapters, there are strong warnings against falling away from the faith (apostasy). The author cautions against drifting away, hardening hearts, or willfully sinning, underscoring the danger of turning away from the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
6. **The Heroes of Faith:** In chapter 11, often called the "Hall of Faith," the author presents a list of Old Testament figures who demonstrated extraordinary faith in God. A similar message can be seen in Mormon's abridgement of Ether, as found in Ether 12. Hebrews 11 highlights their faithfulness and serves as an inspiration for the readers to persevere in their own faith journey.

7. The Importance of Discipline and Correction: In chapter 12, the concept of God's discipline and correction is explored. Just as a loving parent disciplines their child for growth and improvement, God disciplines His children for their spiritual well-being.
8. Call to Worship and Thanksgiving: Hebrews 13 begins with an exhortation to continue in brotherly love and to practice hospitality. It then emphasizes the importance of worshiping God with grateful hearts, acknowledging Him as the unchanging source of grace and mercy.

Overall, these themes in Hebrews chapters 7-13 highlight the centrality of Christ's work, the necessity of faith and perseverance, the call to spiritual maturity, and the importance of maintaining a steadfast commitment to the truth of the Gospel. The letter encourages believers to draw near to God, embrace His promises, and live faithfully in light of Christ's Perfect Atonement.

Hebrews 7-13

Outline

I. The Priesthood of Melchizedek (Chapter 7)

A. Melchizedek's encounter with Abraham (Heb. 7.1-10)

“Melchizedek, king of Salem” (Heb. 7.1)

The names Melchizedek and Salem suggest the uniqueness of the king of Salem and his people. In fact, the very name Melchizedek consists of the two Hebrew words *malkî* ('king') and *sedeq* ('righteousness'), implying the king of Salem's faith in God-'My king is righteousness.'¹ Similarly, the Apostle Paul interpreted Melchizedek as 'King of righteousness' (Heb. 7:2). Salem, the name of Melchizedek's land or city, may mean 'peace' or 'peaceful.' The Bible Dictionary in the LDS edition of the Bible identifies Salem as Jerusalem. Biblical text discloses that Melchizedek was the righteous leader of a group of people who earned a reputation for peace and stability. Thus, in the midst of violent and chaotic times dominated by warring tribal factions, Melchizedek and Salem indeed appear unique.¹

ἀπάτωρ ἀμήτωρ ἀγενεαλόγητος μήτε ἀρχὴν ἡμερῶν μήτε ζωῆς τέλος “Without father, without mother, without descent, neither beginning of days, nor end of life” (Heb. 7.3)

Now, the world has commented upon that very greatly, and they have concluded because of this reading, that Melchizedek was not born in the world like other men, that he had no father or mother. But that is not the proper reading. And they have applied the same thing to Elijah, due to the fact that his was somewhat a mysterious nature.²

“Abideth a priest continually” (Heb. 7.3)

¹ Dennis A. Wright, " 'None Were Greater': A Restoration View of Melchizedek," *Ensign*, Feb. 1998.

² Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3 vols., Bookcraft, 1954-1956, 2: 102. He also explained: “Many Christian teachers have been greatly puzzled because of the reference in the Book of Hebrews to Melchizedek. Bible commentators have scratched their heads and reached false conclusions trying to solve the mystery. It was not Melchizedek who was without father and without mother and without beginning of days or end of life, but it was the priesthood which he held.” See [DOS](#) 3:82.

The writer's point is that Melchizedek (and thus the one who has inherited his priesthood—5:6) is greater than Abraham and thus greater than Levi, for Abraham is greater than Levi. Seeking to get around this argument, later rabbis said that God withdrew the priesthood from Melchizedek (for blessing Abram before blessing God) and gave it to Abraham in Psalm 110:4; but Psalm 110 clearly refers to the ultimate priest-king who would rule over the nations, not to Abraham. Like Philo, the writer of Hebrews believes that the perfect priest is eternal; but this writer can prove his case from Genesis 14 (or even better, from Ps 110 on Jewish premises about the future Messiah and the resurrection of the dead).³

The argument here the author is making is that the Melchizedek Priesthood is superior to the Levitical Priesthood. This is based on the author's theory that Levi was in the loins of Abraham when Abraham paid tithes (Gen. 14.20)⁴ to Melchizedek following his battle with the kings as detailed in Genesis 14.

B. The superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood (verses 11-19)

μετατιθεμένης γὰρ τῆς ἱερωσύνης ἐξ ἀνάγκης καὶ νόμου μετάθεσις γίνεται.
ἐφ' ὃν γὰρ λέγεται ταῦτα φυλῆς ἑτέρας μετέσχηκεν ἀφ' ἧς οὐδεὶς προσέσχηκεν τῷ θυσιαστηρίῳ.

12 For the priesthood having been changed, *out of necessity also*, a change of the law is achieved, 13 for he of whom these things are said in *another tribe has had a part*, from which no one has ever officiated at the altar. (Heb. 7.12-13, my translation).

The prepositional phrase ἐξ ἀνάγκης (ex anangkēs), “out of necessity, necessarily,” emphasizes that a change in priesthood logically requires a change in the law and is thus translated “must” in our Rendition. Since, from a Latter-day Saint perspective, each priesthood order administers specific ordinances and oversees certain laws and doctrines according to the keys it holds, a change in priesthood means that there will be some modification or alterations of the laws and practices it controls. The move from the Levitical to the Melchizedek order of the priesthood meant profound changes to the Mosaic law. Some of these changes—such as the cessation of blood sacrifices and much of the Levitical temple rites—were sweeping... The verbs μετέχω (metechō), “to share in” or “to belong to,” and προσέχω (prosechō), “apply oneself to” or “to officiate at,” are both found here in the perfect tense. The use of this tense highlights the fact that never has one from another tribe ever officiated in Levitical sacrifices. The author makes this point to stress that *a different kind of priest must arise*, totally unlike those serving in Levitical capacity. The problem the author is addressing here is whether Jesus, born into the tribe of Judah, possessed any priesthood at all, let alone a superior one. According to the Mosaic law, only those of the tribe of Levi could hold the priesthood (Gen. 49:5–7; Ex. 28:1–4; Num. 1:47–54). Taking the biblical statements as found in Exodus 30:21 and Leviticus 6:18, 22; 7:34–36, many Jews understood that the Levitical Priesthood would stand forever. Therefore, in their view, Jesus had no claim on priesthood authority. The author of Hebrews picks up on this and, in this section, seeks to justify the Christian position.⁵

³ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, IVP Academic, 2014, p. 649.

⁴ Under Old Testament law, the tithes went to the descendants of Levi, who was a descendant of Abraham (e.g., Num 18:26; 2 Chron 31:4-6; Neh 10:37-38; 13:5, 12); but Abraham tithed to someone else. Keener, *Background*, p. 649.

⁵ Richard Draper and Michael Rhodes, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, BYU Studies, 2021, p. 382-383, emphasis added.

