

The background of the entire page is a dense, repeating pattern of Hebrew letters. The letters are rendered in various colors including blue, yellow, red, purple, green, and orange, set against a light grey background. The letters are of different sizes and orientations, creating a vibrant and textured effect.

# Hebrews

*Transcription  
of  
Larry  
Wilson*

FAITH IS THE FIRST ISSUE A CHRISTIAN HAS TO CONSIDER

# Hebrews

*Transcription*  
*of*  
Larry  
Wilson

faith is the first issue a Christian has to consider

# Hebr ews

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*On occasion, italics and brackets in Scripture quotations have been added to enhance understanding. They are not intended to change the meaning of the texts, only to clarify. We encourage you to consider them and hope they will provide you with deeper insight as you study God's Word.*

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We are deeply indebted to the efforts of so many who support this ministry. It is impossible to acknowledge each one individually here, but know that without your cumulative support this book would not be possible. May the Lord bless your faithfulness.

I would like to give special thanks to Paul Lundgrin for writing the foreword. Your love for the Lord and Larry is so very evident. A special thanks also is due Eunice Leach for her meticulous proofreading, and a most perceptive critique of the Hebrews manuscript. You truly deserve a special medal for giving so much of your time.

A personal thanks to Diana and Marty in the office for your assistance in choosing a cover, and your helpful suggestions which made this book a reality.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge those readers who will read this first printing and send in corrections. Although I have tried to be thorough with even the smallest detail in this manuscript, I'm quite sure a few mistakes remain. It would be foolhardy to think there are no errors within the following pages. Therefore, corrections and suggestions are sincerely invited. In my optimism, I like to think they will be incorporated into future editions.

Rex Johnson



# Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	<i>v</i>
Foreword.....	<i>vii</i>
Editor's Note.....	<i>ix</i>
Introduction.....	<i>10</i>
Plight of Early Converts.....	<i>25</i>
The Faith of Jesus.....	<i>50</i>
Plan A / Plan B.....	<i>65</i>
King and Priest.....	<i>91</i>
Promise to Abraham.....	<i>110</i>
Restored to Eden.....	<i>134</i>

Dedicated to the memory of Larry W. Wilson, a brilliant teacher, consummate speaker, and prolific thinker who understood, far more than almost anyone else, the extensive plans God has to save mankind.

# Foreword

For forty-eight years, I have taught and preached the Word as an Evangelist, Pastor, Teacher, and Revival preacher. As I begin writing this, I am joyfully and painfully reminded of how wonderful and rewarding it was to have known Larry as my friend and mentor. I use the word *joyfully* because Larry was the best friend and brother in Christ I could ever have asked for, and the word *painfully* because there has been a very empty spot in my life since his passing. Calling and spending time talking with him about *anything* was so special. He was the big brother I wish I could have had my whole life. There is no way to put into words how valuable those many talks were. Although Larry has been gone for what seems a very long time, when I read this manuscript, it was like having those conversations all over again.

The fact that you are reading this is evidence the Spirit is leading you to dive more deeply into God's Word. Larry would want you to read his book with these conditions in mind: (a) "Search the Scriptures daily to see if these things are true." (b) "If you come across something you disagree with, don't worry about it, just set it on the shelf and wait for the Spirit to lead you in understanding. Truth is ever expanding and increasing and will stand the test of time." Then he would close with, "Press On!"

There are some things Larry tried to teach me (I'm a little slow sometimes) that are still on my shelf, waiting for the Spirit to help connect the dots. But reading and studying this book on Hebrews has removed several items from that shelf. There is so much to learn about and from our Lord Jesus. The book you are reading, this very moment, is the next best thing to being in a classroom with one of the best teachers and writers I have ever known.

Larry brings fifty-plus years of intense study in God's Word to this book. If you knew Larry, you know why you need to read this book; if you didn't, you will learn a little about him. Larry will help you discover and understand answers to questions most of us have never considered. As you read, you will learn to see treasure under rocks you never saw. For me, that's the real sign of a true teacher. Larry's train of thought was not bound to any denominational dogma. If he discovered something that didn't align with Bible truth, he discarded it and made the appropriate adjustments to position himself for receiving, and passing on any new light the Lord showed him.

Hebrews is a crucial book for a seeker of truth to grow in understanding how to walk in the prophetic priesthood of our Lord Jesus. The New Covenant Gospel of Jesus Christ is leading all sincere seekers of truth into a more wonderful relationship with Him. Establishing unity with Jesus as our great High Priest, after the order of Melchizedek, is essential to a believer's ability to lead others into a dynamic, Spirit-filled, empowered ministry to draw others into the saving Grace of our Lord Jesus.

Prophecy is being fulfilled as we go about our duties and daily lives. Understanding the truth stored within the words of the book *of* Hebrews and this book *on* Hebrews is key to leading others into a fulfilling walk with Jesus. My guess is you will want to read this book more than once. It is just one of those kinds of books. And after reading it, you will have a deeper awareness of who the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are. So buckle up and hold on. You are embarking on a vital phase of the incredible journey of your life in Christ.

If I never get the privilege to meet you down here, let's make an appointment sometime during the first thousand years in Heaven, to get together with Larry, compare notes, and have a Q and A on the streets of gold.

At His Feet,

Paul Lundgrin

# Editor's Note

You are holding in your hands *Hebrews*, the second book in our Transcript Series. We have four more books planned over the next two years. Isaiah and Ezekiel in 2023, Jeremiah and God's Temple in 2024.

This series is so much more than a transcript of the corresponding seminar. Larry would prepare for each seminar by writing two sets of notes: one called *head notes*, and the other *screen notes*. The Hebrews manuscript combines both sets of notes with the audio transcript.

Because of time constraints, Larry often only used around sixty percent of the prepared material in his seminars. He simply ran out of time. We are doing our best to finally share this extra material with you in the Transcript Series books.

Rex Johnson



# Introduction

This study of the book of Hebrews will prove there is information in the Bible besides the books of Daniel and Revelation. People contact me and say, “Larry, I never hear you talk about anything but Daniel and Revelation.” It is true that I write and talk a lot about those books, but I also understand that the remaining books in the Bible are intimately connected with them.

You will discover from this book that the message of Hebrews has never been more timely than right now because we have an enemy who is like a roaring lion seeking whom he can devour. As the book proceeds, you will also notice a recurring theme: There is a way to overcome the world and the devil. God has generously provided a way out.

The authorship of the book of Hebrews is uncertain. Scholars have long debated who wrote it; they recognize the content is from Paul, but the writing style is not. The writing in Hebrews is very well organized and stylistically polished. Paul’s writing isn’t, as you have discovered if you’ve read many of his letters. It is believed that perhaps Luke or Apollos wrote the book of Hebrews after discussing elements with Paul, thus putting Paul’s ideas in organized form.

Now, because no one knows who the author is, I’m going to use the name Paul when referring to the author because we know the ideas are Pauline in nature, although it was someone else who penned the book.

We also know that when the New Testament was assembled around AD 350, the book of Hebrews was almost left out because no one was sure who wrote it. It is believed to have

been written around AD 63 when Paul was in prison in Rome—about seven years before the destruction of Jerusalem.

The word *Hebrew* refers to people who migrate from place to place. In today's language, we would use the word, *Gypsy*. The first time the word *Hebrew* is used in the Bible is in Genesis 14:13 when Abraham was called a *Hebrew* (a gypsy or wanderer). After all, where did Abraham come from? His home was in Ur, about 800 miles from the land of Canaan. That is a long way on camelback.

Because the entire nation of Israel wandered in the wilderness, they became known as the nation of nomads. When was the last time you heard of a nation picking up and moving, looking for a new spot to sit down? The term *Hebrew* stuck to the Israelites even though they finally settled in the land of Canaan. When he wrote the book of Philippians, Paul described himself as a Hebrew of Hebrews.<sup>1</sup> For one who had conducted many missionary journeys around the world, he certainly would be classified in today's terms as a nomad.

For the background setting of Hebrews, we need to understand the time and conditions in which it was written. Christianity grew out of the cradle of Judaism. At that time, the cradle was about 1,400 years old.

Consequently, Judaism was more than a religion. I have invented a new word to describe Judaism in those days. It was a religio-socio-politico culture representing the ultimate church/state. It was the amalgamation of everything—religion, government, and society—all wrapped up in one big culture, just like it is today in the Middle East.

A culture defies logic. The first indication you are deep in a culture is when you hear, "My great-grandfather spoke with God, and I'm a fourth-generation descendant." This is a statement by someone excited about his culture. It was the claim the Jews used.

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 3:5

Because God had wonderfully revealed himself on behalf of Israel many times throughout their 1,400-year history, Jews thought themselves exceptional—the apple of God’s eye—thus indispensable to God. Over the centuries, God’s merciful actions on behalf of Israel were interpreted to mean they were God’s *only* people. They thought the lineage of Abraham became a rite of passage for exclusivity.

In AD 33, Judaism was highly nationalistic. Even God, ever just and merciful, saw that corporate Israel could not be changed nor saved. The Father had done everything He could to redeem Israel for 490 years, but He patiently waited for 37 more before dealing with Israel’s rejection of His Son in AD 70.

Do you know why punishment didn’t come immediately after their 490-year probation ended? The Father allowed the newborn Christian faith time to develop in Jerusalem. After Christians agreed on a few critical matters of doctrine, God then destroyed Judaism. In doing so, He dispersed the Christians to the four corners of the earth. That is how God works. He always has the larger picture in mind. If He had destroyed the Jews immediately, it would have destroyed Christianity. So, by postponing the destruction He promised on Jerusalem, God allowed Christianity to take root and begin to grow.

God didn’t want Christianity to keep too much of Judaism. He knew that if they set up headquarters in Jerusalem, early Christians would weave the cultural baggage of Judaism into Christianity. After all, 99% of the new converts were Jews and held many false ideas about God. The book of Hebrews was written to undo these false ideas. So, while Christianity was in its formative years, God revealed much-needed instruction to the apostle Paul who was in prison, in Rome, about to die.

Hebrews explained pressing issues (covered later) so that when Jerusalem was destroyed, Christians could more firmly develop their faith in Christ and extricate themselves from the rituals and culture of Judaism.

If Paul and Barnabas were to awaken from the grave, go

to church, and do what we do today, they would think it the strangest service they had ever seen. Because where they came from to where we live is separated by many centuries, cultures, and traditions.

Ultimately, the book of Hebrews distinguishes Christianity from Judaism and makes Christianity adaptable within all nations and cultures. This could not have been achieved if Christians had stayed too long in Jerusalem and borrowed too much from Judaism. God allowed Christians to live in Jerusalem long enough to get on their feet and then *ran them off*. Isn't that what our parents did to us?

I think the book of Hebrews was written in veiled language to address that conundrum. Not so much for the local Hebrews of that time, but to gypsy Hebrews down through the ages. When you think of the title *Hebrews*, remember we're talking about nomads. When the author wrote Hebrews, I believe he had in mind the ultimate Gypsy—the ultimate Hebrew—those who would not have a land of rest on this earth. Like the old song says, "This world is not my home; I'm just passing through."

When Hebrews was being written, Jews and Romans were persecuting the Christians; it seemed they were unwanted everywhere they went. This is why the author put so much emphasis on the *rest* in Hebrews 4. He was talking about rest as being the Promised Land. "Therefore, there remains this rest of God." The book of Psalms also calls the Promised Land God's rest. It is like the Sabbath rest, the kind of rest the saints should make every effort to enter.

The book of Hebrews makes three significant contributions to Christianity:

(1) It reveals the ministry of Christ and His use of authority in the plan of salvation as no other book could. It was hard for the early Christians to realize that Jesus was God. If I told you that someone you knew was God, you would think I was crazy. Claiming that a human could be God, the One who made heaven and earth, the One who formed all of creation's

marvelous wonders, is just so foreign. It is hard to comprehend that God would enter human flesh and come to live among us.

The book of Hebrews reveals the ministry and authority of Jesus in the plan of salvation. That was a ponderous thought back then, although we accept it today without question because we grew up with that understanding. New ideas are no easier to accept today.

(2) Hebrews points out the operation of a heavenly sanctuary and, subsequently, the purpose and meaning of the services of the one on earth. With this book, we have the clearest explanation that what happened on earth in the Old Testament sanctuary is just a model of what happens in heaven.

(3) Hebrews explains the nature of God's promises (covenants). Many people are confused about God's covenants. They may sound complicated but are relatively simple once you understand how they work. Later, I'll explain more about the role of trusts and trustees and how the rules for trustees differ from the rules of the covenant.

Everything God makes, especially the plan of salvation, is more beautiful than the most beautiful flower, more glorious than the most glorious sunset.

Because of the past of those who would make up the Christian faith, when Christianity arose, three conditions existed.

(a) Early Christians did not sense that Jesus was Jehovah God, the one they call Yahweh. They didn't understand Jesus was the Lord God of Israel—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the One who spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai.

When Jesus said to the Pharisees, "Before Abraham was, I am." How does one deal with that? He also said of Abraham, "He looked forward to my day." Today, it's still the same. Most people do not know who Jesus really is.

(b) Early Christians did not understand the simplicity of Christ's doctrine. Their former religion had ten thousand rules and regulations. They had a tough time leaving rituals

and services behind. Today, most people cannot distinguish between the effect of religion on culture and the effect of culture on religion. We see culture manifest in the selection of music, clothing, food, and ways of worshiping.

Do you think an African village would choose your type of music? No. Would that make their worship service less worshipful? Of course not. Early Christians had a similar problem with culture and religion because they were essentially all Jews. They couldn't get their new precepts straightened out because of where they had been and how they lived.

That is why Paul, in Romans 14, says about those weak in the faith, let them eat vegetables. For a Jew to eat meat slaughtered and offered as a sacrifice to a pagan god was unacceptable. To do so was strictly against their religion.

Paul, as he traveled around, kept telling folks, "These gods of wood and stone are nothing. If you can't eat meat from which the blood has been offered to idols, don't worry about it, just eat vegetables." "But," he said, "If I can get my hands on meat, I'm going to eat it because I know that an idol is nothing. However, if it's an offense to my brother, I won't eat it in front of him."

There are times to be mindful of what is offensive to a brother. We don't want to offend our brother. We want to treat him with due respect. But to appreciate their situation, we have to understand the difference between culture and religion.

(c) Early Christians could not reconcile the teachings of Moses with the teachings of Jesus. What Moses said was different than what Christ said. This very point got Paul into trouble and ultimately brought about his imprisonment.

Let me share a story with you from Acts 21. Pay close attention to how it unfolds. Paul is returning from his last missionary journey, eager to get back to Jerusalem to tell the brothers what God has done.

**"Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had**

done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: ‘You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed [because they had been busy back at Jerusalem too], and all of them are zealous for the law. [But Paul, we’ve got bad news.] They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, so do what we tell you [to avoid trouble]. There are four men with us who have made a vow. Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law.’<sup>1</sup> This sounds very much like a committee action.

They said, “Paul, we want you to act as if you live according to the law.” “As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.” So Paul said, “I’m in Jerusalem, and when in Jerusalem, I’ll do as the Jews do.”

“The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them. When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, shouting, ‘Fellow Israelites, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place.’” Paul was arrested and imprisoned from then on.

Paul was teaching the truth Jesus had revealed to him. The

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 21:19–24

converts, however, were mixing it with the customs of Moses which created a big problem. Let's go back about ten years before this happened when Christianity was growing quite fast among Gentiles.

In a rapidly developing movement, there is a certain amount of confusion. When the doctrinal chains of religion are broken, what remains is a religious free-for-all. But, eventually, the excitement of the newness is absorbed, and reasonable people prevail if the movement has virtue, albeit whatever arises contains some religious baggage. The Jewish converts were no different.

In AD 49, some men came down from Judea to Antioch and taught the brothers, **“Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.”**<sup>1</sup> These were Christians talking. They were trying to bring the culture, writings, and teachings of Moses into Christianity, their new culture.

Notice what Acts 15:2 says. **“This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them.”** In other words, it got ugly. **“So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.”**

Now watch this. **“Then some of the believers [these are Christians, not Jews] who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, ‘The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.’”** This is twenty years after Jesus had gone to heaven. And still, Christians were insisting that everyone keep the Law of Moses. To be saved,

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 15:1

you had to do it.

**“The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: ‘Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.’”<sup>1</sup>**

He is talking about when he went to Cornelius’s home, and the Holy Spirit was poured out, and they spoke in tongues just as Peter and the disciples had done on the Day of Pentecost.

Peter stood and told the group that “The Holy Spirit made no distinction. He gave Gentiles the gift of the Holy Spirit just as it was given to us. Circumcision is not an issue.”

Notice how he said this. **“Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?”<sup>2</sup>** He was talking about the laws of Moses. **“No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”<sup>3</sup>**

When the argument is deconstructed, it is: To be saved, you must obey the doctrine of Moses, which was nearly 1,400 years old, or obey the doctrine of Jesus, which was only about 15 to 20 years old.

Moses’ long-respected and established teachings were in direct opposition to the teachings of a young man named Jesus. This created a problem.

If you were Mormon, who would you follow if there was clear diversity between Joseph Smith and Jesus Christ? If you were Muslim, whom would you follow if there was clear diversity between Muhammad and Allah? If you were Catholic, whom would you follow if there was clear diversity between the

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 15:6–9

<sup>2</sup> Acts 15:10

<sup>3</sup> Acts 15:11

Church's traditions and Jesus' teachings? If you were Christian Scientist, whom would you follow, Mary Baker Eddie or Jesus? If you were Seventh-day Adventist, whom would you follow if there was clear diversity between Ellen White and Jesus?

Understanding this crucial problem sets the stage for the first two chapters of Hebrews. The Jews believed that no one could look upon God and live, so either God transformed himself into an angel or sent angels to reveal truth and wisdom to man. Therefore, throughout the Old Testament, we find this phrase, "the angel of the Lord."

The first two chapters of Hebrews explain that Jesus, the Son of man, is greater than angels. That is hard to do because, in the scheme of the Jewish mind, you had Moses, then Abraham, then God—that was the order.

\* \* \* \* \*

The book of Hebrews is segmented into five main issues.

Chapters 1–2 deal with the question of who Jesus is.

Chapters 3–4 deal with a *rest* for the nomads (Hebrews).

Chapters 5–8 deal with why Jesus has the right to be our high priest.

Chapters 9–10 deal with what Jesus is doing as our high priest.

Chapters 11–13 deal with being faithful until the very end.

So when you break the book of Hebrews down into what it is about, it has five essential subjects.

As we read the first two chapters of Hebrews, please understand that it is written from the perspective that the end of the world was about to happen.

In 1 Corinthians 7:29, Paul talked to the men in Corinth and said, "Listen, time is short. If you're married, you should live as though you don't have a wife. It's that short." Paul believed he was living near the end of time. In fact, he had to write 2 Thessalonians to clear up a misunderstanding about what he

had actually said. So, when the book of Hebrews was written, understand that the author was convinced that Christ was about to come. Please overlook the fact that Paul knew nothing about 1798 or 1844. He knew nothing about the two millennia that would pass before Christ's return. So, the book of Hebrews refers to the events as something that will happen soon.

Let me explain. When God gave Paul the vision of what Christ was doing in heaven, Paul thought it was going on right then. Why would he think otherwise? When John wrote the book of Revelation, he thought it was the last hour; that those events were about to happen.

In Revelation 1, John said, "These are things which are soon to come to pass." In 1 John 2:18, he says, "This is the last hour, folks. This is it." Each time we find a prophet writing about his perception of time, everything he sees looks as if the great day of the Lord is near and coming quickly.

When Paul saw what was going on in heaven, he thought it was happening right then. He didn't understand that God had a future time for all these events to occur. So, you will notice what we call a flat field. There is no perception of depth. Paul was writing as though everything was going on right then because that's the way he understood it. If Hebrews was meaningful in the first century, shouldn't it be meaningful to those of us who live at the end?

\* \* \* \* \*

Now, as I go through the first chapter of Hebrews in this introduction, you will notice I have taken the liberty of interlacing my thoughts into the verses so I can explain what the verses mean. As you read along in your Bible, please compare what I'm saying with what your Bible says.

Keep in mind that I admit my understanding of a text is subject to change without notice. Indeed, I expect my knowledge to change because I continue to learn more about God's infinite love and wisdom as I study. So I'm giving you the best

of what I have today, but I may have more tomorrow. That is why knowing the Scripture and understanding the Word for yourself is essential. The best that I can do is help you get started in that process.

I hope that going through the first chapter of Hebrews in this manner will help as you read through the remaining chapters on your own. The more you read Hebrews, the better you will appreciate what it reveals.

Hebrews 1:1, **“In the past God [the Father] spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways.** [Yes, we know that the angels of God brought special messages to the prophets. We have the records of Gabriel and Palmoni in Daniel 8 as angels bearing divine truth.]”

Let me stop here. Some may have never heard of the name of an angel called Palmoni, but in Daniel 8:13, when one saint spoke to another, the word for *saint* in the second instance is *Palmoni*, which means *wonderful numberer*. This particular angel is asked because these questions will be answered with numbers.

How long will be the desolation of the sanctuary?

How long will the sanctuary be trodden underfoot?

How long until these things are fulfilled?

All of these answers come with numbers, and the holy numberer, Palmoni, is the angel that reveals the answers. Hebrews is saying that angels of God have brought special messages to the prophets.

Hebrews 1:2, **“But in these last days [of earth’s history] he [the Father] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.”** The Son is about to inherit the earth because He made the universe for the glory of the Father; the Father is going to show His pleasure by rewarding the Son with the earth. He will give Jesus the world and all that is in it so that Jesus may do with it as His heart desires.

Hebrews 1:3, “**The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.** [In fact, the Son is just like the Father. They look alike. The Son can create and destroy. He speaks, and everything obeys His powerful commands, just like the Father. And] **After he** [the Son] **had provided purification for sins** [demonstrated victory over sin was fully possible], **he** [was invited to and] **sat down at the right hand of the Majesty** [the Father] **in heaven** [to co-reign with almighty God].” All these point to one significant fact, Jesus is greater than any of the angels.

Hebrews 1:4, “**So he** [Jesus, who was viewed for a long time as Michael, the archangel in heaven,] **became as much superior to the angels as the** [new] **name he has inherited is superior to theirs** [for He now has a new identity, one greater than He had as an archangel].”

Hebrews 1:5, “[The Father has exalted the Son before the angels because of His unspeakable love and daring rescue of man. Jesus died in man’s place. And this love for man by the Son has attached the Son to the heart of the Father in a way that had never been seen before. The Son has suffered in a way that even the Father has not known.] **For to which of the angels did God** [the Father] **ever say, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father’? Or again** [in another place it is written], **‘I will be his Father, and he will be my Son’?**” The Father never said anything like this to any of the angels.

Hebrews 1:6, “**And again, when God** [the Father] **brings his firstborn into the world, he says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship him** [Jesus].’”