ἀθέτησις μὲν γὰρ γίνεται προαγούσης ἐντολῆς διὰ τὸ αὐτῆς ἀσθενὲς καὶ ἀνωφελές

For there is verily a **disannulling** of the commandment **going before** for the **weakness** and **unprofitableness** thereof. (Heb. 7.18 KJV)

For there is an **abrogation** of the former commandment because of its **weakness** and **uselessness** (Heb. 7.18 Draper & Rhodes translation)

Draper and Rhodes offer the following commentary:

The noun ἀθέτησις (athetēsis) denotes not only setting something aside but also canceling or repealing it. Because the English noun “abrogation” denotes effectively dispensing with or abolishing a law or statute, we use it in our Rendition. This use of the word is important. The law was at one time valid and therefore had to be obeyed, or unwanted consequences followed (2:2). Once the governing priesthood was changed, however, God abrogated the old law, and it became invalid as a means of drawing people closer to Jehovah. The adjective ἀσθενής (asthenēs), “weak, powerless,” denotes something that is ineffective because of its inherent limitations or deficiencies. The adjective ἀνωφελής (anōphelēs), “useless,” denotes something that has absolutely no value. Both of these adjectives we translate as neuter nouns, yielding “weakness and uselessness.” The author is using very strong and perhaps even exaggerated ideas here to make his point. “With the inauguration of Christ’s priesthood comes not simply as an amendment of the Law, but its definitive ‘abrogation’ (ἀθέτησις, athetēsis).”⁶

C. Jesus as a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (verses 20-28)

He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. (Heb. 7.25)

Jesus pleads the cause of the Twelve-and all the saints-in the courts above. He is their Mediator, Advocate, and Intercessor. He makes intercession for them, because they have forsaken the world and come unto him; he advocates their cause, for their cause is his cause and they have received his gospel; he performs a divine service of mediation, reconciling fallen man to his Maker, because the fallen ones choose now to associate with those who are not of this world. Jesus prays, thus, not for the world, but for those who have kept his commandments; who have reconciled themselves to God through faith and repentance; who are preparing themselves for an abode with him and his Father. And his interceding petitions are always available for all men, if they will but believe his word and obey his law.⁷

Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. (Heb. 7.27)

High priests did not directly offer up the daily offerings, but they were responsible for the priestly service that did offer them. Fire was to burn on the altar continually; Israel’s sacrifices were offered day after day; priests offered daily morning and evening sacrifices on behalf of the whole nation in the temple. The writer may be conflating the duties of the whole priesthood

⁶ Draper and Rhodes, *Hebrews*, p. 393.

⁷ Elder Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, 4 vols. Deseret Book, 1979-81, 4:111.

with the duties of the high priest on the Day of Atonement, thus stressing the necessity of repetition in the Levitical cultus. Or he might mean “daily” hyperbolically for “continually,” year after year. Under the law, only on the Day of Atonement did the high priest make an offering for his sins and then for those of the nation (Lev 16:6, 11, 15-16).⁸

II. The New Covenant and Christ's Priesthood (Chapter 8)

A. Jesus' superior ministry as the High Priest (verses 1-6)

ἄς γὰρ ἀρχιερεὺς εἰς τὸ προσφέρειν δῶρά τε καὶ θυσίας καθίσταται· ὅθεν ἀναγκαῖον ἔχειν τι καὶ τοῦτον ὃ προσενέγκη. εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἦν ἐπὶ γῆς οὐδ' ἂν ἦν ἱερεὺς ὄντων τῶν ἱερέων τῶν προσφερόντων κατὰ τὸν νόμον τὰ δῶρα. For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer. For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: (Heb. 8.3-4 KJV)

Now every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices, therefore it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer. 4 So if he were on earth, he would not even be a priest, since there are already priests who offer gifts according to the law. (Heb. 8.3-4, Draper & Rhodes trans.)

One of the major tasks of the Levitical priest was to offer gifts and sacrifices to Jehovah in behalf of a person or the people (Lev. 1–5). The ἀρχιερεὺς (*archiereus*), “high priest,” not only oversaw that these tasks were properly done but could also do them himself. The power for a priest to legitimately perform service came from being appointed (καθίστημι, *kathistēmi*, “to appoint”), the verb denoting the act of assigning someone to a position of authority... The coordinating conjunction ὅθεν (*hothen*), “therefore,” marks “the basis for an action” and here emphasizes the reason for that action. The neuter adjective ἀναγκαῖον (*anankaion*) with ἐστὶν (*estin*) means “it is necessary to” and denotes an action that must be done. In this case, it refers to having a sacrificial offering. The idea expressed in the phrase is that since the purpose of the appointment of priests is to make sacrificial offerings for the people, Christ’s appointment held no exception. The author does not specify what that offering is here but has already done so in Heb. 7:27. He will do so again in 9:14. The noun “high priest” is not in the Greek text but is intimated by the accusative pronoun τοῦτον (*touton*), “this one,” and therefore is inserted in our Rendition for clarity. Noteworthy is a point from grammar. The author, in describing the offerings of the Levitical priests, uses the present infinitive προσφέρειν (*prospherein*), “to make offerings,” showing the continuing nature of their work, but when he refers to the Savior’s offering, he uses the aorist tense προσενέγκη (*prosenengkē*), “made an offering,” showing that the Savior’s offering was singular, sufficient, and definitive. Further, the priests offer θυσίας (*thysias*), “sacrifices”—note the plural—where the Savior offers τι (*ti*), “something,” in the indefinite singular: himself, once for all.⁹

B. The superiority of the New Covenant (verses 7-13)

And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. (Heb. 8.11)

⁸ Keener, [Background](#), p. 650.

⁹ Draper and Rhodes, [Hebrews](#), p. 428-429.

We read of this in the Doctrine and Covenants:

... until I have completed my work, which shall be cut short in righteousness— Until all shall know me, who remain, even from the least unto the greatest, and shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, and shall see eye to eye, and shall lift up their voice, and with the voice together sing this new song, saying:

The Lord hath brought again Zion;

The Lord hath redeemed his people, Israel,

According to the election of grace,

Which was brought to pass by the faith

And covenant of their fathers. (D&C 84.97b-99)

Seeing eye to eye and singing a new song in unison is a reminder of the early Christian prayer circles, whereby Christians prayed to have the heavens opened and receive revelation from God.

Commenting on this verse, Elder McConkie taught:

After Israel had been subject to the law for nearly 900 years, the Lord, through Jeremiah, promised to make a new and better covenant with them, a gospel covenant, a covenant which would bring them into his presence so that all might know him. In using this prophecy of Jeremiah to show that Christ brought the new gospel covenant, Paul is doing the same thing in principle as the Elders (of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) do in quoting Biblical passages about the restoration of the gospel in the latter-days... That the glorious and full effect of the covenant promised through Jeremiah will come to pass during the millennium, is shown by the following statement of the Prophet about making one's calling and election sure: 'This principle ought (in its proper place) to be taught, for God hath not revealed anything to Joseph, but what he will make known unto the Twelve, and even the least saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them, for the day must come when no man need say to his neighbor, Know ye the Lord; for all shall know him (who remain) from the least to the greatest. How is this to be done? It is to be done by this sealing power, and the other Comforter spoken of, which will be manifest by revelation.' (*Teachings*, p. 149.)¹⁰

In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away. (Heb. 8.12)

The writer undoubtedly says “about to disappear” because the temple service had not been directly discontinued by Jesus’ exaltation, but it was at that time on the verge of disappearing. If, as appears likely, this letter was written in the late 60s AD, many in the Diaspora recognized that the Romans might soon crush Jerusalem and the temple. Apart from a few groups not very dependent on the Jerusalem temple (such as the Essenes), most Palestinian Jews were forced to make major readjustments in cultic practice after the temple was destroyed in AD 70.¹¹

¹⁰ McConkie, [Doctrinal New Testament Commentary](#), 3 vols. Bookcraft, 1965-1973, 3: 180.

¹¹ Keener, [Background](#), p. 651.