Hebrews 1:7, “**In speaking of the angels he says, ‘He makes his angels spirits, and his servants flames of fire.’**” We know that angels have mighty powers beyond that of man. They can fly as fast as lightning and strike thousands of men dead in a moment.

Hebrews 1:8, “**But about the Son he** [the Father] **says [to**

the Son], **‘Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice [righteousness] will be the scepter of your kingdom.’**”

Hebrews 1:9, **“You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God [Jesus], your God [the Father], has set you above your [angel] companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.”**

Hebrews 1:10, **“He also says [to the Son], ‘In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.’”**

Hebrews 1:11, **“[Because of sin] They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment.”**

Hebrews 1:12, **“You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.”**

Hebrews 1:13, **“To which of the angels did God ever say, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?’”**

Hebrews 1:14, **“Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?”**

Hebrews 2:1, **“We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.”** Keep in mind that Jesus and His words are greater than any angel.

Hebrews 2:2–3, **“For since the message spoken through angels [in the past] was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape [the coming wrath of God] if we ignore so great a [direct revelation about] salvation [from His Son]? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord [Jesus Christ], was confirmed to us by those who heard him.”**

Well, I’m going to stop there. Hebrews 1 shows that Christ is above all angels. He is the ARCH angel—the one above them all. The authority and supremacy of Jesus are greater than that

of any angel, who in the Jewish mind, was next to God.

You have just read that Jesus is the exact likeness, the same authority, the creator, the one who made everything. Jesus is God. These are exciting concepts when we begin to build upon them. We want to study the book of Hebrews to see what unfolds because it has to do with the Revelation of Jesus and all He is.

I encourage you to read the book of Hebrews a couple of times in your own Bible because the better you understand it, the better you will appreciate the book of Revelation—the Revelation of Jesus.



## chapter 1

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# Plight of Early Converts

Let's invite the Holy Spirit to impress us with clarity about the book of Hebrews.

*Loving Father, wonderful Jesus, eternal Spirit, we come to you, inviting, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, your presence, Lord Jesus. We desire to study your Word. We desire to search deeply and to drink freely from the fountain of truth that springs eternal from your Word. Thank you, Lord, for the precious souls who are reading this book. I ask you to bless them as they read. Speak through my pen so that seeds of truth might be rightly presented, in my prayer, in your wonderful name. Amen.*

You might wonder why, living at the end of the world and near the end of all things, it would be necessary to write a book on Hebrews. In 1991, I rented a gymnasium and began a seminar on Hebrews that was cut short when the church notified me it was our last week in their gym. So, six presentations into the study, it abruptly stopped. Through the years, many

people have asked, “Are you ever going to finish the Hebrews’ seminar?” Well, yes, finally.

The introduction of this book was the introduction to that seminar in 1991. I am glad to redo the whole presentation because I’ve learned so much since then, and I’m still learning. God’s Word is endless, tremendous, and full of treasure.

The book of Hebrews is critically important to those who live at this time in earth’s history because the last generation will have many of the same questions and experiences that beset early Jewish converts.

There are five parallels in Hebrews between believers leaving Judaism during the first century AD and believers who will leave their religious systems during the great tribulation.

Hebrews helps us to understand the imparting of Christ’s righteousness (the sealing) during the judgment of the living. It also explains the concluding ministry of our high priest in heaven’s temple, the deity of Jesus, the properties of faith, and the establishment of God’s rest.

There is extraordinary wisdom in the book of Hebrews, and all who are willing may come and drink deeply of this living water. Just don’t expect to drink too quickly. Hebrews is the second most complicated book in the Bible—Revelation being the first.

The Bible teaches God plans to test the entire world during the great tribulation to see if we love and trust Him supremely or if we love and trust our religious system. There is a difference between a religious system and God, although the line sometimes becomes blurred. Yet, we can’t know the line is blurred until there is a contest between what the Bible teaches and what our church presents. Then we start scratching our heads, wondering which is correct.

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Paul dropped five problematic arguments on Hebrew believers to show the early converts their faith in Christ was not

misdirected. He did this to destroy the power and influence Judaism held over its members. All religious systems are a house of cards, and when advancing truth proves that a supporting card is false, the house falls.

To appreciate Paul's longing for his race, the nation of Israel, as well as those Jews who had already received Christ, let's step back in time to AD 64 and understand their mindset.

Thirty-four years before the book of Hebrews was written, Jesus had been crucified. He was resurrected on the third day, appeared around Jerusalem for forty days, and then disappeared. This is not what was expected of Messiah. They understood He was to remain on David's throne forevermore.

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Just before His crucifixion, Jesus said to His disciples: **“My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back [here] and take you [there] to be with me that you also may be where I am [going].”**<sup>1</sup>

According to Matthew 27, Jesus died on the cross at about 3 pm. When Jesus was resurrected, the Father also raised other dead people so they could rush into Jerusalem on Sunday morning to testify that Jesus was alive! **“And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.”**<sup>2</sup>

I believe, but can't prove, that these newly resurrected people went to heaven with Jesus when He ascended, and the twenty-four elders, described in the book of Revelation, are

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1 John 14:2-3

2 Matthew 27:50-53

members of this group.

Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:7–8: **“But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: ‘When he [Jesus] ascended on high, he took many captives [when Jesus returned to heaven, a line of people followed Him who had also been captives of the tomb] and [Jesus] gave [generous] gifts [befitting His victory and celebration over sin] to his people.’”**

These verses describe a procession of people who had been captives of death in the tomb, and Jesus, the author of life, is at the front of the line leading this group of firstfruits. What a procession to watch! Jesus ascended to heaven with these resurrected individuals following Him. Wouldn't you have loved to see all these dead people walking into the Holy City?

Now, what were the gifts mentioned? **“So Christ himself gave [to His church so that they might become] the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, [gifts] to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”**<sup>1</sup>

There was also a celebration in heaven with trumpets sounding and people and angels rejoicing. I can visualize Jesus stopping, scratching His head, and saying, “What about the people on earth? They need help! I'm going to give them gifts.” That is why we have: apostles, prophets, pastors, evangelists, and teachers. He didn't forget those of us left behind.

Why did the Father raise many dead people to testify that Jesus wasn't dead? **“While the women [Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Mary Magdalene] were on their way [to tell the disciples about the resurrection of Jesus], some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum**

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 4:11–13

of money, telling them, ‘You are to say, “His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.” If this report [that you were sleeping] gets to the governor, we will satisfy him [with more money] and keep you out of trouble.’ So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story [lie] has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day [~AD 80].”<sup>1</sup>

I believe the book of Matthew was written ten years after Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70. Get the timing in your mind because Jerusalem is now history. The Jews were scattered, killed, or taken to Rome. I don’t know what the priests paid to keep the scheme alive, but it must have been a large sum because Jesus had died in AD 30.

Remember, when Hebrews was written in AD 64, there was no telephone, radio, television, or internet—nothing but lips, eyes, and ears. Suppose you had been an ordinary Jew living in Jerusalem. Which rumor would you have most likely believed: The disciples stole Jesus’ body from the tomb, or the Father resurrected Jesus?

When Jesus came forth from the tomb, the Devil threw as much darkness on Jesus’ resurrection as money could buy. Because political propaganda is never concerned with presenting the truth, the Father confounded a whole city of unbelievers by raising a group of dead people to testify that Jesus was no longer dead! What could the Sanhedrin do about these *dead people* who were now alive?

The Bible says that on Sunday morning after Jesus was resurrected, these previously dead individuals left the graveyard and went straightaway to Jerusalem to proclaim that Christ had come out of the tomb.

What did the resurrection of a host of dead people accomplish? The spiritually dead in Jerusalem listened to those who had been dead and resurrected. See the irony? The dead testified on Christ’s behalf! Jesus had said, “God can raise up

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 28:11–15

stones to testify if necessary.”

The decision to use dead people was clever. Here's the result: The Sadducees were discredited and humiliated by those resurrected from the dead because they had made “There is no such thing as a resurrection” a crucial religious matter. Therefore, the resurrection of Jesus created a big problem. It pulls a supporting card out of the house of cards.<sup>1</sup>

On the other side of the aisle, the Pharisees were so furious they could not be consoled. First, Jesus had raised one of their members, Simon, from the dead. Now, after crucifying Jesus, He was alive again. Both parties of the Sanhedrin were frustrated. What else could they do but *spin* the facts so their shame would not be exposed?

Because I was alive when President Nixon attempted to cover up his involvement with the *Watergate* scandal, I like to call the cover-up in Jerusalem *Templegate*. Numerous dead people were walking about the city, and, unfortunately, they were talking. Their only solution for shutting them up was to throw money at the problem. It is the typical way politicians resolve issues. People will do anything for money.

Then, after Jesus' resurrection, the Father compounded the problem by having Him appear before a large crowd of 500+ believers.

Paul wrote, **“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.”**<sup>2</sup>

Why did the Father put Jesus in front of so many people at one meeting? The answer is lips, eyes, and ears. The Devil

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 22:23

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:3–6

knew that if the truth about a resurrected Jesus spread, Christianity would have a chance to survive. If there were no living Jesus, Christianity would be dead just like the tomb. The truth about Christ's resurrection had to, in some way, overcome the lies created and sustained by large sums of money.

However, don't get lost in the details. I have deviated from Hebrews to make clear what was happening in AD 64. We need to understand their dilemma. Christ's absence was both humiliating and embarrassing for early Christians.

At Pentecost in AD 30, a few days after Jesus ascended to heaven, Peter boldly made the following remarks: **"Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: 'Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.'"**<sup>1</sup>

All the early Christians believed Christ would return within their lifetime. Even the apostles were saying, "These are the last days!" In fact, Hebrews 1 begins, **"In these last days, He [the Father] has spoken to us by his Son."**

No one in AD 64 suspected two thousand years would come and go, and there would still be no Jesus. Notice what James, Peter, and Paul wrote. Remember, these are *plank owners* (original members) of the new Christian Church talking.

**"You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near."**<sup>2</sup>

**"The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray."**<sup>3</sup>

**"The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let**

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1 Acts 2:14–17

2 James 5:8

3 1 Peter 4:7

**us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.”<sup>1</sup>**

Even in AD 64, Paul thought he was living at the end of the world. Hebrews 9:26 says, **“But he [Jesus] has appeared once for all [before the Father] at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.”**

Hebrews 10:37 continues, **“In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay.”** But years passed, weeks of years passed, and still no Jesus. Eventually, those who saw Jesus after His resurrection began to die off. And as the second generation began to appear, they wondered, “Did our forefathers genuinely see an apparition of Jesus? Did Jesus really ascend into heaven? Did His disciples actually steal His body from the tomb?”

The waiting became annoying, then humiliating, and finally embarrassing. But the situation worsened. Persecution and imprisonment plagued Christ’s followers in Jerusalem.

Jesus had warned His disciples: **“They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me.”<sup>2</sup>**

About three years after Jesus disappeared, a deacon named Stephen became the first Christian martyr. The Jews stoned him to death for teaching that Christ was the anticipated Messiah. Saul, a young zealous Pharisee who participated in Stephen’s death, began persecuting followers of Christ.

To make matters worse, Saul’s actions were touted by the Pharisees to be supported by Scripture. This meant there would never be any aid or refuge for Christians in Jerusalem.

The Pharisees justified and framed Saul’s persecution of Christians using these verses: “[The Lord said to Moses:] **If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among**

<sup>1</sup> Romans 13:12

<sup>2</sup> John 16:2-3

you and announces to you a sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder spoken of takes place, and the prophet says, 'Let us follow other gods' (gods you have not known) 'and let us worship them,' you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him. That prophet or dreamer must be put to death for inciting rebellion against the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. That prophet or dreamer tried to turn you from the way the Lord your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you. If your very own brother, or your son or daughter, or the wife you love, or your closest friend secretly entices you, saying, 'Let us go and worship other gods' (gods that neither you nor your ancestors have known, gods of the peoples around you, whether near or far, from one end of the land to the other), do not yield to them or listen to them. Show them no pity. Do not spare them or shield them. You must certainly put them to death. Your hand must be the first in putting them to death, and then the hands of all the people. Stone them to death, because they tried to turn you away from the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Then all Israel will hear and be afraid, and no one among you will do such an evil thing again."<sup>1</sup>

The Jews maintained a *monotheistic* view of God (only one God) and considered any suggestion that another God existed as polytheism which was blasphemy and grounds for death.

Stephen was stoned to death because the Jews thought Deuteronomy 13 demanded it. Saul persecuted the Christians because Deuteronomy 13 required it.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 says, "**Hear, O Israel: The Lord our**

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 13:1-11

**God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”**

Exodus 20:2–3 says, **“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.”**

And the Lord says in Isaiah 44:6, **“This is what the Lord says—Israel’s King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.”** Remember, Jesus was also put to death for blasphemy.<sup>1</sup>

One of the most vexing problems between early Christians and Jews is that early Christians believed that Jesus was another God. **“In his defense Jesus said to them, ‘My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.’ For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.”**<sup>2</sup>

The Jews wanted to kill Jesus because Jesus claimed to be God’s Son, and all sons at maturity are considered equals of their fathers.

After Stephen was killed, Saul saw a golden opportunity. **“Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.”**<sup>3</sup>

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I am trying to create a mental image of some of the tension that existed in AD 64 so you can understand the plight of the early converts. Jesus had been gone for thirty-four years when Hebrews was written. The enthusiasm and belief in a soon-returning Christ were becoming annoying and embarrassing. Many early converts were wondering if they had bought into

<sup>1</sup> Mark 14:64

<sup>2</sup> John 5:17–18

<sup>3</sup> Acts 9:1–2

a Ponzi scheme—spiritually speaking. Was Christ real or a fable? What is the essence of our religious experience? We no longer go to the temple; we no longer associate with our families; we've been cast out; we've been rejected; we're persecuted; the Romans hate us, they think we're Jews. The early Christian situation was very painful.

Before Jerusalem was destroyed, the only people who could be Christian in the first century were people willing to live by faith. Otherwise, the heat of the furnace was too hot.

The Holy Spirit killed Ananias and Sapphira so those who were going to come into the church but live the carnal life would think twice about what they were doing. Their deaths kept the church free of opportunistic people. The Holy Spirit expressed divine displeasure with their actions by killing them where they stood. This put the fear of God in the Church.

When Stephen was stoned for testifying that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Jewish leaders felt justified in killing him for trying to persuade them to consider another God. Therefore, Saul's crusade against Christians was deemed a *holy war* in the eyes of the Jews. A *holy war* is a righteous war against evil in which God promises victory.

Look at Deuteronomy 20:1. Moses told Israel, **“When you go to war against your enemies and see horses and chariots and an army greater than yours, do not be afraid of them, because the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, will be with you.”** Verse 4, **“For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory.”**

Since you know what a holy war is now, you know why Muslims consider jihad (holy war) an important part of their mission today. They believe they can't fail because God will give them victory in their effort to overthrow the Great Satan (United States) or anyone else who speaks against Allah.

The Jews had the same understanding based on Deuteronomy

20, a thousand years before Mohammed showed up.

Saul, the young Pharisee, was zealous to make a name for himself. He was determined, with God's help, to wipe all Christians off the face of the map. But Saul was arrested by Jesus on the road to Damascus and converted.

Because of Jewish hatred, Christians in Jerusalem did their best to keep a low profile between AD 34 and AD 64. Those who managed to leave found it difficult to survive because the Gentiles generally held the Jews in contempt for being self-righteous.

As the years went by, there were reports of signs and miracles in various towns: Peter raised Dorcas from the dead at Joppa, and Paul raised Eutychus from the dead at Troas. This encouraged early believers, but where was Jesus? Persecution by the Jews and the Romans dragged on and on. They thought Christians were another sect of Jews like the Pharisees, so there was no safety or peace for Hebrew believers in or outside Jerusalem.

About AD 53, there were rumors that Jesus had returned, but His return was only a private appearance. These rumors upset the believers because what good was their faith in Jesus if His return were merely a private matter? Why would He return and take only a few people back to heaven?

Apostle Paul jumped on this rumor with both feet and wrote to the believers in Thessalonica, saying: **“Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come. Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.”**<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3

We can summarize the setting in AD 64 by concluding that hatred and persecution were rampant. But it gets even worse.

Because of ongoing rumors and conspiracies, Christians had dashed hopes, perpetuated by the disappointment of thirty-four years with no Jesus. On top of this, all Hebrew converts were social outcasts, religious outcasts, and familial outcasts. Their families had rejected them. And because their religious system had alienated them, they had no social life other than assembling as believers in Christ.

If it had not been for the astonishing work of the Holy Spirit between the ascension of Jesus in AD 30 and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, the church of Christ in Jerusalem would have faded away. You might be thinking, so what? The gospel had gone to the Gentiles anyway.

Here is the problem. When the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are separated from the God of the Old Testament, the gospel of Jesus becomes *silly putty* that can be manipulated according to religious bias or whim.

If you take the four Gospels and separate them from the God of the Old Testament, you create a God that doesn't exist. Millions of Christians have done this; they worship an icon called Jesus which has nothing to do with the real Jesus. You cannot take the four Gospels, throw away the rest of the Bible, and get an accurate picture of God. This is the most pernicious problem within Christianity today.

Contrary to the claims of thousands of New Testament scholars, the gospel of Jesus is not a *New Testament* gospel (a new message). The book of Revelation tells us that the gospel of Jesus is an *eternal* gospel (an eternal message).

Notice what Revelation 14:6–7 says: **“Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, ‘Fear God [Jesus] and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment**

**has come. Worship him [Jesus] who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.’”**

The one book in the Bible that best unifies the Old and New Testaments is the book of Hebrews. Many Christians today, as did the Jews living in the first century AD, refuse to understand that Jehovah in the Old Testament is Jesus in the New Testament. He is the same person, the same God. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. He never changes.”<sup>1</sup>

Look at what these verses reveal: **“This is what the Lord says—Israel’s King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.”**<sup>2</sup>

**“When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: ‘Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades [grave].’”**<sup>3</sup>

Israel’s King and Redeemer was Jehovah, and Jehovah is Jesus—who was dead. Jesus is also the Lord Almighty, who is the first and the last. Apart from Him, there is no God who shows himself to mankind. The Father doesn’t, and neither does the Holy Spirit.

Jehovah has been God from the beginning, just like the Father is God. Jesus is called *the Word* in John 1 because He is the One who speaks for the invisible Father.

Why is it important to understand the existence and function of three Gods? Of the three, only one is visible, and He alone speaks for the Godhead. Jesus was crucified, and Stephen was stoned, not for blasphemy, but for telling the truth. When truth is considered blasphemy, the culture is doomed.

Jesus said in John 3:19–21, **“This is the verdict: [new] Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness [their religious traditions] instead of light [advancing truth]**

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 13:8

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 44:6

<sup>3</sup> Revelation 1:17–18

**because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil [clings to the status quo and] hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds [traditions] will be exposed [as false]. But whoever lives by the truth [seeks truth] comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.”**

As a tiny acorn takes root and breaks a concrete slab, the seed of truth also can take root and break the iron grip and control of prejudice and religion. The religious, social, and political situation in AD 64 created a perfect storm. Hebrew believers were at a crossroad. Doubts about Jesus were growing. Rumors prevailed, theological questions surfaced, fears were taking over, depression was setting in, and the onset of Jerusalem’s destruction by the Romans was only four years away. Now that we have some background, let’s step into the book of Hebrews.

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Hebrews was organized to resolve numerous issues that plagued early Hebrew believers. But as you can see, the answers to the questions are as applicable today as they were then.

(a) Is Jesus an angel or deity? Is polytheism fact or fiction? If He is divine, Christianity and Judaism are forever separated.

Answer: Hebrews 1:1–14

(b) What is the relationship between Jesus, the Father, and the salvation of sinners? Does salvation come through obedience to Israel’s God or faith in Jesus Christ? If through faith in Jesus Christ, Christianity and Judaism are forever separated.

Answer: Hebrews 2:1–18

(c) Are the teachings of Jesus greater than the laws of Moses? If so, Christianity and Judaism are forever torn apart.

Answer: Hebrews 3:1–6

(d) Where and when will God’s rest begin? Who will enter God’s rest? If God’s rest is not located in Canaan, Christianity and Judaism are forever separated.

Answer: Hebrews 3:7–4:13

(e) How can Jesus be the high priest? He is not a Levite and not on earth. If Jesus is the high priest for eternity, Christianity and Judaism are forever separated.

Answer: Hebrews 4:14–5:10

(f) What happens if the teachings of Christ are abandoned? Can we remain faithful to Judaism and still be saved? Will the consequences be serious if we stay?

Answer: Hebrews 5:11–6:12

(g) Is Jesus greater than Melchizedek? Abraham was a great man but lower in God's sight than Melchizedek. If Jesus is greater than Melchizedek, this puts Abraham below Jesus and separates Christianity from Judaism.

Answer: Hebrews 6:13–7:28

(h) Long ago, God promised to make a new covenant with Israel.<sup>1</sup> How can a Christian participate in a covenant made with Israel?

Answer: Hebrews 8:1–9:28

(i) How can one say temple rituals are meaningless, that animal sacrifices do not remove guilt? If true, this separates Christianity from Judaism forever.

Answer: Hebrews 10:1–39

(j) What is the difference between intellectual assent (believing) and faith (believing)? Why is faith the prerequisite for eternal life? What does discipline have to do with living by faith?

Answer: Hebrews 11:1–12:13

(k) Can I remain a Hebrew? I love my church. I love the people. Do I have to leave Judaism? Why do I have to embrace present truth and suffer?

Answer: Hebrews 12:14–13:6

(l) Being a social, religious, and familial outcast for Christ

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 31:31

is painful and discouraging. I hate it. When will Jesus return?

Answer: Hebrews 13:7–25

These twelve issues are complicated and applicable today. It takes quite a Hebraic scholar to create these arguments laying out the contrasts between Christianity and Judaism so sharply. Their goal was to coax Hebrew converts out of the cradle of Judaism into Christianity.

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The book of Hebrews confronted Judaism with five arguments that will still stretch your mind even today.

(1) The first argument was the deity of Jesus. Judaism, as you remember, was a monotheistic religious organization. There is only room for one God in a monotheistic religion. So the fact that Jesus is deity was a big problem. How can there be two Gods? Paul skillfully proved Jesus was not an angel but is, in fact, God—a deity—an equal member of the Godhead. If Jesus is God, Judaism is false. This was theologically devastating.

(2) The second argument was that Jesus is now the high priest in the order of Melchizedek and serves in the true tabernacle in heaven. This means the high priest at the temple in Jerusalem was of no value. He was from the tribe of Levi, a descendant of Aaron; the priest predicted in the book of Psalms is a high priest from the tribe of Judah. That priest is to be in the order of Melchizedek. He is to serve in the true tabernacle, not the shadow that is on earth. This was a big problem. How do you tell someone their church has just been destroyed or made of no value?

(3) The third argument was another big problem: God's rest. If you're not familiar with the mindset in AD 64, you might not appreciate this. The Jews believed the kingdom of God (another name for God's rest) would be established in Canaan because God had promised Abraham the land.

When God created Adam and Eve, He put them in a garden called Eden, which was God's rest. In the garden, they didn't

have to work for a living. The trees and plants produced food. They didn't have to work for it. It came up naturally. This was the way God set up a land. When Israel entered Canaan, they thought they would enter God's rest—a land that flowed with milk and honey. The trouble is that God could never establish His rest because Israel was not cooperative.

Hebrews presents its arguments to the believers who were beginning to waver. They believed in Christ, but Jesus hadn't returned, so they were inching back toward Judaism. To step out of Judaism meant stepping away from one's family, friends, church, and job. On top of this rejection, they were being persecuted. So, Paul was posing these arguments against Judaism to prove they were going back to nothing. He is saying, "You're going back to something of no value, don't waste your time."

In Hebrews 3 and 4, he's trying to show that God's rest will not happen until Christ returns. He is pleading with them, "Why don't you put your faith in Christ? Then you too can enter His rest."

(4) The fourth argument was probably the most inflammatory the author of Hebrews could posit: that God's covenant with Abraham did not include all of Abraham's descendants. Whoa! This was terrible news if you were a devout Jew who believed that only a biological descendant of Abraham could be included in the covenant promise. Thus, it was imperative to have your genealogy traced back to Abraham because genealogy separated the Jew from the Gentile.

(5) And then the last argument. Living by faith is unlike legalism. It is the opposite of legalism. We will study this fifth issue first and work our way backward through the arguments. I like to jump to the conclusion and work my way back to the beginning.

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At a seminar, I once had a lady say, "Larry, I pray for you in every seminar that the Lord will give you the wings of an eagle

so that you can quickly fly to the point.” So let me get right to the point.

Salvific may be a new word for you. It is a theological term that describes a faith that leads to salvation. How do you get a Hebrew to understand what salvific faith is, much less come to that understanding quickly? And how do you get a Jew who has been immersed in a legalistic religious experience to:

Stop offering animal sacrifices?

Stop listening to the teachings of the Levitical priesthood?

Stop attending feasts?

Step out of legalism into faith?

Mix freely with Gentiles?

Ignore circumcision?

Eat meat offered to idols?

And lastly, walk away from a way of life where Judaism infiltrates every aspect of living?

To answer these questions, I want to explain how legalism, presumption, and faith differ. Legalism is an imaginary bilateral contract with God summarized in three words: *this-for-that*. Legalism begins when a person makes a deal with God. The sinner agrees to do whatever God wants, and in turn, he believes that God will grant him eternal life. Think of legalism as *I do this, I get that*. Most of us, whether living under law or grace, are legalists. It is human nature. It is a phenomenon found in every religious system because most contracts are bilateral.

A bilateral contract is where two parties make an agreement. “I take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife,” and, “I take this man to be my lawful wedded husband.” You have a bilateral contract with two parties agreeing. Most friendships are bilateral. We are friends, or we’re married for as long as you do what I think you should do. A bilateral contract on its legal basis is *this-for-that*.

And many well-meaning Christians have slipped into a legalistic contract with God without realizing it because they live with the idea of *I do this, I get that*. If you have made a deal with God for eternal life, you are a legalist.

Remember, three months after being delivered from Egypt, Israel camped at the foot of Mount Sinai. They saw, at a distance, the majesty and the shrouded glory of Jehovah. Jesus had descended on the mountain to meet with Israel, but before meeting with the congregation, He said to Moses, “Come up here.”<sup>1</sup>

After Moses met with Jesus, He was sent back down the mountain. **“So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, ‘We will do everything the Lord has said.’ So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord.”**<sup>2</sup>

How long did the deal last? In less than seven weeks, they were dancing around the golden calf. Israel had entered a legal contract and broke it.

Emotionally speaking, a relationship based on legalism goes up and down because human performance goes up and down. But faith doesn’t change.

Before we delve into the meaning of faith, we must examine one other widely practiced relationships with God. This one is called presumption which is summed up as *give-me-that*.

A person with presumption treats God as though He were a very kind and generous Santa Claus who can do anything He wants. This relationship assumes that God is always there like an almighty teddy bear. The person with presumption believes that God is not only attentive and interested in our health, prosperity, and well-being but—and this is excellent news—He is not overly concerned with sin or transgression because Jesus took care of that on the cross. Those living in presumption

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<sup>1</sup> This is before Jesus spoke the Ten Commandments.

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 19:7–8

often pretend all is well. “God is on my side, looking out for my best interests.” The number of prayers offered by people living in presumption increases when something is wanted. They pray and cry to the Lord daily, “Give me this. I want that.”

The faith experience is unlike the legalistic or presumptive experience. A relationship with God based on faith is torturous and burdensome to the carnal nature. I know this from experience.

Salvific faith can be summarized as, “Lord, the Holy Spirit is beating me up. I’m convicted and don’t like it, but God’s will must be done.” That is what faith, at its core, is all about. I will show that this makes our redemption through Christ so unique.

The word *faith* can mean *denomination*. “What *faith* are you?” The word *faith* can also mean *confidence*. “I have faith that you will carry this out.” Or, the word *faith* can indicate *intellectual assent*. “I believe God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh.”

But we’re not discussing the general usage of the word faith. I am emphasizing salvific faith—the kind of faith that brings salvation. This kind of faith always rubs our carnal natures the wrong way. Rebellion quickly modifies salvific faith into legalism or presumption. We cannot stop the temptation. Most of us rarely even detect it. History affirms that Israel constantly cycled through rebellion, apostasy, and repentance. Israel’s history is a mirror of human conduct. Let’s now see if we can put legalism, presumption, and faith into a meaningful context.

In Daniel 3, King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold 90 feet high and 9 feet wide, set it up on the plain of Dura, and made this proclamation: **“Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into the blazing furnace. At this time, some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, ‘May the king live forever! Your Majesty has issued a decree**

that everyone who hears [the music] must fall down and worship the image of gold, and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. But [O king] there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. [I can hear them saying this with contempt in their voice.] They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.’”

Translating this into today’s English, they said, “O king, you have some defiant subjects. Deal with them.” The Bible says, “The king was furious with rage.” So, he summoned Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. As these men were brought before the king, they replied to the king’s threat: **“King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”**

This means, “King, you know that we worship Jehovah and that our service to you has been faithful and wholehearted. You know the God we serve gave you the understanding of this vision you’re trying to obfuscate. You know all of us, O king.” This parallels the end time because another image is coming, and all will be required to worship it or die. The parallels between the two stories are apparent.

Let’s analyze the situation. The second commandment says, “You shall not make an idol, nor bow down and worship any idol.” So were the three Hebrews being legalistic, presumptuous, or faithful?

A legalist would have said, “O king, I’m not doing it. I would rather burn to death than worship an idol.” Is defiance a manifestation of faith? No, defiance is a manifestation of the carnal nature. “I’m not doing it and you can’t make me.”

A person with presumption would have said, "O king, I don't normally worship images, but God understands the situation, and since you insist, I will honor your wishes because an idol is nothing to me. I hope that you and your staff have a nice day."

On the other hand, a faith-full person says, "O king, I love life as much as anyone. The God I love and serve forbids me from worshiping an image or an object. Therefore, I cannot obey your command. You must do what seems best. My God can save me from death if He so chooses. But if not, I'm prepared to die in the furnace." That is faith. "I am convicted; I don't like it, but God's will must be done." That is salvific faith.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, "My father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away and I must drink it, your will be done." Jesus was saying, "I know your will. I don't like it, but your will must be done." Jesus taught us to pray, **"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."**

The difference between legalism and salvific faith is that legalism is about being righteous (egocentric), and salvific faith is about pleasing an all-seeing God (theocentric). Legalism is about being right. This appeals to our ego. All of us enjoy saying, "I told you so." Legalism is about becoming righteous in our own eyes and being above reproach in the presence of others.

Salvific faith is an entirely different approach. It is about pleasing God every moment of every day. That becomes a theocentric life rather than an egocentric life. Whenever we are tempted to do something wrong, we don't think about it long enough to make a good decision. We just fall off the edge. Faith obeys Holy Spirit conviction without regard for the social or financial consequences.

As I write this, I know a man who is losing his family, friends, and respect in the community because of his faith. The consequences, socially and financially, are heavy. Please keep

those in the same circumstance in your prayers. Faith obeys the Holy Spirit without regard for the consequences.

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After dropping four profound arguments on the Hebrews, proving that Judaism had become a false religious system, Paul appealed to the Hebrews to leave Judaism and put their faith in Jesus. Salvific faith is the only way to leave a religious system and embrace another.

Look at Revelation 14:12. I especially like how the New King James translation describes the saints who will live when the Devil is physically upon earth. This is also when the third angel's message is proclaimed: warning that anyone who worships the lamb-like beast, anyone who worships Lucifer, will receive God's wrath. The penalty for calling the Devil 'a devil' will be horrible.

For example, if you were to go to a Muslim country, get up on your apple crate, hold up your Bible and say, "Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but Mohammed is a false prophet," what would your lifespan be? It would be a very short time.

That is what the 144,000 are going to do. They are going to say, "This man is not God; he is the Devil. And most of the world will think, "No, he IS God, and you're the devil."

Scripture says, "**Here is the patience of the saints: here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.**"<sup>1</sup> The next chapter is about the faith of Jesus. There is no example on earth like Him. That is why the above verse talks about *those who go through and are faithful to the end will have the faith of Jesus.*

Pray with me.

*Dear Lord, it's unbelievable what you did on the cross. Out of love, you were willing to die for one sinner without any assurance of resurrection. That is astonishing. That you would give up being a deity so that*

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 14:12

*a mere mortal could have your eternal life. Precious Jesus, in the last moments of your life on the cross, when the Father put upon you the guilt of the second death, you refused to use your own divinity to save yourself. Your faith in the Father was unbreakable. Please give us that kind of faith. Prepare us so that we might have the faith of Jesus. Thank you for blessing us. This is our prayer. In your wonderful name, we pray. Amen.*



## chapter 2



# The Faith of Jesus

*Dear Lord, thank you for the privilege of studying your precious Word which reveals your character, your love, your plans, and your efforts to save each of us. Thank you for the hope that brings our hearts together in unity, anticipating and longing for that wonderful day when you will return. Thank you for hearing and answering our prayers, for forgiving us our sins, and for giving us the empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit to be transformed daily into your character. Thank you for loving us as you do. Bless us as we study the book of Hebrews. In your wonderful name, Lord Jesus. Amen.*

When I write and speak, one of the most challenging decisions for me—because there’s so much I want to say—is what to select, what to leave out, and the order in which what is kept should be said. I fret over this often.

You may be surprised that we began this study covering the faith of Jesus, when faith isn’t discussed in the book of Hebrews until chapter 11. Usually, one starts reviewing a book

at the beginning, not the end.

I started with the faith of Jesus because the necessity of faith is the first issue a Christian has to consider. How does a created being who understands so little live in the presence of an infinite God?

Let me ask the question a different way. How do you live with someone you can't understand until you finally understand them? What makes it possible to live in that interval of time between *not understanding* and *understanding*? There is only one way and that is through faith.

Have you ever wondered why God made *faith* the prerequisite for salvation? Because faith is precisely what it takes to live with Him. Lucifer was cast out of heaven because of his lack of faith in God. And only individuals who have faith are going to be saved.

Consider this illustration. Suppose you were born four thousand years ago on a remote island in the middle of the Pacific. No missionary had ever been to your island to tell you about Jesus and the plan of salvation because, four thousand years ago, the name Jesus had never been used. No one knew about Jesus that long ago. A small group was expecting a messiah, but the name JESUS wasn't mentioned until the angel Gabriel came to Mary and revealed it.

What happens if you've never heard about Jesus? How can you be saved? The fact is, God is willing to save anyone who will live by faith.

The Holy Spirit has been working on hearts since Adam and Eve were created. The ministry of the Spirit is to bring conviction. When Abel brought the appropriate sacrifice, it was because he acted on conviction the Spirit imposed.

I am trying to explain that if you had been born on that island and never read the Bible, never knew about Jesus, never heard about the living God of heaven—you may have even worshiped an imaginary god—it's immaterial. If you have

responded to the conviction that the Holy Spirit places within your heart, you live by faith. Therefore, when judgment comes and God judges you, He says, “The person on that island is willing to live by faith. He is willing to respond to the Spirit. All he needs to know now is truth.”

Responding to the conviction is what matters. Salvation comes through faith! The only sin that cannot be forgiven is the rejection of the Holy Spirit. Whether we’re aware that Christ paid the penalty or not makes no difference in terms of our salvation. When we know what Christ has done, that understanding implores us to love Him. But being aware that Jesus died on the cross doesn’t mean we live by faith.

The author of Hebrews did not write this epistle for Gentile Christians. He wrote to Jewish converts who had embraced Jesus as the Messiah.

It is one thing to grow up viewing God through the lens of a religious system that is fifteen hundred years old, a religious system that includes everyone in your family, a religious system that began with your own great-grandfather Abraham. But it is another matter to abandon your religious heritage to follow a man your religion recently killed. To make matters worse, Jesus disappeared, leaving nothing but a promise to return.

The author of Hebrews assumed his readers would have some knowledge of Old Testament laws, messianic prophecies, routine temple services, Jesus’ life and ministry, and the importance of trusting in God.

Who in AD 64 would have had such knowledge? Only a small group of Hebrew converts that probably consisted of less than five thousand people.

We know the apostle Paul wrote thirteen of the twenty-nine books in the New Testament. Thirteen of his books were written for Christians. Hebrews was written specifically for Jewish converts who had a thousand questions about topics that did not affect Gentiles.

Looking at church history, I think it fair to say that if Christians understood the book of Hebrews, there would be less division among denominations.

Hebrews explains the concluding ministry of our high priest in heaven's temple. It explains the deity of Jesus as a sovereign God. It explains the properties of faith and the establishment of God's kingdom—God's rest.

Even though today we are not concerned with the questions that faced early Jewish converts, God foreknew that Christians would eventually have many of the same experiences. In this sense, the book of Hebrews is timeless and contains profound parallels for the final generation.

Hebrews helps us to understand the imparting of Christ's righteousness which occurs during the judgment of the living. The book of Revelation calls this removal of our carnal nature *the sealing*.

Hebrews is not a book that invites casual study because it's not easy to read. Its eternal riches, however, belong to those willing to dig for buried treasure.

Although the author of Hebrews did not sign his name, many scholars and eminent writers believe Paul penned the book. Many others believe he did not.

As stated in the introduction, I have no doubt the apostle Paul composed the book, meaning he was the originator of its ideas. Yet when comparing it with other letters we know Paul wrote, it is evident a stenographer organized and wrote the book.

Paul probably dictated the book from prison shortly before Nero put him to death. I believe he recorded the book because, as a Jewish convert, Paul wanted his kinfolk to embrace the joy and fullness of life in Jesus that he had.

There is a tremendous difference between living by faith and living under the law. There is also a difference between living by faith and living under grace. Living by faith is a unique

experience that militates against the carnal nature. That is why it is so difficult to sustain it.

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I want to give an example of what salvific faith is all about. The best case study of faith in the Bible is found in the life of Christ.

When Jesus was born, He was born just like you and me. He didn't know that He was God's Son until after He began to grow up. The Holy Spirit revealed to Jesus by age twelve that He was the Lamb of God. Remember the story of His parents finding Him in the temple talking with the teachers? He had stayed behind, so He could get answers to questions that were forming in His mind.

Jesus, until He turned thirty, was the Son of God by faith alone. He had no evidence of it other than His mother's testimony about His origin. The Holy Spirit revealed things to Him, but it was not until He came up out of the water during His baptism that the Holy Spirit descended on Him in the form of a dove, and He heard a voice from heaven affirming, "This is my Son in whom I am well pleased." Living thirty years by faith is a remarkable feat. Thirty minutes is a struggle sometimes.

Jesus' faith was affirmed three times: (1) in the temple,<sup>1</sup> (2) at His baptism,<sup>2</sup> and (3) on the Mount of Transfiguration<sup>3</sup> when the Father spoke and said, "This is my Son, listen to him."

Remember, after He was baptized, the Bible says, "And immediately the Spirit led Him into the desert." At the time of the first temptation, it was during the onset of winter and very cold. Jesus had no food for forty days, so he was weak and emaciated. This is when the Devil came and pulled a despicable trick.

He said to Jesus, "Turn these stones into bread if you're the Son of God." Satan was tempting Jesus to exercise His divinity.

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<sup>1</sup> John 12

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 3

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 17

He was saying, “Jesus, go ahead and prove to yourself that you are who you think you are. Use your power. You’ve got it. Use it and remove all doubt. There is no need for faith. Just do it.”

Between the ages of twelve and thirty, the Holy Spirit revealed much to Jesus. For example, in Psalm chapter 2, the Father had promised Jesus before He came to earth that if Jesus successfully carried out the Father’s will, the Father would raise Him from the dead and make the earth His inheritance.

**“I will proclaim the Lord’s decree: He said to me, “You are my son; today I have become your father. Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.”**<sup>1</sup> What was the significance of this statement before Jesus came to earth? Everything Jesus created belonged to the Father. Jesus kept nothing.

But the Father said to Him, “If you redeem the earth and its sinners—those who respond to the Spirit—I will give them to you for your inheritance; they will be yours.” This passage in Psalm 2 occurred on the day that Adam and Eve sinned. The Hebrew word for son is *Ben*. *Ben* means *subject*.

On that day, Jesus went to the Father and said, “Father, I’ll do whatever you say. I will do whatever you want to redeem these sinners—Adam and Eve and their offspring.” And the Father said, “Since you are willing to do that, I will give you everything you redeem. They will be your possession.”

The same day Adam and Eve sinned, Jesus subjected himself to the Father. The sentence is saying in Hebrew, “You are my subject; today, I have become your boss.” That is what it means. This is why we call Jesus the *Son* (subject) of God. He was willing to do whatever the Father required—whatever the Father demanded to save you and me. He subjected himself to the Father willingly.

Jesus said in John 17:5, **“And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world**

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 2:7–8

**began.”** The Holy Spirit revealed details about Jesus’ previous existence in heaven. Jesus was taken away in vision many times and shown who He was and what went on before He came to earth.

Jesus continued in verse 6, **“I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me, and they have obeyed your word.”** Jesus was thrilled! The Father had promised Him that whomever He redeemed He could keep.

This is why Hebrews 1 says, **“In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.”**

So, Jesus became an heir, and He will receive all the Father promised at the proper and appointed time. Because He had audibly heard the Father’s approval three times during His ministry before reaching His destiny on the cross. Jesus was confident the Father would keep His promise to raise Him from the dead.

Notice what Jesus said in Luke 9:22. **“And he said, ‘The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.’ ”** Jesus knew the agreement He had with the Father was bilateral. However, to carry out the agreement, the Father said, “Now, there’s one other thing, Jesus: You must have complete faith in me. You have to trust me even though you might not want to.”

So, at the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus knew it was the Father’s will that He would go to the cross. Jesus was saying, “Oh man, this is terrible. If at all possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, your will be done.”

Luke 22:43 says, “An angel appeared to Him and strengthened Him” in the garden. Otherwise, He might have died

before going to the cross. Such was His anguish.

Jesus went to the cross like a child, fully trusting His Father, knowing it was the Father's will that He should die and that the Father would raise Him from the dead. Then, while hanging on the cross, the Father did what Jesus could not anticipate: He broke their connection. This action shocked Jesus to His core. Suddenly, all hope of being resurrected was gone because the strengthening presence of the Father had disappeared. Physically suffering in the extreme, Jesus was unexpectedly crushed with self-loathing for the first time.

When we feel guilty, it is a form of self-loathing. It is a feeling of not liking one's self. Now, there is false guilt and true guilt. But in both cases, it's the same. Internally, it is self-loathing. Many people today take drugs because they don't like themselves. They loathe themselves, and drugs are a way of masking the pain.

For example, consider the end of one thousand years when Jesus resurrects the dead and all the wicked stand before the Holy City. Jesus confronts each wicked person and has them look toward the sky because He will play their whole life in review. He will show each wicked person why they could not be saved. Each wicked person will see the countless times the Holy Spirit was rejected.

At the end of the drama—the panorama in the sky—Jesus will tell each wicked person, “This is why you cannot be included in the city.” Each wicked person will see The City and the saints standing on its walls like sailors when aircraft carriers dock. Their feeling of self-loathing will be overwhelming. The wicked will say to themselves, “I had the lottery ticket and threw it away. I could have had all this but chose not to—despicable me.” In their overwhelming feelings of shame and disgust, Lucifer will rush in, leading them to attack the Holy City. God will then burn them up.

Now, let me address the guilt put upon Jesus on the cross. Jesus had never sinned or done anything wrong. So He had

never felt guilt or self-loathing until just before three o'clock that Friday afternoon.

2 Corinthians 5:21 says, **“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** Jesus was blown away. The Father broke His connection with Jesus and immediately imposed the darkness of guilt on Jesus so that Jesus would experience what all sinners will experience when the time comes for the second death.

The Father's separation terrified Jesus. From Jesus' point of view, it seemed the Father had double-crossed Him. The Father had been with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane and sent an angel to sustain Him to get to the cross, so Jesus knew He wasn't alone. But then—about five minutes till three—the Father was gone, and Jesus felt entirely different. He was full of self-loathing because the guilt of sin was placed upon Him.

He had to experience the second death because the wages of sin is eternal death. God imposes nothing on us that He has not first experienced. Suddenly, when Jesus needed the Father's presence and approval most, there was no Father—only darkness and despair.

Mark 15:34 says, **“And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?’ (which means ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’).”** Why have you done this to me? This wasn't part of the plan. It was a complete surprise to Jesus. It seems so cruel. The Father placed this loneliness on Jesus as an extreme test of faith. If Jesus passed the test, the Father could demonstrate two truths for all eternity so they could never be questioned:

(1) The Father wants the universe to know that Jesus loved sinners enough to die for them. Even when Jesus was in a condition where He was 100% sure there would be no recovery or resurrection for himself. What kind of love is this?

The Father put Jesus in a situation where Jesus had no hope of ever living again because the Father wanted the universe to

know that this would be the depth of God's love for eternity. There is nothing like it. He put Jesus in the most difficult position to see what His faith would be.

(2) The Father wants the universe to recognize that Jesus would not, during His last and most terrifying moments of life, yield to the overwhelming temptation to stop the process by using His divine power to escape the second death.

See, the Father pulled a *fast one* on Jesus, as we would say in the vernacular. Jesus was hanging on the cross, and the Father unexpectedly withdrew from Jesus. The Father placed the guilt of the second death on Christ to test His faith. Would He die or exercise His divine power to save himself? That was the taunt, "He saved others but can't help himself. Come down off that cross if you can."

If you think the temptations in the desert with Lucifer were awful, Christ's temptation on the cross during the final moments of His life was greater. During Jesus' last moments, the Father plunged Jesus into total despair to bear witness that Jesus would forfeit everything out of love and remain faithful to His assignment.