III. The Earthly and Heavenly Tabernacles (Chapter 9)

A. Description of the earthly tabernacle and its limitations (verses 1-10)

Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat; of which ***we cannot now speak particularly***. (Heb. 9.4-5, emphasis added)

The writer follows the Old Testament carefully in his description in 9:1-10, not conforming it at all to the modifications of his day. (Verses 4-5 were no longer true in his own day, elements having been removed.¹² In many Jewish traditions, they would be restored in the end times.)¹³

F.F. Bruce adds this insight:

What our author would have had to say about the parabolic significance of the Cherubim ... we can only imagine ... He leaves us with the impression that he could have enlarged at some length on their symbolism if he had chosen to do so. We do not know how to account for this failure to describe them, especially as all other articles connected with the tabernacle are minutely described. Whether the form of the Cherubim was so generally known as to make the description unnecessary, or whether the description was purposely concealed, as among the secrets of Jehovah, cannot now be known.¹⁴

Perhaps the reason the author of Hebrews 9 mentions that *περὶ ὧν οὐκ ἔστιν νῦν λέγειν κατὰ μέρος* “of which we cannot now speak particularly” about this fact of the cherubims shadowing the mercy seat is that ***these are images that were too sacred*** for him to elaborate. One author shares this insight:

Christ and the Church were also united in “marriage” (Matt 25; Rom 7:4; 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:31–32; Rev 19:7–9; 21:2). Since Christ replaced Yahweh as Israel’s “Husband,” and the Church replaced Israel as his “Bride,” the symbolism of the Embracing Cherubim must also have been applied to them. This helps to explain why Paul could speak of Adam’s marriage to Eve, Christ’s marriage to the Church, and man’s marriage to a wife as forms of the same “Great Mystery” (Eph 5:31–33), for all follow the same heavenly pattern, and all became equivalent through their common denominator, the symbolism of the Embracing Cherubim. This is also why the Temple Mystery in Hebrews 9:5 was still presided over by the statues in the Holy of Holies, and why the Church Fathers would continued to apply their meaning to the wedding of Christ and the

¹² Orthodox commentators in fact insisted that the Holy of Holies in the Second Temple was completely empty. According to a prophecy in Jeremiah (3:16–17), the Ark from the destroyed First Temple was never to be replaced, since a soon-to-be-redeemed Jerusalem would herself become Yahweh’s “Throne.” Lamentations 2:1 was also understood to mean that Yahweh had completely abandoned his Ark, thanks to the continuing sins of Israel. Yet 2 Maccabees 2:4 records a legend that the prophet Jeremiah had actually hidden the Ark in a cave, and that God was shielding it from the world until it could return to the Temple in the Messianic Days. R. Samuel thus concluded in the Talmud that five things were lacking in the Second Temple: the Shekhinah, the Spirit of Prophecy, the fire, the Urim and Thummim, and the Ark—with its famous Cherubim standing above the Mercy Seat. See: Eugene Seach, [A Great Mystery: The Secret of the Jerusalem Temple: The Embracing Cherubim and At-One-Ment with the Divine](#), Gorgias Press, 2008, p. 6.

¹³ Keener, [Background](#), p. 652.

¹⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Grand Rapids, 1964, p. 191.

Church... But perhaps most illuminating of all is the way in which the entire New Testament culminates in a heavenly vision of the Feast of Tabernacles and a revelation of the Sacred Marriage, which is taking place behind the opened veil.¹⁵

8 By this the Holy Spirit was making it clear that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been revealed while the outer section of the tent still existed. 9 This was a symbol pointing to the then-present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices they were offering could not perfect the worshiper with respect to his conscience, 10 since they are only concerned with food, drink, various washings, and external regulations imposed until the time of reformation. (Heb. 9.8-10 Draper & Rhodes trans.)

The problem with the rites of the old covenant was that they never prepared the participants to enter into the Father's glory because they did not have the power to change the conscience of the individuals... The author emphasizes that the participants in the sacrificial rituals went away still somewhat troubled in the conscience because they sensed the ritual, having to be done over and over, had brought no real change in their lives.¹⁶

B. Christ's role as the perfect sacrifice and High Priest (verses 11-28)

But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building (Heb. 9.11).

Elder Holland taught:

Every one of us has times when we need to know things will get better. Moroni spoke of it in the Book of Mormon as "hope for a better world." (Ether 12.4) For emotional health and spiritual stamina, everyone needs to be able to look forward to some respite, to something pleasant and renewing and hopeful, whether that blessing be near at hand or still some distance ahead. It is enough just to know we can get there, that however measured or far away, there is the promise of "good things to come."

My declaration is that this is precisely what the gospel of Jesus Christ offers us, especially in times of need. There *is* help. There *is* happiness. There really *is* light at the end of the tunnel. It is the Light of the World, the Bright and Morning Star, the "light that is endless, that can never be darkened." (John 8.12; Rev. 22.16; Mosiah 16.9) It is the very Son of God Himself. In loving praise far beyond Romeo's reach, we say, "What light through yonder window breaks?" It is the return of hope, and Jesus is the Sun.¹⁷ To any who may be struggling to see that light and find that hope, I say: Hold on. Keep trying. God loves you. Things will improve. Christ comes to you in His "more excellent ministry" with a future of "better promises." He is your "high priest of good things to come... You keep walking. You keep trying. There is help and happiness ahead—a lot of it... You keep your chin up. It will be all right in the end. Trust God and believe in good things to come."¹⁸

For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. (Heb. 9.16)

¹⁵ Seach, [A Great Mystery](#), p. 135-136.

¹⁶ Draper & Rhodes, *Hebrews*, p. 468.

¹⁷ See William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, act 2, scene 2, lines 2–3.

¹⁸ Elder Holland, "[An High Priest of Good Things to Come](#)," October 1999 Conference.

Bruce R. McConkie taught:

In legal usage, a testator is one who leaves a valid will or testament at his death. The will or testament is the written document wherein the testator provides for the disposition of his property. As used in the gospel sense, a testament is a covenant. Jesus is the Mediator of the new covenant or testament, that is of the gospel which came to replace the law of Moses. (Heb. 9:15; 12:24; D. & C. 107:19.)

Paul mixed these legal and gospel definitions to teach a basic doctrine. Speaking of Christ's death, and the gifts in effect willed to men in and through that death, he said: 'For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.' (Heb. 9:16-17.) In other words, Christ had to die to bring salvation. The testament or covenant of salvation came in force because of the atonement worked out in connection with that death. Christ is the Testator. His gift, as would be true of any testator, cannot be inherited until his death. Christ died that salvation might come; without his death, he could not have willed either immortality or eternal life to men.¹⁹

Robert Millet wrote:

Like his Master, Joseph Smith also shed his blood in order that the final testament, the reestablishment of the new covenant, might be in full effect (see Heb. 9:16). Just prior to his death, the **Prophet Joseph** was reported to have remarked:

'I am tired, I have been mobbed, I have suffered so much. Some of the brethren think they can carry this work out better than I can, far better. I have asked the Lord to take me out of this world. I have stood all I can. I have to seal my testimony to this generation with my blood. I have to do it, for this work will never progress until I am gone, for the testimony is of no force until the testator is dead. People little know who I am when they talk about me, and they never will know until they see me weighed in the balance in the kingdom of God. Then they will know who I am, see me as I am. I dare not tell them, and they do not know me' (Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, in *They Knew the Prophet*, comp. Hyrum and Helen Mae Andrus, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1974, pp. 26-27).²⁰

So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. (Heb. 9:28)

The author's point here is that just as people die only once (a commonplace even of Greek classical literature, though Plato taught reincarnation), Christ had to offer. Although Josephus and probably some other Jewish thinkers dabbled with the language of reincarnation in Plato's writings (in Josephus's case, seeking to make the Pharisaic belief in resurrection intelligible to Greeks), the vast majority of first-century Judeans expected instead one death, then resurrection and judgment (the sequence of the latter two varied in different Jewish accounts). Like the Old Testament (Ezek 18:21-32), Jewish people often felt that death was the cutoff point for

¹⁹ Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. Bookcraft, 1966, 785.