When Jesus was unexpectedly disconnected from the Father, Jesus became aware that He wasn't coming out of the tomb. So in terror, He cried out, "Why?" Have you ever prayed and heard nothing? Have you ever prayed and wondered where God might be? I have. This is the part that touches my heart. Not understanding what was going on, Jesus waited a few moments, and upon hearing nothing, His last words were, "Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit." Wow, that is raw faith! This is a faith that won't let go! This is the faith of Jesus we so desperately need.

We are entering a very dark age. Tragedy is about to break out on the earth, and we'll need *the faith of Jesus* to get through what we face.

The Jews and Romans desired to exterminate Jesus and His

influence, so hung Him on a cross. But at three o'clock, Jesus gave His life to the Father, and it was the Father who killed Him. Man cannot kill divinity. Only deity can kill deity. Jesus freely gave His life to the Father, and the Father snuffed it out. Then He raised Jesus on the third day as promised.

This is why we read in Revelation 1:18, **“I am the Living One; [Jesus says] I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever!”** He is alive forevermore. That Friday afternoon, a coeternal, separate, and distinct member of the Godhead went voluntarily to His death—under the most distressing circumstances possible—to save one sinner. This is the price of our salvation which Jesus paid in full.

Jesus is our demonstration of divine love and raw faith. The faith of Jesus is a faith that cannot be crushed by despair, inspired by music and praise, or sustained by vigorous preaching. The faith of Jesus is not emotionally based or roused by cheerleading. The faith of Jesus is choice-based. Jesus chose to believe in the promise of the Father, even when there was absolute darkness and nothing to support His belief. The relationship between Jesus and the Father was not *this-for-that* or *give-me-that*. It was, “I am convicted. I don’t like it, but God’s will must be done.”

Job said, **“Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him.”**<sup>1</sup> Jesus asked, **“When the Son of Man comes, will he find [salvific] faith on the earth?”**<sup>2</sup> Jesus’ willingness to cease to exist forever just to save one sinner is a resounding lesson of what faith is. Legalism cannot take disappointment. Presumption can’t endure persecution or rejection. But faith in God endures steadfastly until either the storm is over or life has ended.

This is why Paul wrote, **“Without faith, it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe [no matter the circumstances]. No matter how dark it may be. No matter how bleak. You must believe] that he exists and that**

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1 Job 13:15

2 Luke 18:8

**he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”**<sup>1</sup> Paul continued in Hebrews 11:1, “**Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.**” Jesus showed us the way that faith works.

In Hebrews 10:38–39, Paul appealed to the early converts who were wavering in whether they should remain Christians or return to Judaism. He quoted Habakkuk 2:4 concerning Christ: “**But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back.**” Paul then took the experience of Christ and turned it to the converts. “**But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are [killed but] saved.**” Exciting options, aren’t they?

The work of the Holy Spirit is to bring conviction. A person is lost or saved according to his response to the Holy Spirit. Conviction is where faith begins. If you don’t have conviction, how can you have faith? When we live by faith, God rewards it.

I started Hebrews by showing you the faith of Jesus because the early Hebrew converts had to put their confidence and trust in Christ. Even though they suffered rejection for being Christians, even though they were ostracized, even though they were ridiculed and persecuted, Paul encouraged them to hang on because the reward would be worth far more than any suffering.

This is the story, the parallel, that we need as Revelation’s story unfolds. To hang on is to have faith like Jesus when He was hanging on the cross. Jesus chose to remain faithful: “Father, into your hands, I commit my life.” Are you ready to commit your life to Christ?

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In Revelation 22:13, Jesus says, “**I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.**” Jesus then says, “I was dead.” This can only be talking about

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 11:6

Jesus. Israel's King and Redeemer was Jehovah, and Jehovah was Jesus, who was dead. Jesus is also the Lord Almighty, the first and the last, and apart from Him, no God shows himself to mankind. The Father doesn't show himself, and neither does the Holy Spirit.

Jesus says, "There is no other God that can be seen. No one can ever see the Father. No one can see the Holy Spirit. I am the only one you can ever see. That is why I can say, 'Apart from me, there is no other visible God. I'm the first; I am the last; apart from me, there is no other.'"

Jehovah in the Old Testament is Jesus in the New. This is important because to understand the four Gospels, one needs a good understanding of the Old Testament. Most Christians throw the Old Testament away to create a God who suits their fancy and bias. They need a God who is indulgent and does what they want. It is easier to create your own God than to acknowledge the sovereignty of the living God and live by faith because surrendering to the demands of another takes effort.

When Jesus was speaking with Nicodemus—a Jewish leader and Pharisee who came to Jesus in the cloak of darkness—He was going to say something that Nicodemus would not understand at that moment, but would become clear after Jesus' departure.

Jesus said, "**This is the verdict: [new] Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness [their religious traditions] instead of light [advancing truth] because their deeds were evil.**"<sup>1</sup>

Jesus continued His conversation with Nicodemus in John 3:20–21, "**Everyone who does evil [clings to tradition to avoid the price] hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds [traditions] will be exposed [as false]. [That's the way it works.] But whoever lives by [hungers and thirsts for] the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done [changes made] has**

<sup>1</sup> John 3:19

**been done in the sight of God.”**

Does this passage make sense to you? Jesus was talking to Nicodemus about the importance of moving out of Judaism into the kingdom of God. He said, “You can’t get there unless you’re born again. The only way you will love truth, Nicodemus, is to be born again.” When new light comes, our desire for truth is tested: either we cling to tradition or embrace truth. When advancing light comes with a price, it is evil to avoid the price.

The following is a statement written by an attorney. Contemplate its wisdom?

*“When a man who is honestly mistaken hears the truth, he will either quit being mistaken or cease being honest.”*

— Richard J Humpal, JD

In the remaining chapters of this book, I will examine the twelve issues the book of Hebrews confronts, but I’ll close this chapter with these thoughts.

The book of Hebrews was authored by a man who came to know Jesus better than the disciples who walked with Him. Near the end of the book of Hebrews, Paul reminded the early converts of their earlier enthusiasm for Jesus.

Hebrews 10:32–39, **“Remember those earlier days after you had received the light [advancing truth], when you endured [stood your ground] in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You suffered along with [and sympathized with] those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For, ‘In just a**

**little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay.' [Notice the imminence.] And, 'But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back.' But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved."**

In the next chapter, we'll see why there was nothing left of Judaism, so the wavering Hebrews had nothing to return to.

Pray with me.

*Dear Lord, thank you for the book of Hebrews. It is wonderful to see its dedication as the saints are encouraged to hang on to their faith, to hang on to the development of advancing light. As they slowly see more clearly how Christianity is the will of God, is the true church of God, and Judaism is an empty tomb. As we consider the plight of the Christians in the first century AD, we are reminded of the plight of coming Christians during the end time. You are going to call all believers out of their religious systems all over the world. Those who love truth, walk in the light, and are willing to live by faith will rejoice to see your day. We want to be in that number when the saints go marching in. This is our prayer in your wonderful name Jesus. Amen.*



## chapter 3



### Plan A / Plan B

*Loving Father, wonderful Jesus, precious Holy Spirit, I ask that you bless this study with your presence. Open hearts and minds to hear and consider your precious Word that it might take root and produce a hundred-fold. In your wonderful name, we ask. Amen.*

In this chapter, we're going to look at a problematic theological doctrine. What would be the possibility of a Muslim evangelist convincing you to worship Allah? I already know your answer. It is not going to happen.

If you were a Jew living in the first century AD, what would be the possibility of you abandoning Judaism and becoming a Christian? Answers to these questions are revealing because religion has such enormous control.

When God confused the language of mankind and divided the earth at the Tower of Babel, God foreknew language, geography, politics, and religious diversity would keep the world separated until the end. He designed and implemented the division we know today. It was meant to divide, not unite.

During the great tribulation, God is going to demonstrate a profound fact: Millions will abandon their religious culture and heritage to embrace a new God because of their convictions. Presently, this isn't possible. But a time is coming when people will be forced to make that decision. God is the architect behind this phenomenon.

When the Holy Spirit is poured out, the sincere in heart will hear God's demands spoken by the 144,000 and positively respond. These spokespersons will be extraordinary individuals who have no regard for the consequences of their testimony. Jesus will speak through their lips.

The first four trumpets will be overwhelmingly devastating; therefore, the world will be afraid of God. Bewildered and anxious people embrace and worship the God they once knew because, in grievous circumstances, people call on the God they know for help. When the titanic began to sink, the orchestra started playing *Nearer My God to Thee*. After the 9/11 calamity, church attendance soared, but within six months, it was back down to normal.

During the first four trumpets, in an effort to appease God's wrath, the religious and political leaders of the world will create a monster government (composite beast) that will force the world into repentance. They will conclude that if God's wrath is due to sinful behavior, to resolve God's wrath, people only need to behave better.

Politicians are going to pass legislation you never thought possible. Sin-less laws will arise overnight. Sexual immorality will be a capital offense. The gay and transgender movement will be outlawed. Life in every country will change suddenly as religious and political leaders return to the only God they've known.

When Babylon begins establishing its laws, persecution will increase, and as it does, the Holy Spirit will accelerate conviction. Every living person on earth will go through a four-step process.

- (1) Hear the eternal gospel proclaimed by the 144,000.
- (2) Make a decision for or against the gospel.
- (3) Be tested on that decision with persecution.<sup>1</sup>
- (4) Be sealed with God's righteousness or receive the mark of the beast.

Millions from all religious backgrounds will embrace the eternal gospel because they know what it is to live by faith. Many have experienced God without knowing Him. One neat trait about God is that He can know you without you knowing Him. God said to Jeremiah, "**Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.**"<sup>2</sup> All religions have members who are honest in heart, they just need to know truth.

When the 144,000 present God's truth, individuals will embrace it because the Spirit will bear witness within, and conviction will overwhelm them. They will obey because they have learned what salvific faith is.

God's truth can be *fluffy words* or *heavy words*. The difference is in the weight applied by the Holy Spirit. Notice what Scripture says, "**When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.**"<sup>3</sup>

The weight of Jesus' words rested heavily on the hearts of the people because the Holy Spirit gave them significance. Conversely, words spoken by teachers of the law were dry and meaningless.

When John the Baptist was preaching in the wilderness, people went to listen because his words were unlike what they had been hearing from the pulpit. There was power in John's words which captivated the people.

Jesus told His disciples, "**For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that**

<sup>1</sup> Persecution reveals how determined we are. God will see how strong our faith is.

<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 1:5

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 7:28-29

**I have spoken.**<sup>1</sup> This is why Jesus is called *the WORD*. He speaks for the Father. Out of Jesus' mouth came the *words* the Father gave Him to speak. And not only *what*, but *how* to say it.

This is what the 144,000 will do. Jesus is going to be speaking through them. The Holy Spirit will take Jesus' words and relay them to His servants. They don't need formal education. They don't need *any* education. They only need a willing heart.

In Jesus' day, the Jews did not understand they were hearing the Father speak through this man. If you had been alive, would you have believed that almighty God was speaking through this unattractive man's lips? The idea was preposterous!

Most Christians today will tell you, "If I had lived in Noah's day, I would have entered the ark." That is because you know what happened. In reality, you most likely wouldn't have. Only eight individuals actually did so. In John 12:50, Jesus said, "**I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.**"

Consider how the deity of Jesus will be a huge problem during the great tribulation. Currently, 75-83% of the world's population either rejects or does not know that Jesus is almighty God. Also, 93% of Christians do not know that Jesus, a separate and distinct God just like the Father, is currently reigning from the royal throne.

The Father temporarily stepped aside in 1798 and relinquished everything to Jesus after determining that He was worthy to receive sovereign authority. Most people have no idea the Father, at present, is not managing the universe. His exaltation of Christ changed everything.

We read, "**Worthy is the lamb,**" but don't think about what He is worthy to do. The phrase means the Lamb is worthy to rule the universe! The Father has stepped aside and given all power and authority to Jesus so He can conclude the sin

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<sup>1</sup> John 12:49

problem. That is why an intense search was made to find someone worthy of accomplishing this.

Ephesians 1:9–10 says, **“He [the Father] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—[and the Father is going] to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.”**

Paul knew a time was coming when everything in heaven and on earth would be put under Christ’s authority. The book of Revelation had not yet been written, and the book of Daniel was not understood, so Paul could not know when that time would occur. But today we know.

The book of Revelation was written thirty years after Paul was killed, and the book of Daniel is now unsealed. Using these two books, we can piece the story together and know the Father did this in 1798.

Most Christians don't know that Jesus created everything that exists; they believe the Father did. But the Bible doesn't teach that. John 1:10 says, **“He [Jesus] came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him.”** Furthermore, most Christians don't know that the holy day our creator observed is Saturday, the seventh day of the week. But a shocking surprise is coming. People around the world will soon hear the eternal gospel.

John states in Revelation 14:6, **“Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people.”** That is everybody, everywhere. In short, the eternal gospel is to be afraid of God.

Revelation 14:7 says, **“He said in a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.’”** The Greek word for fear is *phobeō*. It is translated as *phobia* in English, but it means

**fear God.** When the world undergoes the devastation of the first four trumpets, it will not be hard to convince people to have respect for and fear God.

The statement, “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” will be evident and easy to communicate after we experience: the death of 1.75 billion people, a third of the earth burned up, the global earthquake destroying infrastructures, asteroid impacts washing away coastal cities, and darkness covering the world because of volcanic eruptions.

Back to Revelation 14:7, **“Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come.”** This means the judgment of the living begins with the seven trumpets. The command is, **“Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”** Worship the One who made you and give Him glory. That means to worship Jesus! **“For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.”**<sup>1</sup>

The world will be shocked to learn that Jesus determines the eternal destiny of each person, not the Father. When we talk to a Muslim and say that Jesus will determine one’s eternal destiny, it isn’t received well. We would have the same result with a Jew. But the truth is the truth, and it must be told so that the Holy Spirit can give conviction to honest-hearted people.

Jesus said, **“Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.”**<sup>2</sup> When the Jews heard that, it blew their minds.

How does Jesus want to be worshiped? Jesus said in John 4:24, **“God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”** This means having the right attitude and

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<sup>1</sup> Colossians 1:16

<sup>2</sup> John 5:22–23

being willing to learn. God says, ‘If you have the right attitude, the right spirit, and you’re willing to learn and grow, that’s the kind of worshiper I want.’

Now, *when* does Jesus want to be worshiped? Paul tells us, **“There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest [kingdom] also rests from their works, just as God did from his.”**<sup>1</sup> Notice when Jesus rested from His work. **“By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.”**<sup>2</sup>

During the great tribulation, the Father’s command to worship Jesus, the creator, on His seventh-day Sabbath, will produce unimaginable anxiety. How will Jews, Muslims, Catholics, Hindus, Atheists, Protestants, and Heathens respond to worshipping a God they don’t know (Jesus) on a day regarded as common (Saturday).

To the whole world, other than a tiny segment of the population, all of this will be very irritating. It is not easy to move from one god to another. Less than 5% of the world’s population moves between religious systems. Whatever they’re born into is what they die out of. Yet, in the end, God will require them to change gods.

We have examined the dynamics that will occur during the end time because the same ones existed in AD 64. What consternation did the worship of Jesus create for early converts from Judaism?

Judaism is a monotheistic religion. It has no room for two gods. Therefore, Jesus could not possibly be a God, and He could not be worshiped; to do so would be blasphemy. According to Deuteronomy 13, blasphemers were to be put to death—no exception.

In AD 64, there were good reasons many, who had received Christ as their savior, were wavering in their faith:

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 4:9–10

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 2:2

- (a) Christians were religious, social, and familial outcasts.
- (b) Christians were discouraged and exhausted.
- (c) The Jews and Romans persecuted Christians endlessly.

Poverty, prison, separation, relocation, and anxiety awaited early believers. For example, the Romans used proscription lists to shut down Christianity. If you were identified as Christian, you would be added to a publicly posted proscription list.

If your name was on this list, anyone could come to your home and take anything without reservation—even to the point of taking your life. In some cases, your family was also at risk, and nothing could be done to stop it. If you were recognized as a Christian—you lost everything!

Because the Romans used this so successfully, believers in Jerusalem were selling their possessions before losing them. Many had already lost everything, especially those who had not known what to expect. So, they were urgently selling and sharing what they received with fellow Christians. You can see why early converts were wavering in their faith. Where could you live? Where could you go?

(d) There were rumors and propaganda. For example, Judaizers argued that Mosaic laws must be kept to be saved.

(e) Early Christians were ignorant, essentially, because Christianity was a new religion. No one in the first century AD understood the ramifications of believing in Christ.

In AD 64, Christians had three external pillars upon which to base their faith: (1) Old Testament predictions, (2) The miracles Jesus himself performed, and (3) Miracles the apostles performed.

However, miracles are not necessarily convincing. John 12:37 states, **“Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they [the Jews] still would not believe in him.”**

At this time, there was little information to study about Jesus other than the Old Testament. Many of the New Testament

letters had not yet been written. Waiting and suffering for *the missing man* was a difficult life of faith and becoming more depressing.

Remember, in AD 64, the early converts were focused on the fulfillment of *Plan A*. *Plan A* is a term used to describe God's original plan outlined through the promises and prophecies given to ancient Israel. It was a grand plan having a wonderful outcome for the nation of Israel.

I have discussed the historical setting of AD 64 considerably because to appreciate the book of Hebrews, you must understand the intellectual setting. The Jews were focused on *Plan A's* prophetic fulfillment. However, because they rejected Jesus, *Plan A* was abandoned during the 70th week. But Israel did not know this; neither did the Hebrew converts.

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There are no verses about the second coming in the Old Testament. None. And any part of the Old Testament's *Plan A* applied to *Plan B* is a distortion of Scripture. God's original plan did not include a second advent for Jesus. There are parallels, but you cannot lift verses out of *Plan A* and place them in *Plan B*.

Today, many use the following passage to create a second coming, but this passage was to have been fulfilled under *Plan A* when the time came for bringing the sin problem to a close.

**Zechariah 14:2-4 says, "I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city. Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south."**

This would have happened in *Plan A*. However, the promises and prophecies of *Plan A* were abandoned. *Plan B* has a better set of promises and prophecies. Each time there is a failure on man's part, God exponentially increases the covenant's value. But mixing *Plan A* with *Plan B* puts the Bible in a state of internal conflict because the two sets of prophecies are separate and distinct. What I have written in the last two paragraphs is considered heresy and nonsense in most churches today. Most Christians cannot bear to hear it.

Contemporary Christianity has taken Old Testament and New Testament scriptures, and carefully blended them to create a concoction of prophetic fulfillment that has nothing to do with coming realities. The Old Testament has nothing to say about events leading up to the second coming because there would have been no *Plan B* or second coming *IF* Israel had cooperated with God. All of the promises and prophecies, given to ancient Israel in the Old Testament as *Plan A*, would have been carried out *IF* Israel had obeyed.

Under *Plan A*, Jesus would have come to earth (which did happen), He would have died on the Altar of Burnt Offering (which didn't happen), He would have been resurrected (which did happen), and He would have remained on earth and established the kingdom of God (which didn't happen).

God abandoned *Plan A* for the same reason He destroyed the world in Noah's day, burned Sodom and Gomorrah, kept the Israelites in the wilderness until they died, and had Nebuchadnezzar demolish Jerusalem—rebellion.

Going back to about 600 BC, Jesus said through Jeremiah, **“From the time your ancestors left Egypt until now, day after day, again and again I sent you my servants the prophets. But they did not listen to me or pay attention. They were stiff-necked and did more evil than their ancestors.”**<sup>1</sup>

Because of rebellion, Jehovah raised Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Jerusalem and enslave His people. During their captivity,

<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 7:25–26

Jesus gave Israel one last chance—a period of 490 years,<sup>1</sup> but Israel remained rebellious. In fact, they rejected and crucified Jesus in the middle of the 70th week.

Before returning to heaven, Jesus said, **“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house [your nation] is left to you desolate [without God].”**<sup>2</sup>

The clearest signal in the first century AD that *Plan A* had been abandoned is the ascension and disappearance of Jesus. Think about that for a moment. No Jesus present equals no kingdom of God. But no one understood that Jesus’ absence from earth made the fulfillment of *Plan A* impossible. Early Christian believers did not know this; they did not grasp that *Plan A* had been abandoned. They expected Jesus to return imminently to fulfill the promises and prophecies in *Plan A*.

In AD 64, the expectations of the Hebrew converts regarding *Plan A* were reasonable when you consider they could not know what we know today. But two thousand years later, this is precisely the same mistake Christians are making.

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Thus far, I have written about the deity of Jesus, and there is much more to know, but before writing more, I need to set the stage.

At the beginning of the 70th week (AD 27), **“The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah.”**<sup>3</sup> Many knew it was time for Messiah to appear. This is why they were wondering if John might be the expected One.

Shortly after Jesus’ ministry began in AD 27, the Bible says, **“After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee,**

<sup>1</sup> 70 weeks mentioned in Daniel 9:24

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 23:37–38

<sup>3</sup> Luke 3:15

proclaiming the good news of God. ‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!’”<sup>1</sup> If God’s *Plan A* had been carried out and Jesus had remained on earth after His resurrection, the kingdom of God would have started to be established during the 70th week. Jesus would have then led Israel into God’s rest. When I use the term God’s rest, I’m talking about the kingdom of God on earth.

God’s original plan was to put His kingdom (His rest) on earth. At the end of sin’s drama, Jesus would allow Lucifer to attack the city of Jerusalem, after which He would destroy Lucifer and the wicked. He would have then created a new heaven and earth. But it didn’t work out that way.

What does *God’s rest* mean? In today’s vernacular, rest means early retirement with good health, two condos, and unlimited money. No one wants to labor—it’s the curse of sin. But God’s rest means something even better. It means living, learning, working, worshiping, dining, and walking with God. Isn’t God’s definition better than toiling by the sweat of your brow? Everyone I know wants to avoid labor (the curse of sin).

What is the curse of sin? **“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”**<sup>2</sup>

If *Plan A* had been put in motion, Jesus would have reigned on earth, building up the kingdom of God until the time arrived to end sin’s drama. Keep in mind that if Jesus had stayed on earth, He would not have died as humans do, but everyone else would have lived and died as usual until the end. Let me explain how this would have unfolded.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 1:14–15

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 3:17–19

Under *Plan A*, after Jesus was resurrected from the dead, He would have ascended to David's throne. God's Messianic promise to David was that he would never fail to have a man reign from there. If Jesus had been resurrected under *Plan A*, He would never die again. He would be alive and reigning in Jerusalem right now. Under *Plan A*, at the end of sin's drama, there would have been a resurrection, eternal life would have been given to all the saints at that time, culminating with a new heaven and earth.

Isaiah 65:19–20 contains the *Plan A* prophecy which confuses many people. **“I [the Lord] will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child; the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed.”** This would have happened under *Plan A*. **“They will not labor in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the Lord, they and their descendants with them.”**<sup>1</sup>

*Plan A* included: The arrival of the Messiah, the establishment of God's kingdom on earth, all converts entering God's rest, an end of sin's drama, and a new heaven and earth.

In Revelation 14:5, the 144,000 stand around the Lamb on a Mount Zion that is not on earth. This Mount Zion is in the New Jerusalem because it exists during *Plan B*. *Plan A* had a Jerusalem but was destroyed in AD 70 because of rebellion. When God's rest could not be implemented on earth, Jesus was recalled to heaven, and *Plan B* was put in motion.<sup>2</sup>

Let's return to the Hebrews story. Jewish converts in AD 64 expected *Plan A* to be fulfilled. They often asked, “What is Jesus doing? What is He waiting on? What are His plans for

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 65:23

<sup>2</sup> To study this further, review appendices B and D in my book, *Jesus' Final Victory*.

us? When will He set His people free from the Jews and these despicable Romans, and restore Israel as ‘the head and not the tail’ as promised in Deuteronomy 28:13?”

Understanding the culture in AD 64 and the prophetic anticipation of the believers in Christ, we can perceive they were looking for God’s kingdom to be established on earth. That is why we’re going through this elaborate story to help you see that they were not expecting what we are expecting.

*Plans A and B* are entirely different. They were thinking *Plan A*, we are thinking *Plan B*. They didn’t know God had terminated *Plan A*. Jesus will conclude His efforts to save mankind, albeit in a very different way than the Father originally intended because *Plan A* was conditional, *Plan B* is unconditional. For example, under *Plan A*, God planned to send the twelve tribes into all the world to gather *whosoever will* come to Jerusalem. Then, He would destroy Gog, the devil masquerading as a great king, and Magog, the confederation of nations.

In AD 95, God revealed to John, a prisoner on Patmos, the final installment of *Plan B*. This revelation occurred thirty-one years after the book of Hebrews was written. Under *Plan B*, God will select and empower a mere twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes to do what ancient Israel and Christians have been unable to do for the past thirty-five hundred years. But the result will be the same; the sheep and goats will be separated.

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Before Paul was imprisoned, he spent several years establishing churches in Asia Minor. Early on, he spent eighteen months ministering in Corinth. Then, he went to Ephesus for three years. While there, the church in Corinth began to fall apart. The Judaizers had started to argue that Paul was leading Christians away from Judaism, resulting in a tug of war between Judaizers and new converts.

Because Christianity was a new religion with no established

traditions, Jewish and Gentile believers struggled to establish an optimal blend of culture and religion. Each group came into the church with its own mixture, and neither wanted change. But there is no way Jesus can be mixed into another religious system. Jewish and Gentile converts tried to add Jesus into their traditional religious practices, and this created problems. Jesus knew this would occur because it's the way of humanity.

Soon after his conversion, God took Paul to heaven in vision and explained many concepts so that he could later explain them to Christians. The book of Hebrews was written to answer many questions and to explain a dozen complicated mysteries. God prepared Paul for His special service by taking him into the desert for three years.<sup>1</sup>

A special book was needed because, from the beginning, the plan of salvation was established as a living trust. The Benefactor is the Father. He cannot be on earth, so He appointed trustees to distribute His riches (gospel) to His beneficiaries.

Because human nature is inherently rebellious, there has been a succession of trustees: The patriarchs, Jews, Christians (Catholics), Protestants, and lastly, will be the 144,000. God's people are the beneficiaries of His great riches.

God entrusted the plan of salvation to the Jews for fifteen hundred years—*Plan A*. A change in trusteeship occurred when Israel rejected Jehovah and crucified Him—*Plan B*. The transition is complicated. To steer Christians in the right direction, God chose a man with a big heart and brilliant mind.

As Saul: right heart = wrong head

As Paul: right heart = right head

Because Judaism is a culture and a religion, the two were impossible to separate. When the Father determined *Plan A* had to be abandoned, He sent Moses and Elijah to tell Jesus. At the same time, I believe Jesus was told He would not die in Jerusalem but outside the city and be returning to heaven.

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<sup>1</sup> Galatians 1:17

Notice Jesus' statement in Luke 9:27–31, “**Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom [king of Israel sent] of God.’ About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure [exodus], which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.**” Peter, James, and John saw Jesus transformed into the king He would have been had the kingdom of God been established on earth in *Plan A*.

Many years later, John wrote an account of this event. “**The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.**”<sup>1</sup> Three men saw Moses and Elijah, the glory of King Jesus, and heard the Father acknowledge Jesus as His Son. Peter, James, and John saw the royal king on earth.

Just before Jesus' death, without explaining that *Plan B* had to be implemented, He said to His disciples, “**My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go [there] and prepare a place for you, I will come back [here] and take you [there] to be with me that you also may be where I am.**”<sup>2</sup> What does ‘*Jesus will leave earth and then return to earth*’ mean? It means *Plan A* was dead. God sent two witnesses, Moses and Elijah, to Jesus to affirm that He would be leaving earth because *Plan B* was being implemented.

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In AD 64, among the early converts, the subject of Jesus was a hot topic: Was He a fraud, the incarnation of an angel who appeared as a man, or was He a God who appeared in the form

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<sup>1</sup> John 1:14

<sup>2</sup> John 14:2–3

of a man? Christians later expanded this uncertainty with more questions: Was Jesus merely an apparition of the Father, created by the Father, or a coeternal God separate and distinct from the Father?

The topic festered until the first council at Nicaea in AD 325, when the Christian Church settled the issue by vote. Today, the truth about Jesus may or may not be disturbing. Many people shrug and say, “What difference does it make?” Truth always makes a difference to those searching for it because it is a series of building blocks.

The truth about Jesus in AD 64 shattered the monotheistic Judaism. All other religions, Gentile and Pagan, were polytheistic. From a Jewish point of view, the evidence of another God was unthinkable, even blasphemous. If it was proved that two or more Gods existed, the leaders of Judaism knew their religion would implode.

The arrival of Jesus created a dilemma and posed a threat. If Jesus is a God—a co-eternal being, separate and distinct from the Father, and yet equal with the Father—there is no wiggle room within Judaism and no place for Jesus.

Although early Hebrew converts did not realize it, the birth of the Messiah separated Christianity and Judaism forever. Even the record of time was divided by His birth: Before Christ (BC) and Anno Domini (AD). The latter, a Latin phrase, meaning *After the Manifestation of Divinity*.

Many early converts wanted to keep one foot in Judaism and the other in Christianity, making their walk with the Lord difficult. They were trying to *have their cake and eat it too*. They thought “If we claim Jesus is not a god but a manifestation of a messenger or prophet, our scheme might work.”

Moses predicted in Deuteronomy 18:15, “**The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.**” Was Moses being boastful? No. God used Moses to lead Israel out

of slavery. This is one of the first messianic prophecies God gave after the Exodus, in which Moses said, “God is going to raise up a prophet who will deliver you out of the slavery of sin. He’s going to raise up a prophet like me (Moses) as a deliverer. You must listen to Him (God).”

When John the Baptist began preaching, Israel’s leaders went to the Jordan River to check him out. They said, “**Now this was John’s testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, ‘I am not the Messiah.’**

**They asked him, ‘Then who are you? Are you Elijah?’**

**He said, ‘I am not.’**

**‘Are you the Prophet?’**

**He answered, ‘No.’**

**Finally they said, ‘Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?’**

**John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, ‘I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, “Make straight the way for the Lord.”’<sup>1</sup>**

They asked him that question because the last book in the Old Testament says, “**Before the coming and great day of the Lord I will send you Elijah, the prophet.**”<sup>2</sup> So, if this were Elijah, Jesus the Messiah, would be coming. The next question meant, “Are you the one Moses predicted?” Only those who knew about Moses’ prediction would have known what was being discussed. John knew what they were talking about.

During the days of Christ’s ministry, “**After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, ‘Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.’**”<sup>3</sup> In the Jewish mind, they knew about this prophecy. They were waiting for its fulfillment.

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<sup>1</sup> John 1:19–23

<sup>2</sup> Malachi 4:5

<sup>3</sup> John 6:14

Because monotheism was challenged when Jesus appeared, the nature of Jesus became a huge argument among Jewish converts. By the fourth century AD, the nature of Jesus had become a huge argument for Christians. During the sixth century, three tribal nations, the three horns in Daniel 7—the Ostrogoths, Heruli, and Vandals—were plucked up and destroyed, partly over the *Deity of Christ* argument.

Because Christians did not want to be viewed as polytheistic like the Pagans and Gentiles, they created many goofy explanations about the Godhead that, even after two thousand years, still make no sense.

Before stating one of Augustine's arguments, let me give some background. Augustine was a prolific church writer in the fifth century AD. He was a capable and intelligent man with a brilliant mind.

Understand that when he used the word *catholic*, he was not using the word as we do today. He used the term to identify universal Christian writers. The word catholic is like using the word Kleenex to mean tissue. It is a generic term. The word Catholic became synonymous with the universal Christian church, but in those days, the word catholic didn't mean organized church. Augustine uses the term very differently. Notice what he had to say in 408 AD.

*"All the Catholic (universal) interpreters of the divine books of the Old and New Testaments whom I have been able to read, who wrote before me about the Trinity, which is God, intended to teach in accord with the Scriptures that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are of one and the same substance constituting a divine unity with an inseparable equality; and therefore there are not three gods but one God, although the Father begot the Son, and therefore he who is the Son is not the Father; and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son but only the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, himself, too, coequal to the Father and to the Son and belonging to the unity of the Trinity."* —The Trinity 1:4:7

Two thousand years later, the same circular reasoning goes on and on. It is nonsense. Was Jesus an angel or a prophet? Was Jesus an apparition of Jehovah, or was Jesus a separate deity?

Ironically, if the Jews had paid attention to Genesis 1, they would have known from Moses that the Godhead is made up of Gods (plural).

Genesis 1:1 says, **“In the beginning God [‘elohim] created the heavens and the earth.”** The word *‘elohim* is translated as Strong’s H430 and, in this case, is plural in number and means *Gods*. Genesis 1:26 confirms the plurality of verse one by saying, **“Then [the] God[s] said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.’”** Some Bible scholars have suggested that the plural verb *‘elohim* indicates majesty rather than a plurality, but the plural of majesty is not used with verbs.

Hebrews 1:1–2 said about Jesus, **“In the past God [the Father] spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has [exponentially increased the importance of His words and] spoken to us by his Son [Jesus], whom he appointed heir [the future owner] of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.”**

Remember that Jesus was appointed the heir, the future owner of all things. The book of Hebrews begins without apology or equivocation: ‘God has a Son,’ and this language meant to AD 64 Jews that the Father had an equal. **“For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.”**<sup>1</sup>

Paul did not ever waver on the coeternal equality of Jesus and the Father. Notice his words to the church at Philippi in Philippians 2:5–7, **“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset [attitude] as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made**

<sup>1</sup> John 5:18

himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”

Hebrews 1:3 tells us, **“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”** This verse raises two questions:

1) If there were only one God, as Augustine claimed, does the Father have an angel, a prophet, or an apparition of himself sitting at His right hand? Augustine’s claim doesn’t make sense.

2) Why does the book of Hebrews say that Jesus is an **“exact representation of his [the Father’s] being”**?

The Jews believed that Jehovah was invisible, and whenever God revealed His presence to a person, it was the result of God sending an angel or an apparition (a ghost) in the form of an angel. It is true that the Father is forever and always has been invisible. The only form angels and humans will ever see of the Father is a brilliant light.

In 1 Timothy 6:15–16, Paul wrote, **“God [the Father], the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords [at that time], who alone is immortal [never dies] and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.”** The reason I inserted ‘at that time’ is that before 1798, the Father wore that title. When Jesus comes at the end of the great tribulation, there has been a transition. He will be wearing a sash that reads **“KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”**

Notice in the verse **“no one has seen”** the Father, and this includes the angels. The Trinity surrendered to each other various powers and prerogatives. The Father and Holy Spirit are not visible to angels or humans. The two gave their visibility to Jesus. Jesus affirmed in John 6:46, **“No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father.”**

Hebrews 1:3 declares that Jesus is an exact representation of the Father. Think of the Trinity in terms of *identical triplets*. Jesus told Philip in John 14:9, **“Anyone who has seen me has seen [what] the Father [is like].”** This verse does not mean the Son is the Father, it means they are equal (identical) in every way, but they serve creation in different roles.

When Jesus came to earth, one God ruled from the throne. One God lived among His creation as one of us, and one God lived within the hearts of His created beings. This means God is above, beside, and within us. It doesn’t get any better than that. Two Gods are invisible, and one God is visible.

Jesus said about His mission, **“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”**<sup>1</sup> The truth about the invisible is made known through the visible. We can imagine God’s spectacular throne and the brilliant light that emanates from His power, and then we see Jesus—knowing He has the same authority. When we think about Jesus kneeling and washing His disciples’ feet, we realize the Father would do the same.

This brings us to the point of contention that remains in Christianity. Many Christians cannot accept the idea that before Jesus’ life on earth, He lived in heaven as Michael, the archangel. Yet these same Christians have no problem thinking that the divine Jesus could live on earth in the form of a man. Michael and Jesus are the same entity. We need to know that for Hebrews 1:8–9 to make sense.

In the first chapter of Hebrews, the author quotes from the Old Testament at least a dozen times to prove Christ’s deity. The author is proving that the Bible predicted Jesus’ arrival in the form of a man. This blows Judaism out of the water.

Jewish writings, which the Jews treasured for a thousand years, were used to prove that Jesus is deity. He is doing this

<sup>1</sup> Luke 10:22

for the Hebrew converts because he wants them to know that if you return to Judaism, you're returning to an empty tomb—a house of cards that has already fallen. The irony is that the converts knew these scriptures but never understood them.

Hebrews 1:8–9 says, **“But about the Son he [the Father] says, ‘Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God [Michael], your God [your Father], has set you above your companions [the angels] by anointing you with the oil of joy.’”** The Father calls the Son God. How can this be?

The answer is that Michael, who is deity, lived among the angels as one of them until the time came for Jesus to be exalted to a position at the right hand of the Father. Prior to this event, there was nothing about Him to indicate that He was a God. He lived among angels as an angel in the same way He lived among men as a man.

Speaking of Jesus, Isaiah 53:2–3 says, **“He grew up before him [his Father] like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. [In other words, He had no support around Him. He is totally unlike His environment: a root standing up out of the dry ground. Notice what it says about Christ,] He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering [and sorrow], and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.”**

The Father decided this is the way His Son should come into the world. What kind of parent would do this to his child? The Father said to Jesus, **“You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.”**<sup>1</sup>

Why was Jesus elevated above His companions and given a chair at the right hand of the Father? Because Jesus carried out,

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 1:9

with astonishing perfection, the Father's will while He was on earth. Jesus was crushed on the cross, yet His love for sinners and faith in the Father never wavered.

After the Son returned to heaven, the angels still regarded Him as Michael the archangel, whose name means *one who is like God*. However, Jesus did not return in the *form* of an angel. He was no longer a chief prince. He was no longer a guardian cherub. Instead of living among the angels as He had before, the Father exalted Him. Albeit physically, Jesus remained in the form of a man.

Because the Father wants to exalt human beings someday, He gave the Son of man a chair at His right hand. This elevated Jesus above the angels.

In the beginning, as deity, Jesus was superior to the angels, who were created beings. The angels did not know His identity until the Father revealed it. This startling revelation took place before He created the world, on the day Lucifer and his followers were cast out of heaven the first time.<sup>1</sup>

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Three Gods surrendered a portion of their rights and prerogatives to each other. Each gave 2/3 of himself to the others so they would appear as one.  $1/3 + 1/3 + 1/3 = 1$ , like a man and a woman united in marriage are one.  $1/2 + 1/2 = 1$

Because the idea that *Jesus was an angel or prophet* had gained traction among Hebrew believers, Paul disputed the idea straightaway in Hebrews 1.

**“For to which of the angels did God ever say, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father’? Or again, ‘I will be his Father, and he will be my Son?’”<sup>2</sup> “And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship him.’”<sup>3</sup>** Hebrews 1 summed up the beauty of

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. This is discussed in detail in Prophecy 12 of my book, *Jesus’ Final Victory*.

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 1:5—Quoting Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 1:6—Quoting Deuteronomy 32:43 from the Septuagint

Jesus in calling Him God.

The Old Testament is used to prove that God has kept His promise and sent His Son, who is also God. And surprise, monotheism is dead. If you were an early Jewish convert, would you be willing to change gods? Would it bother you to discover that the Jehovah you had always worshiped could now be called Jesus? Think about the Muslims and Hindus, about the Jews and Catholics, about the Protestants and Atheists who will be called to put their faith in Jesus—the creator.

The only way you can make such a startling paradigm shift is through faith. The Holy Spirit comes with those heavy words. The conviction builds, and you have to say, I have heard the truth. I am convicted.

I can tell you from experience that every time we are challenged to step forward in faith, it always costs. But after the price has been paid, it turns out that the price is minuscule for the experience and reward that follows.

Pray with me.

*Dear Jesus, it is so exciting to understand who you really are and to comprehend how Hebrews is revealing you in a way that leaves no doubt as to who, what, why, and how you're all you claim to be. It is our great joy, privilege, and thanksgiving that we can bow before you, worshiping you and giving you praise and honor and glory. Truly you are a God worthy of our worship, and we thank the Father for giving you to us. We thank the Spirit for revealing you to us. And now we ask you to stay with us as we study this book. Amen.*



## chapter 4



# King and Priest

By now, we should have an appreciation for the plight of early Christians. Everywhere they turned, rejection and persecution confronted them. But one of their biggest impediments was ignorance. They were not aware that *Plan A* had been canceled. Early Christians were anticipating the fulfillment of what had been written in the Old Testament. They were constantly asking, “Where is it?” It took a while to understand the reality of *Plan A*. Of course, first-century Christians could not see the whole story because the book of Revelation was not written until AD 95.

I am astonished the Christian faith was able to flourish. It wouldn't have survived had it not been carried on the wings of the Holy Spirit. Tutored by the same Spirit, Paul knew what it meant to leave friends, family, colleagues, and religion. He knew what suffering for Jesus was. His testimony stems from head knowledge and heartfelt experience. How did he go from being the ‘Pharisee of Pharisees’ to being the most despised Pharisee ever? Salvific faith.

Around the time Hebrews was written, Paul wrote a second letter to the believers in Corinth because some Jewish scholars were persuading them to return to the practices and culture of Judaism.

As you read Ephesians, Galatians, Colossians, Philippians, and 1 Corinthians, you can see that the early Christian church was struggling to separate itself from Judaism. They had one foot in Christianity and the other in Judaism, and they were trying to merge the two. Hebrew converts, for whom the book of Hebrews was written, were returning to Judaism because of the difficulty in cutting the umbilical cord.

A group of experts had gone to Corinth and persuaded the believers they had relinquished too much of their childhood religion. According to the experts, the believers had to follow what God had previously said: keep the feasts, return to circumcision, and don't eat meat offered to idols. They also argued, "New light does not undo old light." But the truth is, it can!

Paul, responding to the assault on the church at Corinth, wrote a letter. He asked the church to compare his credentials with the experts from Jerusalem. **"Are they [the Judaizers] servants of Christ?**

[Judaizers is a term used to define the *Jewish experts* who went to Corinth. Today, we would call them Apologists: a person who argues for and defends their religion. Paul called them *Judaizers* because they were trying to pull Christianity back into Judaism. He was bringing this up because he wanted them to realize he had the better credentials to talk about Christ. Paul continued,]

**I know I sound like a madman, but [since you brought it up, I'm going to talk plainly.] I have served him far more! I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I**

was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my feeling that weakness? Who is led astray, and I do not burn with anger [and regret for them]? If I must boast, I would rather boast about the things that show how weak I am. God, the Father of our Lord Jesus, who is worthy of eternal praise, knows I am not lying.”<sup>1</sup>

The man who once persecuted and murdered Christians is arguing, “Who is an *expert* on the subject of faith in Christ, those who have endured relentless suffering for Him or those who know nothing about suffering?”

Hebrews 10:23 says, “**Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised [to return soon] is faithful.**” Verse 25, “[We must consider] **not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing [because of discouragement], but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.**”

Think of the tremendous advantage we have today. When the censer is cast down and the great tribulation begins, we can know the number of days until Jesus appears. This will be a comfort in the darkness and chaos overtaking the world.

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Like all other world religions, Judaism was built upon a

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:23–31

series of blocks considered to be *divine truths*. But once a major block is proven false, the *house of cards* collapses. A religion's implosion is never simple; there is always controversy.

Monotheistic Jews could not, and still cannot, embrace another God. Neither could the Jews of that day accept that Jesus was Jehovah. Even after two thousand years, many Christians will not believe Jesus is a coeternal, separate, and distinct member of the Godhead.

After Jesus ascended, His identity became an inflammatory issue for Jewish converts. A chasm soon developed, and anyone believing that Jesus was the Messiah had to make a hard choice: Stay with the *synagogue of the Jews* or go with a gospel that declared Jesus a God.

The Judaizers could see many fine attributes in the gospel of Jesus, but several were detrimental to Jewish doctrines. Therefore, they fought to correct the Christian church. Their effort was beneficial, but not in the way they anticipated. Through their antagonism, the Judaizers forced Israel and Christianity to separate.

Paul silenced every argument advanced by the Judaizers with a clearer understanding of *present truth*. The light of truth was moving forward, and those holding to the traditions of the elders were left behind in darkness.

The first chapter of Hebrews was written in a very direct manner. It proved, using the Old Testament, that the coming Messiah was another God. Jesus said, "You cannot put new wine into old wineskins."<sup>1</sup> The reason is that as new wine ferments, it expands the wineskin, blows it apart, and ruins both the skin and the wine. This analogy explains the truth that two or more Gods cannot be factored into Judaism. When a new religious paradigm is mixed with an old one, both end up ruined. Thus, let's investigate the second theological issue in the book of Hebrews that destroys Judaism.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 5:37

The priesthood of Jesus, His service, and heaven's temple were painful issues for wavering Hebrew converts. Remember, the Jews respected and worshiped the temple building in Jerusalem. They believed it was God's house—His dwelling place—and considered it holy ground. It hurt to realize the service rituals no longer had efficacy.

Jesus entered that building when Joseph and Mary carried Him to be presented to the Lord. Since the first temple was destroyed, there have been no holy buildings on earth. Many beautiful buildings are dedicated to God's glory and service which is fitting and proper, but there are no holy buildings. A building is just a building. Instead, God now dwells in the hearts of those who worship Him in Spirit and truth.