²⁰ Robert L. Millet, "[Joseph Smith among the Prophets](#)," *Ensign*, June 1994.

judgment. (Thus a late-first-century rabbi warned disciples to repent one day before death; those being executed should say, “May my death atone for all my sins” [but cf. Ps 49:7-9, 15]; those who were dying often expected to be judged immediately—e.g., the story of Johanan ben Zakkai’s pious fear when he was on his deathbed; one tradition said that the righteous were escorted by good angels and the wicked by evil ones; etc. But other Jewish traditions did allow for temporary punishments that expiated one’s remaining sins: the view that the corpse’s decomposition helped atone for sin, the placing of a rock on a coffin to symbolize the execution of one who died before being executed, and the view that no Israelite could spend more than a year in Gehenna. These views of posthumous expiation have no clear parallel in the Old or New Testament.) This writer follows the frequent Jewish and unanimous New Testament consensus (among those sources that comment on the question) that death ended one’s opportunity for reconciliation with God.²¹

IV. The Superiority of Jesus’ Sacrifice (Chapter 10)

A. The inadequacy of the Old Testament sacrifices (verses 1-18)

1 For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. (Heb. 10.1-2 KJV)

1 Now since the law is but a shadow of good things to come and not the actual form of these things, it can never, by the same sacrifices continually offered year after year, perfect those who come to worship.

2 Otherwise would not the sacrifices have ceased being made? For the worshipers would have no longer had a consciousness of their sins, having been cleansed once for all. (Heb. 10.1-2 Draper & Rhodes trans.)

Draper and Rhodes summarize Hebrews 10.1-2: “The author’s point is that if the sacrifices actually worked to make one whole, their repeal would have been unnecessary.”²²

3 On the contrary, in those sacrifices there was a yearly reminder of their sins, 4 because it is impossible to remove sins by the blood of bulls and goats. 5 So when Christ came into the world, he said, “You did not want a sacrifice and an offering, but you prepared a body for me. 6 You did not delight in burnt offerings and sin offerings. 7 Then I said, ‘See, I have come—in a papyrus scroll it has been written about me—to do your will, O God.’” [LXX Ps. 39:7–9; KJV Ps. 40:6–8] (Heb. 10.3-7 Draper & Rhodes trans.)

This phrase points to an unknown but prerecorded prophecy. The noun βιβλίον (biblion) denotes a papyrus scroll. The author likely had the Pentateuch in mind but could have thought in terms specific to the scroll comprising Deuteronomy, since it contained the laws governing kingship. The particle ἰδοῦ (idou), “behold, lo, see,” is used to draw attention to what follows. Here it emphasizes the Lord’s determination to do the Father’s will no matter the cost.²³

²¹ Keener, [Background](#), p. 654.

²² Draper and Rhodes, [Hebrews](#), p. 521.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 524-525.

8 When he said above, “Sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not want nor did you delight in them” (which are offered according to the law), 9 he then said, “See, I have come to do your will,” he abolishes the first so that he can establish the second. (Heb. 10.8-9 Draper & Rhodes trans.)

C.S. Lewis put it this way:

The book or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust in them; it was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through them was longing. These things—the beauty, the memory or our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself, they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.²⁴

B. Encouragement to persevere in faith (verses 19-25)

17 And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. 18 Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin. 19 Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh. (Heb. 10.17-20)

“Having boldness” (ἔχοντες ...παρρησίαν) (Heb. 10.19)

Draper and Rhodes explain:

The circumstantial participle ἔχοντες (*echontes*), translated “having” in the KJV, is important. It is causal in sense and can be translated as “because” or “since we have” like in our Rendition. It introduces the effect Christ’s sacrifice should have on each believer. That is, because of what the Savior has accomplished, the author’s readers should feel fully confident in approaching God. The author chose the noun παρρησία (*parrēsia*), “boldness, confidence,” to show what his readers’ attitude should be. The word carries the idea of an absolute fearlessness in approaching a task that might otherwise be intimidating. Further, it also holds the nuance of a person being authorized to do something. This nuance gives a more complete expression to just exactly what the Lord accomplished for his people. They not only can approach God with confidence, but they are also authorized to do so. This confidence is derived from and based on “the blood of Jesus,” that is, on faith in the effects of his Atonement. It is therefore a gift from God. The author uses the nominalized, genitive, neuter plural adjective τῶν ἁγίων (*tōn hagiōn*), literally “of holies” (translated as “sanctuary” in the Rendition), to symbolize the divine realm and to keep a tie to the work of the high priest on the Day of Atonement.²⁵

Joseph Fielding McConkie wrote:

The entrance of the high priest into the Holy of Holies and his passing through the sacred veil of the temple was a type for that future day when the Son of God would rend the veil to enter the heavenly temple and stand in the presence of God. Having satisfied the demands of justice

²⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 29.

²⁵ Draper and Rhodes, *Hebrews*, p. 545.

through his atoning sacrifice, Christ could now commence his great work of mercy and mediation in behalf of all whose labors attested that they had accepted him. By virtue of his mercy and grace, the faithful of all ages could now also enter into the holiest place. 'So now, my friends,' Paul explained, 'the blood of Jesus makes us free to enter boldly into the sanctuary by the new, living way which he has opened for us through the curtain, the way of his flesh. We have, moreover, a great priest set over the household of God; so let us make our approach in sincerity of heart and full assurance of faith, our guilty hearts sprinkled clean, our bodies washed with pure water.' (Heb. 10:19-22, New English Bible.) The purpose of the atonement was to remove the effects of the Fall whereby men were cast out of the presence of God. Through his sacrifice, Christ opened the door through which we might return to the divine presence.²⁶

The flesh of Jesus

Draper and Rhodes explain:

his flesh / through his body: What made the passage possible, that is, what opened the way for all to enter God's presence, the author describes by the noun σάρξ (*sarx*), "flesh, body." The word connotes the Savior's mortality, that is, his physical life that he gave up for all in order to open the way to God. His death did this by allowing his mercy, grace, and power to flow into the lives of all those who would follow him, bringing to them forgiveness and the ability to live acceptably before the Father. Due to the complexity of this sentence (10:21–22), there is some ambiguity whether "flesh" should be construed with "veil" or "way." If taken with "way," the author is saying that through the way of the Lord's flesh—that is, his full obedience—he has opened the veil for access to God. If taken with "veil," the author is saying that through the veil—that is, the Lord's mortal body given in death—he has opened the way to God. Based on grammatical considerations, we have opted for the latter translation in our Rendition, though the former is also valid. Either way, the point is that due to his sacrifice, Christ has done something no high priest had ever done before: he has opened the portal to heaven.²⁷

C. The danger of willful sin and apostasy (verses 26-31)

Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? (Heb. 10.29)

Robert Millet wrote:

All men are subject to temptation and mortal weaknesses and therefore commit some sin, even those whose callings and elections have been made sure. Though the disposition to commit grievous sin would certainly be less among such individuals, yet the principles of repentance and forgiveness are as highly treasured by these as by any of our Father's children. At the same time, where much is given, much is expected and required. Joseph Smith taught: "If men sin wilfully after they have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin."