**“The Lord says: ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?’ declares the Lord. ‘These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word.’”<sup>1</sup>**

Even though Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the first temple in 586 BC—about four hundred years after Solomon built it—the temple was rebuilt and consecrated around 515 BC. Five hundred years later, after the second temple had been constructed, King Herod (20 BC) lavished millions of dollars on rebuilding the temple to gain the allegiance of the Jews. It was a political stunt. Herod wanted to quiet the rebellious nature of the Jews. He thought if he rebuilt the temple and plated it with gold, the Jews would see he was a good man and stop their rebellion. It worked ... for a while.

Even though Herod's temple<sup>2</sup> was rebuilt within a couple of years, the Jews made him do it more slowly than planned because they were afraid that if he tore it down, he would never rebuild it. Construction on the whole temple complex

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 66:1–2

<sup>2</sup> The same Herod who attempted to kill baby Jesus.

continued for almost eighty years. Herod's temple, what I call the third temple, was completed just before the Romans utterly destroyed it in AD 70.

Today, the top of Mount Moriah is about five hundred feet long and about four hundred and fifty feet wide. It is the large, flat plain where Abraham offered up Isaac. The Palestinians and the Arabs control the area and built the Dome of the Rock Mosque there.

Many Christians anticipate another temple will be built on Mount Moriah, but this will not occur because God will not allow it. God gave Temple Mount to the Muslims in the eighth century AD to prevent the Jews from building another temple there. Muslims consider the Dome of the Rock the second most holy place, and any tampering with the mosque would be suicidal for Israel. The Dome of the Rock Mosque serves as a perpetual seal on Mount Moriah, preventing the construction of another Jewish temple. God is finished with *Plan A*. Yet the Bible teaches there is a new Mount Zion, a New Jerusalem, and an actual temple, all of which are in heaven set up by God himself. Many Christians are unaware of the implementation of *Plan B*.

During Christ's ministry, Herod's gold-plated temple was the center of Jewish life, and the Jews were proud of it. Jesus shocked the Pharisees when He cursed them for making the gold *on* the temple more important than the God *in* the temple.

**“Woe to you, blind guides! You say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gold of the temple is bound by that oath.’ You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred?”**<sup>1</sup>

The reason the Jews cannot build a temple in any place other than the Temple Mount is that God forbade them from building one except on the spot He specified. They cannot build on just any land. They must build on that rock.

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 23:16-17

According to Exodus 23:17, every adult male in Israel had to show up at the temple three times a year. For many generations, this command made the temple *ground zero* for all Jews. Even though they didn't realize it, the temple became an idol.

After the second and third temples were rebuilt, the Jews believed the temple was God's dwelling place as the first temple had been. However, when an angel tore the curtain from top to bottom, the Father proved there was no Jehovah in the temple. Instead, Jehovah was hanging on a cross outside the city.

The destruction of the temple in AD 70 is historically significant. In AD 30, Jesus predicted that no two stones would be left on each other. Forty years later, that prophecy was fulfilled.

In AD 70, when Titus placed Jerusalem under siege, thousands of Jews rushed into the temple to escape the Romans. They reasoned that God would not permit pagans to assault and destroy His holy dwelling place. Well, surprise—they did. Most of the temple gold was taken to Rome along with thousands of Jews. Vespasian made slaves of the Jews, and with the gold taken from the temple, he paid for the construction of the Roman Colosseum. Later, many Christians perished in that coliseum.

Let's return to AD 64 and understand the Jewish view of the temple's function. They believed only one man in Israel always stood between sinners and the Shekinah glory—the high priest. This man was honored in Israel like the pope is honored in the Catholic Church today, much like Mohammad is to Islam.

We have to appreciate the awe and respect the Jews apportioned to the temple and its services if we are to understand the great effort in proving they had now become meaningless. This is a difficult argument because the *temple complex* had given the Jews a *superiority complex*.

If Paul could prove from the Old Testament to the Hebrew converts that God had appointed Jesus to serve as the high

priest in heaven's temple—the true temple—then Judaism might lose its hold on them. Judaism would become a religion to avoid rather than one to embrace.

Who but the high priest, appointed by God himself, can apply the merits of an atoning sacrifice? This is a point that 99% of Christians today do not understand. Most believe that Jesus died on the cross, paid the penalty for sin, and all we have to do now is believe in Christ. But it doesn't work that way.

During Old Testament times, a high priest had to cleanse the sanctuary. He was the only one who could. Christians don't have any idea what temple services entail.

In a nutshell, the argument was: "Temple services and the function of the high priest in Jerusalem are no longer necessary or important. God has abandoned Jerusalem and the temple. It is an empty building. The Father has eliminated the office of high priest on earth and assigned the role to His Son. Since Jehovah was not able to serve in the earthly temple, the Father has taken Him to heaven to serve in the true temple."

This means the services at the earthly temple and the office of its high priest have been terminated. Now, the heavenly temple with its high priest is in service. This is a significant theological problem.

The Judaizers countered by arguing, "How can Jesus legitimately be appointed as high priest? He's not a Levite nor on earth to serve at the place where sacrifices must be offered."

The Lord had said, "**Be careful not to sacrifice your burnt offerings anywhere you please. Offer them only at the place the Lord will choose in one of your tribes, and there observe everything I command you.**"<sup>1</sup> Hebrews' rebuttal to the Judaizer's question is the story of Melchizedek. Every Jew knew about Melchizedek, but few understood the significance of his story.

After Abraham moved into Canaan and Lot had moved

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 12:13–14

closer to Sodom, four tribal kings decided to plunder the cities of the plains. Stealing food is easier than growing, harvesting, preserving, and storing food. So, four kings went to war against five kings ... and the four kings won.<sup>1</sup>

**“The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away. [They were after the Little Debbie snack cakes.] They also carried off Abram’s nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom. A man who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew. Now Abram was living near the great trees of Mamre the Amorite, a brother of Eshkol and Aner, all of whom were allied with Abram. When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people. After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley). Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine [for a celebration]. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, ‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High, creator of heaven and earth. [Melchizedek is both a king and priest. Can you think of anyone else like that?] And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.’ Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.’”<sup>2</sup>**

This story is essential to the Jews and for building a powerful argument against the Judaizers because it reveals a man greater

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1 Genesis 14

2 Genesis 14:11–20; 15:1

in God's sight than Abraham. To the Jew, this was difficult to accept.

After Abraham won the battle, the Holy Spirit came upon Melchizedek and revealed that God had chosen Abraham to be the father of many nations. So Melchizedek blessed Abraham.

In effect, Abraham heard confirmation of what God had promised. When Abraham heard Melchizedek's blessing, Abraham realized that Melchizedek was God's priest and gave his tithe to Melchizedek. This action proves Abraham recognized him as God's priest. Why is this so important? The answer is in Hebrews 5:1–6:

**“Every high priest is selected from among the people and is appointed to represent the people in matters related to God, to [mediate] offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. [If Melchizedek is a high priest, who selected him? The Bible says that *every high priest is selected from among the people.* This would include Melchizedek.] He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. And no one takes this honor on himself, but he receives it when called by God, just as Aaron was. In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father.’ [The quote is from Psalm 2:7, the day sin began, Jesus subjected himself to the will of the Father to save mankind. Jesus became SUBJECT to the Father. That is what SON means.] And he [the Father] says in another place, ‘You [Jesus] are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.’ [This quote is from Psalm 110:4.]”**

The original language in Psalm 110 used the term Jehovah which means almighty God. This is one of the few examples in the Old Testament where the term Jehovah applies to the Father. 95% of the time, though, it pertains to Jesus. This messianic prophecy, written by David, was an endless puzzle for

the Jews because *the order of Melchizedek* was not *the Levitical order of Aaron*.

Paul knew the Jews could not solve the Melchizedek mystery. Therefore, he used simple and clear statements from the Old Testament to prove that another priesthood had been predicted in the order of Melchizedek.

Psalms 110 was written about a thousand years before the book of Hebrews. Paul is showing that a day is coming when there is going to be a high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Understand that Melchizedek is a Gentile. Scripture doesn't state this explicitly; it is inferred because he was not a descendant of Abraham. He had nothing to do with Abraham other than this encounter. Yet, Melchizedek is higher in rank than Abraham—the lesser is blessed by the greater.

Hebrews 7:1–3 says, “**This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High.** [Notice the union of church and state in one man. We have the same union in Christ: King of kings and Lord of lords.] **He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, the name Melchizedek means ‘king of righteousness’; then also, ‘king of Salem’ means ‘king of peace.** [Thus we have a king of righteousness and peace in Melchizedek.] **Without father or mother, without genealogy** [no biological records], **without beginning of days or end of life** [we don't know when he was born or when he died], **resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever** [historically speaking].”

The only slice of time we know of him is when he was the king of Salem and priest of God Most High. That is where it starts, and that's where it stops. Historically, that's the whole story. He has no connection with Abraham besides the meeting where Abraham gave him his tithe.

Now, to the Jewish mind in AD 64, genealogy was everything. Being a biological descendant of Abraham was considered a

matter of life (eternal salvation) and death (eternal loss). If your name was not written in the records, you didn't count. You were not part of the promise because you were a nobody and therefore omitted. The statement was to remind the Jews that there was no record of Melchizedek's parents, his birth, or death. The point being made was one of lineage, which was all that separated Jews from the Gentiles.

Hebrews' argument was proving the Father had made the Son a high priest by His authority and that the Son's heritage is meaningless since He came from the tribe of Judah. Nothing was written in Scripture about a priest from the tribe of Judah. Therefore, how could a *nobody*, a Gentile like Melchizedek, having no lineage, be greater than Abraham?

This question demonstrated that Melchizedek and Jesus were divinely appointed. That is the point made in Psalm 110:4, **"The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You [my Son who is Jehovah God] are a [king and] priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.'"** Melchizedek was not a descendant of Abraham, and Jesus was not a descendant of Levi.

Finally, Melchizedek, the king and priest died, and nothing else is known about his life. Jesus died but was resurrected on the third day. He had to be resurrected because, long ago, the Father had appointed Jesus to be a high priest in the order of Melchizedek. He now serves as a high priest for all mankind based on His love, faith, sacrifice, and indestructible life.

Hebrews 7:4–7 says, **"Just think how great he [Melchizedek] was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! Now the law [of Moses] requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people—that is, from their fellow Israelites—even though they also are descended from Abraham. This man [Melchizedek], however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had [been given] the promises. And without doubt the lesser [person,**

Abraham,] **is blessed by the greater** [person, Melchizedek].”

Continuing with Hebrews 7:11–19. Pay attention to the details because this is a bit complicated. **“If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood** [If the Levitical priesthood had been adequate for God’s purposes]—**and indeed the law** [of Moses] **given to the people established that priesthood—why was there still need for another priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek** [per the prediction in Psalms 110], **not in the order of Aaron? For when the priesthood is changed** [from Aaron’s order to Melchizedek’s order], **the law must be changed also.** [Thus, the Levitical law is abolished and nailed to the cross. It is over.] **He** [Jesus] **of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served** [as high priest] **at the altar. For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. For it is declared** [to the Son of God in Psalm 110:4]: **‘You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.’ The former regulation** [the Levitical lineage requirement] **is set aside because it was weak and useless** [temporary] **(for the** [Levitical] **law made nothing perfect** [permanent]), **and a better hope is** [now] **introduced, by which we draw near to God** [through the high priest who sits beside the Father].”

This prophecy was given a thousand years before it happened. The Levitical priesthood was temporary because it was God’s plan from the beginning to appoint His Son as high priest on the order of Melchizedek.

Continuing with Hebrews 8:1–2, **“Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle**

**set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being.”** Steadily putting the axe to the root of Judaism, the argument proved two powerful points from the Old Testament:

(a) The high priest in Jerusalem’s temple no longer matters. The Son of God—a deity who came to earth, provided atonement for our sins, and ascended to the right hand of God—is now a high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

(b) Temple services in Jerusalem have zero merit. The heavenly temple where Jesus serves is superior. Notice what this verse says, **“But when Christ came [to earth] as high priest of the good things that are now already here [the promise of redemption], he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation.”**<sup>1</sup>

Jesus went there to fulfill the promise of redemption. **“How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!”**<sup>2</sup> Incidentally, the Bible mentions three types of sin that lead to death.

Sins causing immediate death in Old Testament:

- (1) *Touching the Forbidden or Disobeying a Direct Order*
- (2) *Desecrating the Sabbath*
- (3) *Murdering*
- (4) *Attacking or Cursing Father or Mother*
- (5) *Kidnapping*
- (6) *Sex with Animals*
- (7) *Adultery*
- (8) *Homosexuality*
- (9) *Witchcraft*
- (10) *Blaspheme or Curse God*
- (11) *Sacrificing Children to Moloch*
- (12) *Person Devoted to Violence*
- (13) *Entering the Sanctuary*

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 9:11

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 9:14

Sins leading to eternal death:

- (1) *Lying*
- (2) *Greed*
- (3) *Arrogance*
- (4) *Covetousness*
- (5) *Anger or Resentment*
- (6) *Irresponsibility*
- (7) *Willful Violations*

Sins not leading to eternal death: (1 John 5:16)

- (1) *Wrongs Ignorantly Done*
- (2) *Spontaneous Wrongs without Motive*

Hebrews 9:24–28 continues, “**For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year [on the Day of Atonement] with blood that is not his own. Otherwise [if this was the case] Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But [now] he [Jesus] has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages [notice Paul’s assessment of timing] to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many [people]; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.**”

At the end of the services on the Day of Atonement, everyone was thrilled their sins had been taken away. This left them sinless for a split second.

The argument is that, on earth, the service had to be performed annually, but as a sinless high priest, Jesus only did it once.

It is clear from the passage the author of Hebrews expected the judgment to occur in his day, and then Jesus would come.

Hebrews 10:1–4 says, “**The [Levitical] law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect [remove the carnal nature of] those who draw near to worship. Otherwise [if it could], would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all [if their carnal natures had been removed], and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.**”

How does one argue that the entire Levitical system was, from the beginning, nothing more than an intricate pattern designed to show how the plan of salvation operates? And most troubling of all, if it were true that animal sacrifices never took away sin, what was the point of killing all those innocent animals over the past fifteen hundred years?

God himself designed the temple services. He created the model, gave Moses laws concerning temple services, and commanded Moses to build the tabernacle according to His instructions. However, the services were nothing more than a pattern. Temple services never produced salvation. Salvation always comes through faith alone—not through rituals, sacraments, or ordinances. Also, the *true tabernacle* must be serviced by a high priest in the order of Melchizedek—not Aaron!

Even though temple services were a model, salvific faith was involved. When a person, sorry for his sin, made restitution and brought an atoning sacrifice to the altar as God commanded, that person’s obedient action revealed salvific faith in God’s promise that one day God would pay the price to redeem the sinner. It was faith in Jesus that accomplished this, not the blood of an animal. This is why Abel did as God commanded. He showed faith in carrying out the requirements of the model.

If it is true that Jesus is deity, and that God abandoned the

Aaronic priesthood and the earthly temple with its services, then Christianity and Judaism have nothing in common.

Hebrews 6:19–20 says, **“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary [Most Holy Place] behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”** The beauty of having Christ as our high priest is that we have one who has been tempted and suffered further than we will ever be. Isn't it wonderful that we have a compassionate judge? I need one.

The earthly sacrificial service was an elaborate model revealing how salvation's process functions: The transfer of sin to the altar through the innocent blood of a lamb, and then, on the Day of Atonement, sins from the Altar of Burnt Offering were transferred to the scapegoat which was then taken away to die in the wilderness. In the process we see the transfer of guilt moving through the sanctuary and the innocence (righteousness) of the lamb (Christ) imputed to the sinner.

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Abel and Cain lived approximately six thousand years before 1844. That is a considerable gap of time. Abel lived by faith, and an angel recorded his entire life in the books of record. The same is true of Cain's life. There is a recording of every life in the books of record in heaven, and that includes yours and mine.

Because Abel responded to the Holy Spirit's conviction, he made a commitment to live by faith. He brought a lamb, killed it, and put it on the altar as God required. In doing this, Abel showed salvific faith. But no determination was made about Abel's salvation during his lifetime. Abel could not say, "I'm saved," because his judgment was still six thousand years away.

Judgment for the dead began in 1844. The righteousness of Christ is not imputed until there is a judgment. Abel could only live by faith because an heir merely has a promise.

Conversely, Cain was in total rebellion. He rejected God and would not do as required. Cain couldn't say, "I'm lost," because he had not been judged. Neither could Cain say, "I'm an heir," because he was not living by faith.

Many Christians today twist Scripture to create comfort, and this comfort, in my opinion, is dangerous because it leads one to believe God has made decisions when He has not.

The judgment of the living has not begun. Because we are still living, we cannot say we are either 'saved or lost.' We can say, 'By God's grace, we're an heir of the promise.' However, all we have is a promise, even though we may die before receiving it. Isn't this what Hebrews 11 is saying? They died without receiving what God had promised. They were heirs, and that is what we are—heirs of the promise. If you are a beneficiary of a will, you do not have what the will provides until the will is executed. A will is only executed after the owner dies.

A new high priest was predicted a thousand years before Jesus came to earth. The Father took Jesus to heaven after the Jews rejected Him, and appointed Him to minister in the true temple. But why do we still need a high priest?

Many preachers today teach what is called *completed atonement* which means everything ended at the cross. This shows total ignorance of the book of Hebrews and no regard for what the book is teaching. There is no such thing as a completed atonement, unless you wish to say there is a completed sacrifice.

Until the merits of Jesus' atonement are applied to my life and judgment has been finalized, it isn't over. This is why we have the judgment of the dead, in which the high priest reviews their records and applies the merits of His sacrifice on their behalf. Then we have the judgment of the living when the high priest examines us to determine whether we receive life or death. Those of us who are willing to go, be, and do all that the Spirit asks, will receive what was promised to the heirs of Abraham.

Well, we've come to the end of this chapter. Pray with me.

*Dear Lord, thank you for the book of Hebrews. It takes such complex matters and boils them down to the essentials. We are so thankful that after two thousand years, we have a high priest in the order of Melchizedek. Thank you, Lord, for giving us grace, strength, and courage. Thank you for being everything we need and for loving us enough to die for us. We have no fear that when our judgment day comes, your love will judge us carefully, thoughtfully, and generously. Thank you for hearing and answering our prayers and blessing us with your presence. In your wonderful name, we pray. Amen.*



## chapter 5

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# Promise to Abraham

*Dear Lord, thank you for the opportunity to study your word. We invite you to come into our hearts and bring joy and peace so we might be refreshed. Create within us a clean heart and spirit. Bless us as we continue to study Hebrews. We ask this in your wonderful name, Lord. Amen.*

One of the biggest challenges with Bible study is that we have to examine *what* is said, *to whom* it is said, and the *circumstances in which* it is said. For example, in 1 Peter 4:7, it was Peter's impression that **"The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray."**

This was Peter's understanding of the time in which he lived. He probably penned this in AD 80–85, and since then, we've had the problem of "Wolf, wolf ... the end is near, the end is near." After a while, the words lose their urgency. It becomes an expression with no meaning. How can we say the end is near if we don't know when the end will be?

Notice what Luke wrote in Acts 2:14–17, "[On the day of

Pentecost] Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: ‘Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.”’”

When the Lord called me to begin teaching about the books of Daniel and Revelation, I said to Him, “History says that everyone who declares your coming is soon, all die.”

The Lord replied, “What’s that to you, Larry? In time, they shall all live.”

At that moment, I had an attitude adjustment, a salvific experience. The Lord wanted to know if I would go and do what He had asked. When I agreed to go, my attitude changed.

It took about a year for me to reach the point of leaving my employment. In doing so, I lost my colleagues and my friends. Fortunately, though, I didn’t lose my family. And I have no regrets. I lost one family and gained another.

This is the experience the book of Hebrews is trying to pull the Jewish converts into: “If you will live by faith, if you will walk with the Lord, if you will come out of the restraint Judaism has placed on you, you won’t look back once you’ve seen the joy of the Lord.”

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I shared this statement’s original wording in a previous chapter. But I have now modified it slightly to make a point:

**“When a man who is honestly mistaken hears the truth [and is convicted that it is truth], he will either quit being mistaken or cease being honest.”**

— Richard J. Humpal, JD

Some people hear truth without being convicted. This is

why God reads the heart. *It is not enough to hear truth, there must be conviction before it becomes an issue of salvific faith.*

During the 1,260 days of the two witnesses, the Holy Spirit will be poured out on all people. The presentation of the gospel will be different than any other time in the past. Defiance will be great. If we rebel against strong conviction, the only alternative is defiance. Anyone who chooses to receive the mark-of-the-beast will have committed the unpardonable sin. When someone comes to the point of taking the mark, defiance took them there. They rejected truth. Not only in hearing the Spirit, but what He was burning into their hearts.

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In previous chapters, we examined three arguments that dethrone the validity of Judaism. The first argument was that the deity of Jesus, proclaimed in the Old Testament, proved Jewish monotheism a false doctrine because of new light. When new light comes and reveals the inadequacy of tradition, tradition becomes a false doctrine. This revelation was hard for converts to process. Being able to accept it would take a paradigm shift.

The second argument was that Jesus, the Son of God, is appointed king and high priest in the order of Melchizedek. He now serves in the true temple in heaven. This transition makes the Levitical priesthood and earthly temple services obsolete and dangerous. Dangerous in that continued participation in temple services after receiving Christ as the Lamb of God showed that the person did not believe Christ's death paid the penalty for sin *in full*. This was the problem with the Judaizers. They wanted one foot in Judaism and one in Christianity. In today's vernacular, it's called *hedging your bet*. The argument questioned whether the Old Testament could be trusted?

The third argument is that legalism and presumption are worthless in God's sight when receiving salvation. Only faith pleases God. A salvific test occurs when the Holy Spirit creates a conviction within us to see what we will do. The life of every

disciple can be defined as one faith experience to the next.

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Let's direct our attention to a present-day school of thought called *eternal security*. This means God is going to save everybody no matter what. The ultimate eternal security is that there is no hell. The Devil designed this lie to lull believers away from a life of salvific faith. He has created variations of of this lie but the result is always the same. I have listed a few beliefs that are not biblical yet widely believed to be necessary for salvation.

- Jesus did it all at the cross.
- Once you are saved, you're forever saved.
- Good works.
- Paying tithe.
- Attending the right church.

Our carnal nature wants a type of salvation that does not have a cross. It wants a salvation that is guaranteed. I remember being in the yard one Sunday and our little next-door neighbor, a ten-year-old boy, was in his yard. He came over to the fence and yelled, "Mr. Wilson!"

I answered, "Yes, Zack."

He excitedly said, "I just got saved this morning!"

I questioned, "Oh, what did you get saved from?"

"Hell," he replied.

I then asked, "Were you going to hell, Zack?"

"Yes," he said.

Think about the hubris Zach's story produces for the next forty years. Why would he need to live by faith? He has already been saved. Now that he has the *insurance* of *assurance* that he's not going to hell, he can relax.

You see how subtle variations of the doctrine of eternal security are not biblical. It leads to a misunderstanding of the gospel and short-circuits the value of Christ's service in

heaven's temple.

Paul makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that God will not demand more than we can do. He says, **“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”**

Speaking figuratively, he is saying that if we obey the Spirit, the Jordan River will open up and a dry pathway will appear so we can proceed toward the Promised Land.

A man in prison once asked me, “I want to be born again; how do I do that?”

I said, “Well, you can't give yourself a rebirth. It's only something God can do. You can't make yourself born again just because you want to be. It is a miracle God has to perform within you.”

He responded, “Okay, what do I have to do to get the miracle?”

I replied, “You have to give everything to the Lord. You have to give Him your heart, your mind, your soul, your future—whatever is left of your life—you have to give to Him. You have to say, “Lord, I am a sinner. I surrender and I will go, be, and do as you direct. If you will pray that prayer, maybe the Lord will come to you and bring the rebirth experience to you.”

He said, “Maybe? What do you mean by maybe?”

I explained, “Well, you will have to wait on the Lord to make it happen. He wants to know if you're sincere about what you're asking. He wants to know if you're genuine about what you're offering. It may not happen instantly. It may take a day or two. It may take a week or two. You may have to say again, ‘Lord, I want to be born again. I want a spiritual nature. The Spirit is moving me.’ At some point, the Lord will answer that prayer and present your first test to see if you really mean it. I don't know what the test will be, but there will be something.

And when you set your mind and heart to reflect Jesus with all that's within you, a test will come. And if God sees you're willing to pass the test of faith and that your faith is genuine, the miracle will occur. It will absolutely occur."

The following week when I went to see him, he said, "It happened! The miracle happened!"

And I said, "Tell me about it."

He began, "About two days after our last study, there was a confrontation. One of the inmates and I had a conflict. He was unhappy with me and hit me in the face. I'm a much larger guy than he and would have instinctively hit him back, but something instantly came over me. This something said, 'This is your test.' I hesitated... I hesitated *very hard*... but I didn't hit him back. The funny thing about this is, the very moment I hesitated, it's as though the anger discharged, and I was free to turn and walk away."

"There it is," I interrupted. "You've been born again! The carnal mind can't do that, but the spiritual mind can because of the enabling power that comes from Christ."

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The fourth argument is deeply offensive to Jews and pierces the core of Judaism. It makes every non-believing Jew angry and every convert nervous. The argument is that the covenant God gave Abraham does not include all Jews.

What would you think if your pastor said, "Benefits of church membership do not apply to all members." This idea was, and to this day is, unthinkable to Jews. Abraham was their father and God's friend. Besides, He had made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants which meant special privileges and distinction above everyone else.

Separating Jewish believers from this false sense of security is necessary but not a simple task. If Scripture proves that God does not grant eternal life based on Abraham's lineage and nothing can be gained by returning to Judaism, what's the

point of being a Jew? It is a clever argument.

To understand why Abraham is so important to the Jews, we must examine what covenants are. Simply stated, a covenant is a promise. A promise can be one-sided (unilateral) or between two or more parties (bilateral). Marriage (in the west) is an example of a bilateral covenant. It is a covenant requiring mutual consent and performance, but broken if infidelity occurs.

For a bilateral covenant to be legal, there must be an exchange of value—*this-for-that*. In the case of marriage, one party gives himself to the other. They exchange themselves. And the contract is a bilateral covenant. That promise becomes a legal agreement. On the other hand, a unilateral covenant is a one-sided promise made by one party to another.

Genesis 9:11–13 states, “**I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.’ And God said, ‘This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.’**”

A unilateral covenant requires nothing from the recipient but is invalid unless the promisor provides some type of pledge, sign, or consideration. The rainbow is a sign of the one-sided covenant God made at the time of the flood. A recurring rainbow is the sign of His unilateral covenant with the earth.

If two people agree on the exchange of property, how is this bilateral covenant legally accomplished? Historically, real estate deeds indicated something of value (usually money) was exchanged between parties to ensure the transfer became legal. With civil matters, uttering a promise does not make the pledge legal. There are some court cases where verbal promises are effectual, but oral contracts are not legal in terms of civil matters and the transfer of real property. If one person tells another that he can have fifty acres of land but there is no

exchange of value, no legal transfer of land can occur. There must be a sign of consideration to validate the legal transfer of property.

It is important to understand that God sees and hears everything occurring on earth. He is a third-party witness to every promise.

Contemplate the significance of what is taking place in this verse: **“He also said to him, ‘I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.’ But Abram said, ‘Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?’ [Abraham was practical. He wanted a sign.] So the Lord said to him, ‘Bring me [five animals] a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.’ Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half.”**<sup>1</sup>

God made a promise. He was going to use blood as a pledge to do what He had promised Abraham. In ancient times, a covenant pledged with blood could not be canceled. No exceptions! If the promisor failed to fulfill the promise, he was guilty of fraud, and his own blood was required to make restitution.

God made a unilateral promise to Abraham, and the sign was a blood covenant. This was the most solemn type of covenant possible.

After Abraham killed and divided the animals, he waited for the Lord. Genesis 15:11–18 says, **“Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away. As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. Then the Lord said to him, ‘Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they**

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 15:7–10

**will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age.** [Abraham lived to be 175 years old.] **In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.** [The full cup principle demonstrated.] **When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot [skillet] with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.** [Picture in your mind what was taking place. It was very dark, and a skillet with smoking coals of fire and a torch were moving between these slaughtered animals.] **On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt [in the south] to the great river, the Euphrates [in the north]."**

This was a one-sided covenant like the sign of the rainbow. There were no conditions that Abraham had to meet, no provisions he had to fulfill. When God said, "I give you and your descendants this land," that was a promise, a unilateral covenant.

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God tried to establish His kingdom on earth five times but could not because of rebellion. When I say this, most Christians think I have lost my mind. But after considering each, notice Israel's repetitive behavior of rebellion.

- (1) Shortly after the Exodus.
- (2) After Joshua led Israel's second generation into Canaan.
- (3) When David reigned. Israel's tenth generation.
- (4) In the time of Isaiah.
- (5) During the 70th week while Jesus was on earth.

According to Daniel 9, Israel had every opportunity to believe Jesus was the promised Messiah before His crucifixion. This produced a problem. Abraham's descendants would not cooperate so God's kingdom could be established on earth, yet, God had promised Abraham that it would be. God could not

fulfill His promise to Abraham due to a problem with carnally minded people who constantly opposed His laws. Imagine a perfect place, a righteous kingdom filled with people who have carnal natures. If God had fulfilled His promise to Abraham and given a small piece of ground to rebellious Israel, it would have been a disaster. Israel's opposition to His authority would have ruined His kingdom.

God's promise to Abraham was not merely to put Abraham's biological offspring in the land of Canaan, even though this is how the promise is widely interpreted today. What most Christians believe is a distortion of what God promised. It is not just a piece of dirt God wants to give; the promise is far more encompassing. God's promise to Abraham involved a sinless king and priest in the order of Melchizedek, a kingdom of righteous people, and a piece of land. God wants a place and a people for His kingdom.

Hebrews 11:8–10 says, **“By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By [salvific] faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”** Abraham was not looking for another city in Canaan like Ur, Babylon, or Jebus. He was looking for something very different. Jesus told the Jews, **“Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.”**<sup>1</sup>

Abraham rejoiced because he knew a day was coming when Jehovah would reign on earth as the king of peace and righteousness. He understood that God would build a great city. God showed Abraham the role that Canaan, located in the center of civilization, would play within His plans.

The fulfillment of God's unilateral promise to Abraham

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<sup>1</sup> John 8:56

requires two items:

- (1) A tract of land for His kingdom.
- (2) A body of people (Abraham's heirs) who love God.

Paul wrote in Romans 8:6-7, **“The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.”** The definition of ‘who Abraham’s descendants are’ is where the subject goes off the rails.

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Now that we know what was promised to Abraham, let’s regress to the beginning of time. Before the world was created, God loved us. Everything conceived in the mind of God is done in love. This world and all of its creatures are His design. From the beginning, the plan of salvation included everyone. This means absolutely everyone, everywhere!

From the beginning, God designed His kingdom for those who would live under His rule. Tragically, the nation of Israel chose not to comply. During His ministry on earth, the Jews constantly confronted Jesus. Consider this exchange: **“I am telling you what I have seen in the Father’s presence, and you are doing [trying to do] what you have heard from your father.’ ‘Abraham is our father,’ they answered. ‘If you were Abraham’s children,’ said Jesus, ‘then you would do what Abraham did.’”**

In verse 44, Jesus said, **“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires [and kill me]. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”**<sup>1</sup> One can see that Jesus never spoke an offensive word!

Today, Jesus’ social media accounts would be terminated, and He would be fired for speaking plainly. The icon created

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<sup>1</sup> John 8:44

today of Jesus more closely resembles Santa Claus than the real man He was. When we study the life and teachings of Christ, Jesus was anything but gentle—except when gentleness would win the heart.

When put into a position where truth meets error, Jesus has a double-edged sword. He says, **“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword [the truth].”**<sup>1</sup> Cutting through the darkness of error takes a sharp sword. Jesus said: **“If you were Abraham’s children, then you would do what Abraham did. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire.”**<sup>2</sup> So, who was the father of the Jews, according to Jesus? The Devil, not Abraham.

Jesus made a startling point to the Jews. Their biological father was Abraham, but this did not make them descendants of Abraham. This is also the argument in the book of Hebrews.

So who are Abraham’s children? Paul answered this in his book to the Romans, **“For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. [Jacob’s name was changed to Israel.] Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children. [This statement is the reason Jews hate Paul so adamantly. They regard Paul’s writings as anti-Semitic.] On the contrary, ‘It is through Isaac [not Ishmael] that your offspring will be reckoned.’ In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise [children of faith] who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring.”**<sup>3</sup>

Christianity today is much larger than Judaism because of Paul’s efforts. He spearheaded the extraction of Christianity from the cradle of Judaism with extraordinary statements like this. He was saying, “It is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise—children

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 10:34

<sup>2</sup> John 8:39, 44

<sup>3</sup> Romans 9:6–8

who live by faith, as did Abraham—who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring.” Ishmael was his child but a result of works of the flesh. Isaac was his child but a miracle that came through faith. Both were biological sons, but only one is counted as Abraham’s offspring in terms of God’s covenant.

Paul says, “If you are merely a biological child of Abraham, you are no different from Ishmael.” In the eyes of the Jews, belonging to Abraham’s lineage was the equivalent of being royalty, the heirs of the promise to Abraham. The Jews believed they were a special people and everyone else was a common Gentile. Therefore, Paul’s argument about natural children was insulting because every Jew considered himself a descendant of Isaac and Jacob. They were convinced every Jew came through the promised son.

Does Abraham’s biological lineage actually matter? Yes and no. This is where the subject becomes technical. It matters in terms of the covenant’s trusteeship but doesn’t as individuals. God wanted Abraham’s family to play a role in spreading the gospel. He wanted them to be trustees of the original covenant He gave Adam and Eve. However, Abraham’s biological lineage has nothing to do with salvation. It never has and never will because salvation only comes through faith.

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The fourth argument is proving that biological ancestry has nothing to do with salvation. This was a most difficult concept for Jews to accept because they believed God unilaterally gave His kingdom and a promise of the land to Abraham. They believed that if you wanted to receive and participate in the kingdom of God, you had to be Abraham’s descendant.

Christians today don’t talk much about God’s unilateral promise to Abraham because they do not understand it. The Christian’s prophetic schematic becomes a nightmare when weaving *Plan A* into *Plan B*. It creates so much confusion that one can hardly figure it out.

God made a blood covenant with Abraham, and this unilateral covenant, this promise, still stands. He said, "Abraham, the land I'm calling you into, I'm going to give to you and your descendants forever." It was more than a plot of land God had in mind. That is why it is so important to be in Christ because the only way to participate in the promise God gave Abraham is through Christ.

God's plan of salvation is a living trust which consists of three parties: a benefactor, a trustee, and beneficiaries. The trustee takes the riches of the benefactor and distributes them to the beneficiaries. The Lord wanted to use Abraham's offspring as trustees of His gospel. Four hundred years later, after making the covenant with Abraham, God sent Moses to ask Israel if they wanted the job and if He could count on them. I am reviewing this concept because we must understand this before proceeding.

At Mount Sinai, God told Israel, "I'm separating you from everybody else. You will be my treasured possession. Not because I don't love the others, I do, but because I need trustees. I'm choosing you because I need faithful messengers for an assignment. I need some teachers to go throughout the earth to represent me. And I'm going to bless you in special ways but expect you to share those blessings with others."

Yet, what happens when trustees steal all the riches? The beneficiaries receive nothing, even though it was meant to be shared. What is more disgusting than to find a trustee has stolen all that was intended for the beneficiary? History is replete with stories of people in positions of trust stealing the benefits they were entrusted with overseeing. That is exactly what Israel did. Israel considered themselves a treasured possession because their father *was* Abraham. God wanted them to be faithful *like* Abraham, and they totally missed the point.

Even though God knew exactly what would happen when He delivered Israel out of Egypt, He did it anyway, knowing only two individuals would enter the Promised Land. He treats

us based on His enduring and everlasting love without regard for the end result. That is a kind of love only divinity can show.

One of the most fascinating stories in the Bible is about the Book of Life. The Father wrote the end of earth's story and sealed it, and it will be opened at the end of the Sabbath millennium. Everything God foreknew will then be revealed and compared with the angels' real-time recordings. The two will be identical. This proves God's foreknowledge did not affect His love for us. That is unlike human nature. We depend on foreknowledge to avoid disappointment—God doesn't.

He said to Israel in Exodus 19:5–6, “**Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.**” He is saying, “I’m looking for a mediator—an intercessor—someone between God and the Gentile.”

Israel entered a bilateral covenant with God when they responded in Exodus 19:8, “**We will do everything the Lord has said.**” The Bible says Moses brought their answer to the Lord. Israel agreed to a covenant that is impossible for the carnal nature to keep.

Imagine, after having seen Mount Sinai quiver with the grandeur and majesty of God Almighty, and witnessing the whole top of the mountain burning, then, camping at the foot of the mountain, building an altar to worship a golden calf. Within 40 days of their unanimous agreement to be God's trustees, Israel was worshiping an image of a baby cow!

Hebrews 8:7–8 says, “**For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. But God found fault with the people and said: ‘The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.’**”

If the descendants of Abraham had experienced a rebirth and allowed the light of truth to shine through them, many Gentiles would have been introduced to the Lord. Unfortunately, God's demands agitated them into deeper rebellion.

Let's consider Israel on two levels:

- (1) The family as a unit.
- (2) The individuals within the family unit.

Israel has a corporate character and an individual character. If the individuals are in rebellion, the corporate condition is rebellion. However, if the individuals have the born-again experience, the corporate character of the body of Israel will be a born-again nation of priests and trustees of the living God. Moreover, He cannot have trustees who are in rebellion.

God planned to use the biological descendants of Abraham to spread the gospel throughout the earth. This would have created a body that loved God and cherished righteousness. Truly a nation of born-again people. Within this atmosphere, Jesus would have established the kingdom of God in Canaan.

I'll explain that, but first, let's examine the descendants of Abraham as individuals. If a Gentile wanted to become an heir of Abraham to share in the promises God gave Abraham, how might this happen?

The word *Gentile* comes from the root word which means *Grecian*. It literally reads, *if a Greek wants to become a descendant of Abraham.*" The word *Gentile* eventually came to mean anyone who was *non-Jewish*. If your grandad wasn't Abraham, you were a Gentile. So the only doorway to becoming Abraham's descendant was to become an heir of Abraham through water and the Spirit.

A salvific test occurs when the Holy Spirit brings a person to the realization that he will not have a place in the kingdom of God unless he repents of his rebellion. By salvific, I mean salvation is at stake. We either rebel or surrender. There is no middle ground. This only happens, though, when the Holy

Spirit brings conviction either internally or externally.

In 1 Corinthians 1:21, Paul referred to the external method when he said, “*The foolishness of preaching*” is important. When we hear God’s Word proclaimed, the Holy Spirit has an opportunity to hammer His words into our hearts. This is why God has ordained apostles, pastors, teachers, and prophets as servants of the church—to promote the gospel.

When I was in about the fifth grade, I remember coming home from school one day. My mother had told me that if I didn’t pass my English test, she would spank me. Well, I failed. I remember telling mom when she asked how I had done on my test that I had *almost* passed! I was trying to put my failure in the most favorable light. But almost is not good enough.

King Agrippa said, “Paul, you almost persuade me to be a Christian.”<sup>1</sup> However, anything short of surrender is rebellion. That is what a salvific test is. When the Holy Spirit brings a sinner to a place where he realizes his true condition before God, he will either quit doing wrong or grow in rebellion.

Living by faith is difficult because Holy Spirit conviction contradicts our carnal desires. I rarely find myself in alignment with the Holy Spirit until He thrashes me, gives me a salvific test, and pulls me back in line.

The Holy Spirit is constantly creating new convictions to see if we will go forward or plateau in defiance. He never lets up. When a sinner lives a life of faith following as the Spirit leads, he will never reach perfection until Christ’s gift of righteousness is imparted.

Yet, perfection is coming! But it will come as a gift from God after having passed the final salvific test. This gift will be imparted at the judgment of the living during the great tribulation. Our carnal nature is going to be taken away. This is called the sealing. Until then, we keep going and growing. That never ends. The Holy Spirit takes us from one faith challenge

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 26:28

to the next, and these challenges are always humbling and humiliating. That is what it takes to grow, to be transformed, to be changed into the likeness of Christ.

To live by faith, we must be willing to change, to allow God to use us for the purpose we were created. Change is not something I want because I'm pretty happy the way I am. Yet, without change and transformation, God's purpose can never be fulfilled.

When a person experiences living by faith, he wants to be around others who are like-minded. God planned that Israel would be a family that lives by faith. As it turned out, Israel was a family that lived in rebellion.

Israel failed miserably as trustees of the gospel. God then assigned Christians as trustees, and they failed. Then, God raised and designated Protestants as trustees, and they have failed. Finally, the book of Revelation reveals that before the end, God will have 144,000 trustees who accomplish what the others have failed to do.

The riches of God's grace will be distributed to His beneficiaries through the 144,000 who will not fail. But before they begin their work, God will remove their carnal natures and seal them with His righteousness. That is why they are called firstfruits.<sup>1</sup> We will witness miracles not seen on earth since Jesus was here—human beings without a sinful nature! No wonder they will be Jesus' special entourage throughout eternity.

Back to the question: What was supposed to happen if a Gentile heard the gospel of Jesus and wanted to participate in the unilateral promise made to Abraham and the bilateral promises to his descendants (trustees)? This is where baptism comes in. Remember, to be valid, a covenant must have a sign, a pledge, or consideration of some kind.

Two things happen when the Holy Spirit brings a person to

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 14:1–5

the point where he wants to become part of the family of God (become a beneficiary).

First, the sinner needs to have a clarifying moment, a public declaration before witnesses indicating that he has *stepped over the line*, chosen to follow Christ and exalt the ways and teachings of Christ. This declaration is important because once made, witnesses testify as to who you are now. Your old friends may ridicule you. They may scorn you. If you're walking with the world, you're going one way, if you're walking with the Lord, you're going another. Something has to give. Friendships will most likely end.

Second, baptism by water is a sign indicating that the sinner has chosen to become a disciple of Jesus. Baptism represents drowning the carnal man and coming up from the grave as a new man. A spiritual rebirth, if you will.

In Israel, when a Gentile wanted to participate in the covenants made with Abraham and his descendants, the date of baptism was their new birthday! Your previous forty years didn't count.

Imagine that on your Gentile driver's license, your birthday shows you are seventy years old, but your Hebrew driver's license would show you're only sixteen! Judaism had an upside! But I digress.

Paul writes in Romans 6:3–4, **“Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”**

The reason baptism is significant is that when Jesus began his ministry, John the Baptist had come to the Jordan River, baptizing those who wanted to be a part of the kingdom of God which was expected soon.

God intended to establish the kingdom of God when Jesus

came to earth. If Israel chose to receive Messiah during the 70th week, the kingdom of God would begin. So, the Lord sent John ahead of Jesus to start heralding the kingdom of God.

**“As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way’—‘a voice of one calling in the wilderness, “Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.” ’ And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”<sup>1</sup>**

Visualize John showing up at the Jordan River. This was not just any man; God had called him. People flocked to hear John, and the Holy Spirit gave him words that pounded on the hearts of the people. John was saying to Israel, the kingdom of God is here. He was persuading the crowd that if you wanted to be part of the kingdom of God, your sins had to be forgiven, and you had to be baptized. Put aside your rebellion and become born again.

The Bible says in Mark 1:14–15, **“After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!’”**

*Plan A* was still possible in Mark 1. Jesus himself proclaimed that “The kingdom of God is near. Repent of your rebellion, as John has said. Be born again. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a new heart and create a new spirit within you.”

John was offering a baptism of repentance at the Jordan River because he understood that entrance into God’s kingdom was not a biological matter. John’s words were terrifying. He didn’t speak the fluffy words a typical preacher speaks. He used hash penetrating words imparted through Holy Spirit power that struck the hearts of those who were listening. John’s words were convicting.

John said, “No one was going to enter the kingdom of God

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 1:2–4

because he was merely a descendant of Abraham.” Many Jews heard this and decided, “Okay, the kingdom of God is coming, and I must be baptized to become a member. I’ll be baptized.” The rationale was, “If the kingdom of God doesn’t come and I’ve been baptized, so what... what have I lost?”

**“John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?’”**<sup>1</sup> Ouch! Those are stern words.

You have to stand in John’s sandals to understand why he would say this. John saw all these people coming out to be immersed but not interested in being born again. They were not interested in putting away their rebellion. The carnal nature wants salvation without a cross because the cross is painful. The carnal heart is not logical, it’s emotional.

Paul writes, **“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.”**<sup>2</sup>

John the baptizer knew a trend had started. People were coming to be baptized, not that they were sorry or repentant, but because they wanted the assurance of making it into the kingdom. This is why he was so stern when he said, “If you aren’t part of the kingdom of God, you’re going to be burned up.” This means if you want to escape hell, get in the water.

He also says, **“Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can**

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 3:7

<sup>2</sup> Romans 7:15–20

raise up children for Abraham.’”<sup>1</sup>

John clearly showed that being a descendant of Abraham had nothing to do with eternal life. God has no grandchildren. Each child of God is born again as a son or daughter of God. Who your parents are is immaterial—it means nothing.

John claimed that those entering the kingdom of God had to repent and receive a heart like Abraham. This was only possible through the Spirit of God.

Years later, Paul summarized this matter by writing, **“A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person’s praise is not from other people, but from God.”**<sup>2</sup>

Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:3, **“Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”** This is a timeless truth that Abraham’s offspring did not know. Jesus’ words explained why the kingdom of God could not be established on earth.

Hebrews’ fourth argument was making clear to the wavering Hebrews that the covenant made with Abraham did not necessarily include all Jews. This was shattering to the Jewish mind. It is just as devastating to all religions that believe they are the only true church. The problem with this belief is being a member of any organization, even Israel, is meaningless when it comes to salvation.