²⁶ Joseph F. McConkie in *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 6: Acts to Revelation*, ed. by Robert L. Millet, Deseret Boo, 1987, p. 199-200.

²⁷ Draper and Rhodes, *Hebrews*, p. 547. They translate Heb. 10.20 as follows: "which opens up to us a new and living way through the veil, that is, through his body."

In the words of a modern apostle: "Suppose such persons become disaffected and the spirit of repentance leaves them—which is a seldom and almost unheard of eventuality—still, what then? The answer is—and the revelations and teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith so recite!—they must then pay the penalty of their own sins, for the blood of Christ will not cleanse them."

When one is guilty of serious transgression and loses the right to the Spirit and the protective blessings of the priesthood, he is essentially "delivered unto the buffetings of Satan" (D&C 132:26), such that "Lucifer is free to torment, persecute, and afflict such a person without let or hindrance. When the bars are down, the cuffs and curses of Satan, both in this world and in the world to come, bring indescribable anguish typified by burning fire and brimstone" (cf. D&C 78:12; 82:20-21; 104:9-10; 1 Cor. 5:1-5). Once one has been sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise, he is in a position to either rise to exaltation or (through rebellion and apostasy) fall to perdition.²⁸

Craig Keener wrote:

Compare this verse to Heb. 2:2-3; here the author uses a "how much more" argument. Garbage could be "trampled down," but what was sacred was to be approached only with reverence, and trampling it underfoot was the ultimate disrespect (e.g., Is 63:18; Mt 7:6). It was a great sin to treat the holy as merely profane or as unclean; Christians had been sanctified by Christ's blood, but other Jews would simply regard Jesus' dead body as an unclean corpse (Deut 21:23). Insulting the Spirit invited judgment (Is 63:10).²⁹

C. Reminders of past endurance and hope in Christ (verses 32-39)

32 But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; 33 Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. (Heb. 10:32-33)

The athletic language of "conflict" (v. 32 niv) or "struggle" (nrsv; see comment on 12:1-3) conjoined with "being made a public spectacle" (v. 33 nasb) or "publicly exposed" (niv) could imply that the readers were subjected to the gladiatorial games. Although the writer probably does not mean this reference literally (since they were still alive—12:4), the image suggests the intensity of their struggle. It is not possible to identify the specific persecution involved without identifying the location of the letters' recipients.³⁰

Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. (Heb. 10:35)

In LDS talk that is to say, "Sure it is tough—before you join the Church, while you are trying to join, and after you have joined." That is the way it has always been, Paul said, but don't "draw back," he warned. Don't panic and retreat. Don't lose your confidence. Don't forget how you once felt. Don't distrust the experience you had. That tenacity is what saved Moses when the adversary confronted him, and it is what will save you... Face your doubts. Master your fears.

²⁸ Robert L. Millet, "A New and Everlasting Covenant (D&C 132)," *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 1: The Doctrine and Covenants*, Deseret Book, 1989, p. 520.

²⁹ Keener, *Background*, p. 657.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 657.

“Cast not away therefore your confidence.” Stay the course and see the beauty of life unfold for you... Trust in that eternal truth. If God has told you something is right, if something is indeed true for you, *he will provide the way for you to accomplish it*. That is true of joining the Church. It is true of getting an education, of going on a mission or of getting married or of any of a hundred worthy tasks in your young lives... Fighting through darkness and despair and pleading for the light is what opened this dispensation. It is what keeps it going, and it is what will keep you going.³¹

V. The Hall of Faith (Chapter 11)

C.S. Lewis, speaking on faith, said:

I [used to assume] that if the human mind once accepts a thing as true it will automatically go on regarding it as true, until some real reason for reconsidering it turns up. In fact, I was assuming that the human mind is completely ruled by reason. But that is not so. For example, my reason is perfectly convinced by good evidence that anesthetics do not smother me and that properly trained surgeons do not start operating until I am unconscious. But that does not alter the fact that when they have me down on the table and clap their horrible mask over my face, a mere childish panic begins inside me. I start thinking I am going to choke, and I am afraid they will start cutting me up before I am properly under. In other words, I lose my faith in anesthetics. It is not reason that is taking away my faith: on the contrary, my faith is based on reason. ***It is my imagination and emotions. The battle is between faith and reason on one side and emotion and imagination on the other...*** Now just the same thing happens about Christianity. I am not asking anyone to accept Christianity if his best reasoning tells him that the weight of the evidence is against it. That is not the point at which Faith comes in. But supposing a man's reason once decides that the weight of the evidence is for it I can tell that man what is going to happen to him in the next few weeks. There will come a moment when there is bad news, or he is in trouble, or is living among a lot of other people who do not believe it, ***and all at once his emotions will rise up and carry out a sort of blitz on his belief***. Or else there will come a moment when he wants a woman, or wants to tell a lie, or feels very pleased with himself, or sees a chance of making a little money in some way that is not perfectly fair: some moment, in fact, at which it would be very convenient if Christianity were not true. And once again his wishes and desires will carry out a blitz... ***Now Faith, in the sense in which I am here using the word, is the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods***. For moods will change, whatever view your reason takes. I know that by experience. Now that I am a Christian I do have moods in which the whole thing looks very improbable: but when I was an atheist I had moods in which Christianity looked terribly probable. This rebellion of your moods against your real self is going to come anyway. That is why Faith is such a necessary virtue: unless you teach your moods "where they get off," you can never be either a sound Christian or even a sound atheist, but just a creature dithering to and fro, with its beliefs really dependent on the weather and the state of its digestion.³²

Craig Keener explains:

³¹ Elder Holland, “[Cast Not Away Therefore Your Confidence](#),” *BYU Speeches*, March 2, 1999.

³² C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book III, Ch. 11, Para. 2-5, p. 122-124, emphasis added.

After defining faith in 11:1 and introducing his thesis in 11:2, the writer surveys biblical history for samples of the kind of faith he is addressing. Faith as defined by this chapter is the assurance in God's future promises, an assurance that enables one to persevere (10:32-39). In form, the chapter is a literary masterpiece. It follows the frequent literary practice called historical retrospective, a summary of Jewish history to make a particular point, as in texts like Acts 7, 1 Maccabees 2:49-69 and Sirach 44-50. (Ancient moralists often used examples of people who embodied the virtue they advocated, and sometimes wrote entire biographies for this purpose.) The writer builds the chapter around a literary device called *anaphora* (repetition of an opening word or words), beginning each new account with the same Greek word, "by faith."³³

A. Definition and importance of faith (verses 1-3)

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. (Heb. 11.3)

Joseph Smith taught:

Faith is not only the principle of action, but of power also, in all intelligent beings, whether in heaven or on earth. Thus says the author of the epistle to the Hebrews (11:3): 'Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.' ***By this we understand that the principle of power which existed in the bosom of God, by which the worlds were framed, was faith; and that it is by reason of this principle of power existing in the Deity, that all created things exist;*** so that all things in heaven, on earth, or under the earth, exist by reason of faith as it existed in HIM. ***Had it not been for the principle of faith the worlds would never have been framed, neither would man have been formed of the dust. It is the principle by which Jehovah works, and through which he exercises power over all temporal as well as eternal things.*** Take this principle or attribute-for it is an attribute-from the Deity, and he would cease to exist. Who cannot see, that if God framed the worlds by faith, that it is by faith that he exercises power over them, and that faith is the principle of power? And if the principle of power, it must be so in man as well as in the Deity? This is the testimony of all the sacred writers, and the lesson which they have been endeavouring to teach to man.³⁴

B. Examples of faith in Old Testament figures (verses 4-40)

Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection (Heb. 11.35).

In her presentation "Women Received Their Dead," Julie Smith shares that this passage relates to the stories of women in 1 Kings 17 and 2 Kings 4, where women receive revelations and great miracles. At 18:40 she shares that every canonized story of a raising from the dead has a female witness. She cites the widow of Zarepath (1 Kgs. 17), the Shunammite woman (2 Kgs. 4), Jairus' wife (Mark 5.21-43), the

³³ Keener, *Background*, p. 658.

³⁴ *Lectures on Faith*, Deseret Book, 1985, 1.13-17, emphasis added.

widow of Nain (Luke 7.12-15), Mary and Martha of Bethany (John 11), the women at the tomb (Mark 16.1-8), “women” (Heb. 11.35).³⁵

“They were stoned, they were sawn asunder...” (Heb. 11.37)

Tradition relates that Isaiah was sawn in half by King Manasseh. See: [Martyrdom of Isaiah 5.1-11](#).

VI. Running the Race toward Mount Zion and the Church of the Firstborn (Chapter 12)

A. Fixing our eyes on Jesus as the ultimate example (verses 1-3)

“so great a cloud of witnesses” (Heb. 12.1)

Do we not have a greater cloud of witnesses than did Paul? We have his witnesses, and in addition we also have the witnesses of modern times. We have the witness of Joseph Smith, who saw and talked with God the Father and his exalted Son. We have the witness of Brigham Young, of John Taylor, of Wilford Woodruff, and of the remainder of the Prophets of the Lord unto President David O. McKay in our day. We have the witness of the more than 80 apostles, who have done mighty works since the day of Joseph Smith. We have the witness of those who faced the hostile hosts in Missouri and Illinois; and of those, too, who walked with faith into these mountain valleys, offering up their daily prayers for help and strength and succor. We have the witness of the Church grown strong, and of its hundreds of thousands of happy members. But most of all we have the witness which enters into the heart of each of us, the living testimony given by the power of the Holy Ghost. Let us not fail to bear that witness.³⁶

“let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12.1)

The image in 12:1-3 and possibly in 12:12-13 is that of runners disciplining themselves for the race. Athletic contests were a common image in Greco-Roman literature, often used for the moral battle waged by the wise person in this world; the Hellenistic Jewish work *4 Maccabees sometimes applied the image to martyrs. This passage (Heb 12:1-3) is the climax of the narration of past heroes of the faith (chap. 11).³⁷

B. Enduring God's discipline as loving children (verses 4-13)

The author is emphasizing the point that big trials are coming to the Christian saints. They must be prepared, like the athlete who prepares for the great race ahead. Historically, we know that the early saints faced tremendous persecution and trials in the centuries prior to Constantine’s conversion to the Christian faith in the early 4th century.

Thomas B. Marsh said this regarding chastening:

I do not know that I can make all this vast congregation hear and understand me. My voice never was very strong, but it has been very much weakened of late years by the afflicting rod of Jehovah. He loved me too much to let me go without whipping. I have seen the hand of the Lord in the chastisement which I have received. I have seen and known that it has proved he loved

³⁵ Julie Smith, “[Women Received Their Dead](#),” BYU New Testament Conference, October 2019.

³⁶ Elder S. Dilworth Young, *Conference Report, April 1968*, p. 85.

³⁷ Keener, *Background*, p. 661.

me; for if he had not cared anything about me, he would not have taken me by the arm and given me such a shaking. If there are any among this people who should ever apostatize and do as I have done, prepare your backs for a good whipping, if you are such as the Lord loves. But if you will take my advice, you will stand by the authorities; but if you go away and the Lord loves you as much as he did me, he will whip you back again.

Many have said to me, "How is it that a man like you, who understood so much of the revelations of God as recorded in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, should fall away?" I told them not to feel too secure, but to take heed lest they also should fall; for I had no scruples in my mind as to the possibility of men falling away.

I can say, in reference to the Quorum of the Twelve, to which I belonged, that I did not consider myself a whit behind any of them, and I suppose that others had the same opinion; but, let no one feel too secure: for, before you think of it, your steps will slide. You will not then think nor feel for a moment as you did before you lost the Spirit of Christ; for when men apostatize, they are left to grovel in the dark.

I have sought diligently to know the Spirit of Christ since I turned my face Zionward, and I believe I have obtained it. I have frequently wanted to know how my apostacy began, and I have come to the conclusion that I must have lost the Spirit of the Lord out of my heart. The next question is, "How and when did you lose the Spirit?" I became jealous of the Prophet, and then I saw double, and overlooked everything that was right, and spent all my time in looking for the evil; and then, when the Devil began to lead me, it was easy for the carnal mind to rise up, which is anger, jealousy, and wrath. I could feel it within me; I felt angry and wrathful; and the Spirit of the Lord being gone, as the Scriptures say, I was blinded, and I thought I saw a beam in brother Joseph's eye, but it was nothing but a mote, and my own eye was filled with the beam; but I thought I saw a beam in his, and I wanted to get it out; and, as brother Heber says, I got mad, and I wanted everybody else to be mad. I talked with Brother Brigham and Brother Heber, and I wanted them to be mad like myself; and I saw they were not mad, and I got madder still because they were not. Brother Brigham, with a cautious look, said, "Are you the leader of the Church, brother Thomas?" I answered, "No." "Well then," said he, "Why do you not let that alone?"

Well, this is about the amount of my hypocrisy--I meddled with that which was not my business. But let me tell you, my brethren and friends, if you do not want to suffer in body and mind, as I have done,--if there are any of you that have the seeds of apostacy in you, do not let them make their appearance, but nip that spirit in the bud; for it is misery and affliction in this world, and destruction in the world to come.³⁸

εἰ δὲ **χωρίς** ἐστε **παιδείας** ἢς μέτοχοι γέγονασιν πάντες ἄρα **νόθοι** ἐστε καὶ οὐχ υἱοί. But if ye be **without chastisement**, whereof all are partakers, then are ye **bastards**, and not sons. (Heb. 12.8)

In antiquity, the designation of an individual as an "illegitimate child," connoting birth outside the bounds of a formalized marital union, carried profound implications, rendering it a highly pejorative and stigmatizing appellation. Illegitimacy was entwined with adverse social ramifications, impacting one's standing within the community and encumbering the individual with diminished inheritance rights. In

³⁸ Thomas B. Marsh, The Bowery, Salt Lake City, Sunday, September 6, 1857.

this context, fathers demonstrated a predilection for prioritizing their legitimate heirs, channeling their investments and attention predominantly towards progeny eligible to inherit their lineage's rights and privileges, while relegating offspring born outside the sanctioned marital framework to comparatively peripheral positions in the familial hierarchy.

“The Father of spirits” (Heb. 12.9)

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin taught:

God truly is our Father, the Father of the spirits of all mankind. We are his literal offspring and are formed in his image. We have inherited divine characteristics from him. Knowing our relationship to our Heavenly Father helps us understand the divine nature that is in us and our potential. The doctrine of the fatherhood of God lays a solid foundation for self-esteem.³⁹

C. Pursuing holiness and peace (verses 14-17)

Shedding Esau Tears

Paul cites the story of Esau and his selling of his birthright (Gen. 27-34-38). There are many examples of shedding the tears of Esau in the lives of our youth. I asked several classes if they have stories from the lives of their families where individuals have made choices that they later have come to regret. Any time we put our temporary, immediate concerns in the place of long-range gospel centered goals, we are in jeopardy of shedding Esau tears.

One such story that I experienced happened several years ago. I was walking to my car in the morning heading to the seminary when a gal I knew in the apartment complex I lived in sat on the stairs crying. I visited with her for some time listening to her dilemma. She was married with two children to a man who was not a Christian. This man had forbidden her to raise the children as Christians due to his faith prohibiting this. When she was courting him, this did not seem to be important. Raised in a faithful Latter-day Saint home, she should have listened to the counsel of her parents, but at the time she believed she knew what was best.

Many years later, shedding the tears of Esau, she asks, “Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?” Her life and the lives of her children are on a course charted by a decision that she made in her youth. Of course there are times when things change and course corrections can be made, but for many of us we face critical moments in our lives when our choices affect our ability to receive the blessings our Heavenly Father so much wants to bestow upon us.

Paul, commenting on Esau’s choices, stated, “Afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.” (Hebrews 12:17). Paul is not saying that there is no hope or repentance for Esau, but that he lost certain blessings that even tears could not bring back.

D. Approaching Mount Zion and God's kingdom (verses 18-29)

18 For you have not come to something that can be touched, to a burning fire, darkness, gloom, and a whirlwind, 19 to the sound of a trumpet and a voice speaking words which those who heard it pleaded

³⁹ Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, "[Fruits of the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ](#)," *Ensign*, Nov. 1991.

that no further words be spoken to them, 20 for they could not endure what it commanded, namely: “If even an animal touches the mountain, it will be stoned” [Ex. 19:12–13]. 21 Indeed, the scene was so frightening that Moses said, “I am terrified and trembling” [Deut. 9:19]. (Heb. 12:18-21 Draper and Rhodes trans.)

Draper and Rhodes explain:

In the first section of this pericope, the author’s discourse lacks his usual clarity, making it a bit more difficult to translate. The contrast he makes between two pictures, however, is clear. The first one is very somber—even frightening—and one that his hearers have not experienced. The second one is very joy-filled and easy and one that his readers have experienced (12:22–24). It is the first picture that is obscure... Taken together, the author uses the effect on Moses, who stood in terror of Jehovah due to the display of his power as it rested on Mount Sinai, to both put the reaction of the rest of the Israelites in a more sympathetic light and to stress how terrifying the experience really was...⁴⁰

22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, 23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect. (Heb. 12:22-23)

The title πρωτότοκος (*prōtotokos*), “firstborn,” is one of the titles for Christ (1:6; Col. 1:15, 18). The adjective found here however is plural and, therefore, refers not to Christ but to all those who take advantage of Christ’s Atonement and become “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17). Each heir will receive “my Father’s kingdom; therefore all that my Father hath shall be given unto him” (D&C 84:38). The firstborn’s inheritance is to obtain all that his or her father has, but in the celestial realm this is not restricted to just one person; it is available to all. These make up the heavenly community or “Church” that belongs to the Savior (D&C 76:54; 93:22–23).⁴¹

The Church of the Firstborn

Robert J. Mathews wrote:

This term (church of the Firstborn) occurs in the New Testament (Heb. 12:23) and also in several places in the Doctrine and Covenants (76:54, 67, 71, 94; 77:11; 78:21; 93:22; 107:19). It has reference to those who inherit the fulness of salvation and exaltation. They belong not only to the Church of Jesus Christ (who himself is the Firstborn), but they constitute a church, the membership of which consists only of those who are exalted and thus have the inheritance of the firstborn. They are joint heirs with Jesus in all that the Father has and are thus the Church consisting of the firstborn. This is what the gospel does for those who obey it fully; it causes them to be born again and gives them an adoption in the eternal patriarchal family so that they

⁴⁰ Draper and Rhodes, *Hebrews*, p. 715.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 720.

have an inheritance as the firstborn even though they are younger in actual chronology (see also Gal. 3:26-27).⁴²

See that you do not reject the one who is speaking. For if those who rejected him who warned them on earth did not escape, how much less will we escape, if we repudiate him who is speaking from heaven. (Heb. 12:25 Draper & Rhodes trans.)

The two scholars explain this difficult part of Hebrews 12:

The verb *παραιτέομαι* (*paraiteomai*), “to reject,” means to forcefully decline to do what another wishes. In connection with the Divine, it carries the idea of willful disobedience.²⁸⁷ The present active participial phrase *τὸν λαλοῦντα* (*ton lalounta*), “the one who is speaking,” refers to God, the one who spoke from Sinai and will speak from Mount Zion but is now speaking through the Son (1:1–2).²⁸⁸ The tense is important because it stresses that God is presently active in directing his people. In sum, revelation continues...

For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth / For if those who rejected him who warned them on earth did not escape: The conjunction *εἰ* (*ei*), “if,” applies to a real situation, that of the rebellious Israelites at Sinai. The plural demonstrative adjective *ἐκεῖνοι* (*ekeinoi*), “those,” refers to the same people. They were guilty of rejecting Jehovah’s word and, therefore, of rejecting him.

The verb *χρηματίζω* (*chrēmatizō*) refers to making known a divine injunction or warning. The law of Moses carried very clear warnings to the people if they disobeyed God’s commandments (for examples, see Deut. 8:20; 11:28; 28:15, 45, 62).

The phrase *ἐπὶ γῆς* (*epi gēs*), “on earth,” refers to the revelations Moses received while at Sinai. At that time, God had come to earth to reveal his will and was therefore not far from the people. This makes those who rejected his word all the more culpable. Nonetheless, the giving of the law was still an earthly event with carnal commandments (9:10) given because the people would not endure a more heavenly order (Mosiah 13:29–30). The verb *ἐκφεύγω* (*ekpheugō*) means “to escape danger or peril” and in this case refers to the judgments of God upon these rebellious souls...

The adverbial phrase *πολὺ μᾶλλον* (*poly mallon*) means “how much greater” and acts here to contrast a lesser outcome to a larger one. Here, because of the nature of the contrast, the idea is that if Israel could not escape the consequences of its rebellion, how much less a chance does the apostate Christian?⁴³

For our God is a consuming fire. (Heb. 12:29)

The author extensively engages with Deuteronomy 4:24, drawing upon it directly as a primary source of reference. This reliance on Deuteronomy is further supported by cross-referencing additional passages, such as Deuteronomy 9:3 and Exodus 24:17. Notably, Deuteronomy 4:24 characterizes the divine persona as “a jealous God,” a concept that finds correlation in the admonition presented in Hebrews 12:29, underscoring the critical importance of heeding God’s ultimate revelation with utmost caution

⁴² Robert J. Matthews, [Selected Writings of Robert J. Matthews: Gospel Scholars Series](#), Deseret Book, 1999, p. 413.

⁴³ Draper and Rhodes, *Hebrews*, p. 732-734.

and vigilance, as it serves as a cautionary reminder against complacency or negligence in matters pertaining to divine revelation.

VII. Exhortations and Salutations (Chapter 13)

The Five Admonitions of Hebrews 13

In Hebrews 13, the author provides five admonitions to his readers:

1. **Brotherly Love:** The author encourages the readers to continue showing mutual love and affection among one another (Hebrews 13.1).
2. **Hospitality:** They are urged to practice hospitality, welcoming strangers and extending kindness to them (Hebrews 13.2).
3. **Empathy for the Suffering:** The readers are reminded to remember and support those who are suffering, including those in prison, and to stand in solidarity with them (Hebrews 13.3).
4. **Marital Faithfulness:** The author stresses the importance of upholding the sanctity of marriage and the commitment to remaining faithful to one's spouse (Hebrews 13.4).
5. **Contentment and Trust in God:** The readers are encouraged to be content with what they have and to avoid covetousness, knowing that God will never abandon or forsake them (Hebrews 13.5-6).

These admonitions reflect the author's desire to cultivate a community of love, compassion, and steadfastness among the readers, drawing from various moral and ethical principles found in Christian teachings.

A. Continuing in brotherly love and hospitality (Heb. 13.1-3)

Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. (Heb. 13.2)

The customary practice of hospitality in antiquity encompassed the provision of lodging and benevolent attention to travelers. Among the Jewish literary corpus, Abraham's exemplification of this virtue remains preeminent, notably depicted in his cordial reception of the three visitors as narrated in Genesis 18. The salience of this account lies in the subsequent revelation of at least two of these visitors being celestial beings, lending it as the most pertinent point of reference in the current exhortation. While other narratives, such as the early Jewish tale of Tobit or Greek myths recounting divine visits in disguised form, possess a secondary significance, they nevertheless serve to illustrate the readiness with which ancient readers could assimilate and embrace the underlying exhortation.

Robert Millet explained:

Sometimes we are like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus—our eyes are 'holden,' or restrained (Luke 24:16), so that we are not able to see who it is that walks among us, teaches us, lifts us up, and points us toward the abundant life. For that matter, is it not possible that unseen angels whisper or testify or warn in ways that we cannot now perceive but which will be obvious to us one day? In speaking of angels, Mormon affirmed that 'the office of their ministry is to call men unto repentance, and to fulfil and to do the work of the covenants of the Father, which he hath made unto the children of men, to prepare the way among the children of men, by

declaring the word of Christ unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they may bear testimony of him. And by so doing, the Lord God prepareth the way that the residue of men may have faith in Christ, that the Holy Ghost may have place in their hearts' (Moroni 7:31-32).⁴⁴

“Remember them that are in bonds” (Heb. 12.3).

During the second century, early Christian communities gained renown for their compassionate treatment of incarcerated individuals. Certain philosophical circles recognized the act of visiting prisoners as a virtuous practice, although Palestinian Judaism exhibited limited discourse on this matter, as its focus predominantly revolved around visiting the infirm or extending aid to the economically marginalized. An exception could be noted in situations where Jewish brethren were captured or subjected to enslavement by pagans.

The term "the prisoners" likely pertains to Christian adherents who faced imprisonment due to their religious beliefs or practices, akin to instances found in 13:23. Notably, in Roman legal contexts of that era, imprisonment primarily served as a form of detention preceding punishment rather than a punitive measure in itself. Consequently, prisoners often relied on external allies for sustenance and support during their confinement.

B. Honoring marriage and avoiding covetousness (Heb. 13.4-6)

C. Remembering leaders and the unchanging Christ (Heb. 13.7-9)

“Remember them which have the rule over you” (Heb. 13.7. See also Heb. 13.17, 24)

The author of Hebrews 13 emphasizes the importance of submitting to rulers and authorities, as evident in their exhortations in Hebrews 13:7, 13:17, and 13:24. In verse 7, the readers are encouraged to remember and respect their past leaders who spoke the word of God, recognizing the impact of their teachings on their faith journey. In verse 17, the author urges the community to willingly submit to their present leaders and those who watch over their souls, emphasizing the need for obedience and cooperation in matters of spiritual guidance. Lastly, in verse 24, the author concludes with a final reminder to greet all their leaders and saints with genuine affection. Throughout these passages, the author seeks to instill a sense of reverence and adherence to authority, underscoring the significance of harmonious relations between the congregation and their leaders for the well-being of the Christian community.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell explained:

Paul's counsel to submit was given in order to have gladness instead of sadness: 'Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief' (Hebrews 13:17). Submitting to the leadership, counsel, and direction of those placed over us may test us, particularly in view of the imperfections leaders have. Frequently, though, the test shows up the imperfections of the one being led. A most interesting example occurs in the case of an early member of the Church, Simonds Ryder. This man had been a member of the Campbellite movement and was among those from that movement who joined the Church in 1831. Because his name was misspelled in

⁴⁴ Robert L. Millet, [Alive in Christ: The Miracle of Spiritual Rebirth](#), Deseret Book, 1997, p. 153.

a revelation calling him on a mission, he began to be disillusioned and finally he apostatized. In 1832, he helped tar and feather Joseph Smith. From member to mobocrat in a matter of months!⁴⁵

D. Embracing persecution and the heavenly city (Heb. 13.10-16)

Do not be misled by deceitful and strange teachings, for it is well for the heart to be made firm by grace, not by ceremonial meals that have not been of benefit to those who participate in them. We have an altar from which they who serve in the tabernacle have no right to eat. (Heb. 13.9-10 Draper & Rhodes trans.)

Hebrews 13:10-15 presents a significant argument centering on the contrast between the old sacrificial system of the Mosaic Law and the new and superior sacrifice offered by Jesus Christ through his Atonement. The main point of this passage is to emphasize the superiority of the Atonement, which renders the previous sacrificial practices of the Mosaic Law obsolete.

Heb. 13.10 starts by drawing attention to the altar used in the Jewish tabernacle, which served as a focal point for offering animal sacrifices. The author asserts that those who follow Christ have no right to partake in the altar of the Levitical system. This statement lays the groundwork for the forthcoming comparison between the sacrifices of the old covenant and the ultimate sacrifice of Christ.

In Heb. 13.11-14, the author highlights the contrast between the blood of animals used in the old covenant, which only temporarily purifies and sanctifies the people, and the blood of Christ, which accomplishes perfect and eternal redemption. The blood of Christ, symbolizing His Infinite Atonement, is seen as the ultimate sacrifice that takes away sin once and for all.

Heb. 13.15 concludes the argument by stating that, in light of this profound transformation brought about by Christ's sacrifice, followers of Jesus are to offer a different kind of sacrifice—a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God, or a broken heart and contrite spirit (2 Ne. 2.7; 3 Ne. 9.20; 3 Ne. 12.19; Ether 4.15). This act of worship signifies the acknowledgment of Christ's Atonement and unlocks its power as it works to transform our lives and our desires.

In summary, Hebrews 13:10-15 underscores the central theme of the book of Hebrews, emphasizing the superiority of Christ's sacrifice over the temporary and imperfect sacrifices of the old covenant. It calls Christians to embrace the redemptive power of Christ's Atonement and then to respond with heartfelt gratitude, offering a broken heart and contrite spirit that reflects the profound impact of Christ's sacrifice on their lives.

E. Submitting to spiritual authority (Heb. 13.17-19)

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. (Heb. 13.17).

See Elder Maxwell's commentary above.

F. Benediction (verses 20-25)

⁴⁵ Elder Neal A. Maxwell, *Not My Will, But Thine*, Bookcraft, 1998, p. 104.

And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation: for I have written a letter unto you in few words. (Heb. 13.22)

Philosophers and moralists provided “messages of exhortation.” Such spoken messages could also be given in writing, especially in letter-essays like Hebrews. Professional public speakers (rhetoricians) often remarked that they had spoken briefly or poorly when such was clearly not the case, to claim for themselves less than was obvious.⁴⁶

Know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty; with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you. (Heb. 13.23)

If, as is likely, Timothy was arrested under Nero in Rome, he may well have been released on Nero’s death, because the Praetorian Guard and the Roman aristocracy had long before lost faith in Nero’s policies. This background would set the letter in the late 60s.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Keener, *Background*, p. 666.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 666-667.