Hebrews 8:8–13 says, **“But God found fault with [our forefathers,] the people [who could not live according to the covenant,] and said: ‘The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt because they did not remain faithful**

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 3:8–9

<sup>2</sup> Romans 2:28–29

**to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord.”**

This fourth argument is being put in the future tense. The writer of Hebrews believed that Jesus would return imminently, so he took what Jeremiah said and used it to indicate what would take place anytime now, just as Peter and the other apostles believed. Stop and read Ezekiel 23 in your Bible. The story tells how Israel wandered away from the Lord.

Continuing with Hebrews 8:10, **“This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. [A time is coming when God will change the faithful and remove the rebellion that is naturally within.] No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, “Know the Lord,” because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.’ By calling this covenant ‘new,’ he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.”**

God is going to make a new covenant with the house of Israel. And the house of Israel is, **“If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”**<sup>1</sup> The verse is saying that the new Israel of today is born-again believers in Christ.

Now, the old covenant hasn’t disappeared yet. Our rebellion is still here. But a day is coming when those living by faith will participate in a new covenant which promises the removal of the carnal nature. Rebellion will not be present. God will write His laws in our hearts and minds, and we will naturally be in harmony with God. I like that. Pray with me.

*Dear Lord, thank you for the book of Hebrews which so clearly and eloquently takes a complex topic and shows that it doesn’t matter who our forefather is.*

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<sup>1</sup> Galatians 3:29

*All that matters is who our Father is. We dedicate ourselves to you so that we might please you, serve you, and walk with you. Transform us through the Holy Spirit so that we might be your children, that we might receive what is promised. As we anticipate and look forward to a glorious future with you, we know you will fully keep your word. Thank you for hearing and answering our prayers. In your wonderful name, we pray. Amen.*

## chapter 6



# Restored to Eden

Thus far, we have seen that the book of Hebrews is about truth and righteousness, qualities missing in Judaism in AD 64. Hebrews is also vital to those who live in these last days. God's children will face challenges during the great tribulation parallel to those of the early Hebrew converts.

We have examined four arguments that dethrone the validity of Judaism in the eyes of the Hebrews. As a quick review, I've listed the four arguments. The examination of a fifth argument immediately follows.

(1) The deity of Jesus proved that the Jewish doctrine of monotheism is false. Heaven has more than one God. Jesus is a separate, distinct, coeternal member of the Godhead. The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Father, and the Holy Spirit is separate and distinct from the other two. There are three Gods, and they are unified in purpose, plan, and action.

Each God has certain prerogatives and powers but function as one. This shouldn't be hard to understand. The Bible teaches

that a man and woman become one flesh when married, yet they're still two separate and distinct individuals.

(2) Jesus, the son of God, serves in the true temple as high priest in the order of Melchizedek. This makes the Levitical priesthood and the earthly temple obsolete. Theologically speaking, it destroys Judaism. And the matter isn't limited to Judaism. The doctrine of Jesus as a high priest in the order of Melchizedek ruins all seven religious systems because all seven are blasphemous. They teach legalism or presumption. Each religion calls these concepts by different names, but in essence, they are *this-for-that* or *give-me-that*. The truth is, Jesus, the appointed Judge of humankind, determines the eternal destiny of each person.

(3) Legalism and presumption are worthless in God's sight. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. Earlier, I wrote about salvific faith—the faith that leads to salvation. The word *faith*, though, can mean different things. If I ask, what faith are you? I'm referring to *denomination*. If I say I believe you can play the piano—although I've never heard you play—I'm referring to *assurance*. Neither example represents *salvific* faith, only how the word *faith* is used.

Salvific faith only occurs when conviction is present. Now, the Holy Spirit doesn't convict everyone about the same issue at the same time, but He is the one who brings it to us. People can hear truth, but without conviction nothing happens. Others hear truth, are convicted, and change takes place. We see a primary example of this in the faith of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. "Father, I know I'm going to the cross. I don't like it because I don't want to die. But I know I am the Lamb of God. If it's possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, your will be done."

God will put His truth before the earth's inhabitants during the great tribulation. He will also pour out His Spirit to test us. Those willing to live by faith will be counted as heirs of Abraham. Jesus gives us a clue about that time in Revelation

3:10. Translators took the Greek preposition and translated it as FROM when the preposition is also used over forty times to mean THROUGH. But the two words have very different meanings. FROM gives credibility to those who want to embrace the rapture doctrine. It is the verse most often used to support a rapture. The word FROM makes it appear as though the church of Philadelphia will escape the testing time. "I will keep you FROM trial and tribulation by removing you from the earth."

To those who believe in the rapture, my question is, "How do you know if you're in the church of Philadelphia? You might be in the church of Laodicea. You might be in the church of Ephesus. You might not be going anywhere." The distortion of scripture creates this problem. There is only one gathering of the saints at the second coming, and Jesus promises, "I will keep you THROUGH that hour of trial."

(4) The covenant God gave to Abraham does not include all of his biological offspring. Of course, this idea was unthinkable to the Jews. For the Jews, being a descendant of Abraham meant eternal security. In their minds, they were automatically saved. It meant special promises, privileges, and distinctions above everyone else. Besides, Paul said, "**All Israel will be saved.**"<sup>1</sup>

In AD 64, they were wavering, deciding whether to return to Judaism or stay with Christianity. If they stayed with Christianity, it meant losing family and friends. It meant losing everything! Returning to Judaism would require them to give up Christ. So, what was the point of returning to Judaism when being a descendant of Abraham was meaningless? The most important question, though, is who in God's sight constitutes Israel? It is all who live by faith, like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

(5) If the first four arguments could not destroy Judaism in the eyes of Hebrew believers, the fifth, *God's rest*, would. Keep in mind that these arguments all came from the Old Testament.

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 11:26

Every Jew had heard of God's rest but did not understand what it was, where it was, or when it was coming. To make sense of this, we must start at the beginning.

Because Adam and Eve were created on the sixth day, their first full day of life was God's seventh day Sabbath. The Garden of Eden was a perfect place to live. *Eden* simply means *home*. How would you like to live in *The Garden of Home*? Genesis 2:15 says, **“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.”**

The Garden of Eden was a complete biosphere, sustained by God's power and equipped with everything necessary for eternal life. It was a world within a world. Food was naturally delicious and perpetual. Water was pure and abundant. Fresh air, beautiful flowers, and lush vegetation filled the garden. Amazing creatures roamed throughout without fear of predators. It was truly a home naturally flowing with milk and honey.

The Garden of Eden is called God's rest because Adam and Eve did not have to work to survive. Their work was rewarding and fulfilling, like that of a master gardener. But they lost their garden home because the devil led them to doubt God. Afterward, they were summarily expelled and the door closed behind them.

**“To Adam he said, ‘Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, “You must not eat from it,” Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.’”**<sup>1</sup>

**“And the Lord God said, ‘The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and**

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 3:17–19

**eat, and live forever.’ So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. [Notice the difference? To live now requires work. Before, life was fun. Now, not so much.] After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.”<sup>1</sup>**

I am reviewing this to contrast the difference between the experience inside of Eden and the experience outside. Adam and Eve went from *God’s rest* to endless *backbreaking work* in a single day—mankind’s worst day in history.

I call the Garden of Eden God’s rest because Eden was not under a curse. Adam and Eve were driven from God’s rest because of sin. What followed was a cursed planet of pain, toil, and death. We need to know this because about 2,500 years after the fall, our merciful God initiated a plan to set up His rest, a Garden of Eden, on earth again. The Bible teaches that He started this plan around 1400 BC. History calls it *The Exodus*. Bear with me until I develop my case.

Notice what the Lord said. **“The Lord said to Abram after Lot had [chosen the desirable land toward Sodom and] parted from him, ‘Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.’”<sup>2</sup>**

And then later, the Lord said to Abraham, **“I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a**

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 3:22–24

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 13:14–17

**foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”**<sup>1</sup>

Fast forward four hundred years, from 1800 BC to 1400 BC. God’s original plan, *Plan A*, was to establish His kingdom in Canaan soon after He delivered Israel from Egypt. If this is a new idea for you, keep reading.

**“Moses said to the Lord, ‘You have been telling me, ‘Lead these people,’ but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, “[Moses] I know you by name and you have found favor with me.” If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people.’”**<sup>2</sup>

Notice the key that endeared Moses to the Lord. Moses wanted to be taught by the Lord so he could know the Lord better. This is why it is said that Moses was the meekest man to ever live. He was eighty years old and asking the Lord to, **“Teach me your ways so I may know you.”**

Pay attention to the Lord’s reply, **“My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”**<sup>3</sup> If you’re quickly reading this verse without understanding its context, you will miss the meaning of **“give you rest.”** One could get the idea that a respite is coming, meaning a little *R n’ R*. That is how we usually read this verse, but that is not what God was saying. God said to Moses, “I’m going to give you my kingdom—the Garden of Eden. I’m going to restore you to *my rest*.”

What did the Lord mean by **“rest”**? If the only text on this subject is Exodus 33:14, we could not fully answer the question. However, move forward 400 years to when David wrote in Psalm 95:10–11, “[The Lord said,] **For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, ‘They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways.’** So I

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 17:7–8

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 33:12–13

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 33:14

**declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’**” What *rest* was God talking about? Psalm 95 was talking about the time of Moses and the generation that did not enter *God’s rest*. The verses indicate they would have entered *God’s rest* had they been faithful.

Hebrews 4:8 says, **“For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day.”** Getting into Canaan was not the *rest* God had in mind for the children of Israel. If Joshua had completed what God had promised Abraham, God would not have spoken about doing it later. It didn’t happen with Moses and it didn’t happen with Joshua. Canaan is not *God’s rest*, and Abraham’s offspring aren’t necessarily Abraham’s descendants. Let me explain.

God often makes statements with two levels of meaning: physical and spiritual. (Please don’t confuse this statement to mean that a prophecy can have two meanings. It can’t. A prophecy can have only one fulfillment.) In this case, the physical meaning was Canaan, *the land*, and the spiritual meaning is God’s kingdom, *His rest*.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:13–14, **“This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.”**

In Psalm 95, God was angry for forty years because of rebellion. He provided the children of Israel manna from heaven and water from a rock, their clothing did not wear out, and their health was excellent. No enemies attacked them because no army could endure the desert. They were a people living in peace, provided with everything they needed. Then, about two years into the wilderness journey, God instructed Moses, “Choose a leader from each of the twelve tribes and send them to spy on Canaan. I want them to check it out because that’s

where we're going."

The Bible story of Kadesh Barnea tells how ten of the twelve leaders came back murmuring, "Oh my, we saw the giants! We're like grasshoppers compared to them! We're scared! Why did God bring us out here to kill us?" This made God angry. He said, "**They have not known my ways.**" That is a great lesson for us. If we want to please God, we need to know His ways. "**They shall never enter my rest**" means the first generation that came out of Egypt could have entered *God's rest* IF its people had been willing to live by faith. This is why God was angry. They had walked through the Red Sea but still would not trust God.

I have had wonderful experiences of faith in God, yet, at times, I have fallen in very simple things. So, just because we might walk on water today doesn't mean we're going to be able to tomorrow. The Holy Spirit knows our weaknesses and how to test our faith.

Even though Joshua did lead Israel into Canaan, we see that *God's rest* is much more than a piece of land. Canaan was where God would have established His *rest*, but it was impossible because Israel was not a faithful nation. If Abraham's descendants had not made God angry, Jesus would have come to earth as a baby about 1400 BC. Then after paying the penalty for sin, Jesus would have been resurrected, and God would have established His kingdom in the land of Canaan.

What happened in the 70th week could have occurred 1,400 years earlier. If God's kingdom had been established on earth, Israel would have become a nation of priests having the honor of serving God on behalf of mankind.<sup>1</sup> God would have set up His rest in the middle of Israel. Then, thousands of years later, when the drama with sin had ended, Jesus would have resurrected all the righteous dead, created a new heaven and earth, and together, the saints from all generations would live forever in the earth made new.

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 19:6

This was God's original plan: *Plan A*. It is what Abraham understood as God's promise. Abraham was looking forward to a day when Canaan would have a city whose architect and builder was God.

The Bible makes perfect sense when we correctly understand the attributes of God's promise to Abraham. Exodus 33:14 says, "**The Lord replied** [to Moses], **'My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.'**" We now know what *God's rest* means.

When Jesus was on earth 1,400 years after Moses, He repeated the same words: "**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.**"<sup>1</sup> Jesus was not talking about a relaxing getaway; He was talking about the kingdom of God. Christ was speaking on a spiritual level about rest from the weariness of sin. He was saying, "If you want relief from sin's burden, I will give you the rest you're looking for—the kingdom of God."

If God had established His kingdom on earth as He originally planned, Moses would have led Israel into Canaan which would have become *God's rest*. The Edenic promise God gave to Adam and Eve included restoration to Eden. The author of Hebrews urged the Jewish converts to make every effort to enter God's kingdom which had not yet appeared.

Hebrews 4:11 says, "**Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish** [in the wilderness] **by following their example of disobedience.**" But generation after generation didn't make an effort. This is why Hebrews 3:16–19 chastises their forefathers by saying: "**Who were they who heard** [God's voice at Mt. Sinai] **and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter,**

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 11:28

**because of their unbelief [no faith].”**

Yet, even after living in Canaan for about four hundred years, Israel’s rebellion only worsened. Its people no longer wanted God as their king. Samuel was indignant and asked the Lord what to do. **“And the Lord told him: ‘Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected [Samuel], but they have rejected me as their king. [They do not want me or my kingdom.] ’”**<sup>1</sup>

Saul was appointed king only because the nation rejected Christ. With no divine king, Israel received no rest from the toils of an agrarian economy. After Israel rejected the Lord and Saul was chosen, God waited patiently until David became king. He wanted a man after His own heart to rule. Then God announced to Israel through David, **“Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Today, if only you would hear his voice, ‘Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness, where your ancestors tested me; they tried me, though they had seen what I did. For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, “They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways.” So I declared on oath in my anger, “They shall never enter my rest.” ’”**<sup>2</sup>

God had good reason to be angry. (Massah and Meribah are two names that identify the same location, a large rock near Horeb, where Israel was angry with God and openly doubted that He was even present.)

Near the time of his death, around 970 BC, David spoke to Solomon in 1 Kings 2:2–4, **“‘[Son,] I am about to go the way of all the earth,’ he said. ‘So be strong, act like a man, and observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws**

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Samuel 8:7

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 95:6–11

**and regulations, as written in the Law of Moses. Do this so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go and that the Lord may keep his promise to me [David]: “[God told me,] If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a successor [a descendant] on the throne of Israel.””**

Like Abraham, David anticipated the kingdom of God. He knew that Israel had not yet entered *God's rest*. Therefore the Holy Spirit, speaking through David, said to Israel, “Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as your forefathers did.”<sup>1</sup> David understood that the promise of entering God's rest was still possible when he said, “Today, we can start over and bring in the kingdom of God.” He encouraged Solomon to follow the Lord, for if he did, Messiah would come to earth and sit on his throne in Jerusalem.

Moving forward about 250 years, we find Israel failed once again. Jesus would have been born around 730 BC had Israel been willing to cooperate. God was willing to establish His kingdom on earth during the days of Isaiah, but it did not happen.

Isaiah said to King Ahaz, **“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right. For before the boy knows how to say ‘My father’ or ‘My mother,’ the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness**

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 95:8

**from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.”<sup>1</sup>**

These events were to occur before Jesus was twelve years old, had He been born during the time of King Ahaz. At that time, the king of Assyria was besieging Jerusalem, and God said, “Don’t worry about the king of Assyria; I’ll take care of him.” During the days of Isaiah, heaven was frustrated with Israel. Jehovah had tried five times to establish His kingdom on earth to no avail. Israel let Him down each time.

Moses - no rest

Joshua - no rest

Saul - no rest

Solomon - no rest

Ahaz - no rest

During Babylonian captivity (605–536 BC), God granted 70 weeks for Israel to accomplish His objectives, and set an unconditional date for the Messiah to arrive. Notice what Jesus said at the beginning of His ministry, **“The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”<sup>2</sup>**

But Israel still would not listen! The arguments in Hebrews were intended to help wavering converts understand that God’s rest had not yet come—but would—and only those who live by faith would enter His rest.

The fifth argument, *God’s rest*, essentially synthesizes the previous four arguments into one. Ultimately, God’s rest means Old Testament Levitical Laws are obsolete, therefore, salvific faith, not Abraham’s lineage, is the prerequisite for salvation. These are the head-scratching arguments that shattered Israel’s entrenched ideologies.

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In the previous section, I shared five instances when the Lord attempted to establish His rest on earth. The word rest

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 7:14–15; 8:4; 9:6–7

<sup>2</sup> Mark 1:15

is significant because it means release from the toil of work. When Adam sinned, the Lord said, “Cursed is the ground because of you. In painful toil you will have to work the ground. It will produce thorns and thistles, and then you will return to the dust.”<sup>1</sup>

If you skim through Scripture looking at the word *rest* and treat it superficially, you will miss the significance of all that God’s rest entails. God intended to take Israel into that rest, beginning with Moses through the time of King Ahaz, but could not because of Israel’s rebellion.

This was a recurring problem for God, who kept pulling Israel to himself, trying to get them into His rest. He did this because He had made a unilateral promise to Abraham and had to keep it. There is no way out of a blood covenant except by death of the promisor.

We now come to the sixth attempt at the time of the 70th week. When Jesus began His ministry on earth, God’s kingdom was near. Daniel 9:24 states, “Seventy weeks are determined upon your people, Daniel, to put away sin and bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up vision and prophecy.”

This meant that if God had established His kingdom during the 70th week—as He intended—the prophecies in the book of Daniel would have never been understood. Let me explain something that can be confusing. But once you understand it, it will make perfect sense.

In 600 BC, there were three prophets alive: Daniel, who was in the palace in Babylon; Ezekiel, who was in the fields in Babylon; Jeremiah, who was left behind in Jerusalem 800 miles away. These three prophets were living at the same time, but God told Daniel a different story than Ezekiel and Jeremiah.

On the one hand, God revealed *Plan A* to Jeremiah and Ezekiel. He told the two men what would be done if Israel repented. God wanted His prophet in Jerusalem, Jeremiah, to

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 3:17–19

tell the captives and His prophet in Babylon, Ezekiel, to tell the exiles. On the other hand, God had another prophet in Babylon to whom He revealed *Plan B*. This prophet recorded events that would come to pass IF *Plan A* did not materialize. Why would God speak about both plans at the same time?

When we read Daniel 9, the Hebrew word translated as *decreed* means to *cut off*. The verse means that 70 weeks were cut from a longer period of 2,300 years. God planned to start *Plan B* in 457 BC, but He was going to cut off the first 70 weeks of *Plan B* to give Israel a final chance to fulfill *Plan A*. That is why the 70 weeks and the 2,300 years began at the same time.

God was warning Israel that His patience was running out. He was ready to move forward with keeping His promise to Abraham. So when Israel nailed Jesus to the cross, both *plans* had been running concurrently 70 weeks.

After John was imprisoned, Jesus began proclaiming, **“The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”**<sup>1</sup> This could have happened, but Israel would not listen to Jesus.

The Bible says, **“He [Jesus] was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.”**<sup>2</sup>

When it became clear that Israel had no interest in entering God’s rest—even when Jesus was already living in their midst—the Father had a problem. How was He going to fulfill the promise made to Abraham? When Israel nailed Jesus to the cross, the Father began abandoning *Plan A*. *Plan B* which contained a whole new set of promises and prophecies had to be implemented.<sup>3</sup> The new covenant included a new Mount Zion,<sup>4</sup> a new Jerusalem,<sup>5</sup> and a new Israel.

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1 Mark 1:14–15

2 John 1:10–11

3 Luke 22:20

4 Revelation 14:1

5 Revelation 3:12

Galatians 3:29 says, **“If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed [the new Israel], and heirs according to the promise [made to Abraham].”** This meant that if you belong to Christ, you’re a child of the promise made to Abraham. This created a rift between biological Israel and spiritual Israel.

God always has a remnant in every group who lives by faith. Jesus declared, **“Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. No one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”**<sup>1</sup>

Because Israel would not cooperate with God, He refused to allow Israel to enter His rest. This explains why Jesus was taken back to heaven. God’s rest could not be established in Canaan, even with the Messiah already in Jerusalem.

Hebrews 4 makes three emphatic points I want to bring out before we close this study.

(a) The promise of entering God’s rest still stands. It will take place at some point in the future. **“Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the good news [concerning the kingdom of God] proclaimed to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed.”**<sup>2</sup>

The ultimate worship is submission. If we are to worship God, we need to do what He commands. That is the difference between Cain and Abel. Cain wanted his way rather than allow the Spirit’s conviction to compel him and bring the right offering. When conviction comes, you must respond favorably before experiencing joy. It takes action. Until you fulfill that conviction, there is no joy. Paying lip service isn’t submission.

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<sup>1</sup> John 3:3, 5; Matthew 7:21

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 4:1–2

The Lord told Isaiah, **“These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”**<sup>1</sup>

(b) Those who have faith in Christ will rest from their work on the seventh day, just as God did.

**“Now we who have believed [in Christ and received His gospel] enter that rest [each week], just as God has said, ‘So I declared on oath in my anger, “They [the rebellious and unbelieving] shall never enter my rest.”’ And yet his works have been finished since the creation of the world. For somewhere he [Moses] has spoken about the seventh day in these words: ‘On the seventh day God rested from all his works.’”**<sup>2</sup>

**“There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his.”**<sup>3</sup>

The Sabbath is a weekly experience that parallels *eternal rest*. Having pastored forty-two years, I have seen individuals lose their jobs, spouses, and even families for choosing to keep the Sabbath. But I don’t know anyone who hasn’t gained more than was lost. Everyone who decided to keep the Sabbath and remained committed to it has been blessed with more than they had before. Now, at the time, it didn’t seem that way. But that’s what faith is all about.

For those who have never observed the Sabbath and are not convicted of its validity, don’t try keeping the Sabbath without Holy Spirit conviction. You don’t want to get into a *this-for-that* relationship because it will be a disaster. However, if the Holy Spirit is pressing you with conviction, and you take that step in faith, you will be one step closer to entering God’s eternal rest!

Once you begin to experience the joy of the Sabbath, you can know that whatever you’re doing, God puts it on hold so

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1 Isaiah 29:13

2 Hebrews 4:3–4

3 Hebrews 4:9–10

you can have a day of peaceful rest. God wants us to have 24 hours each week for peace and joy, leaving our cares with Him. That is what is meant by **“Anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his.”**

In AD 64, Hebrew converts observed God’s Sabbath—a very Jewish thing to do. They did not understand that God’s seventh-day rest was a weekly reminder of the rest to come. The parallel between resting on God’s weekly rest day and entering God’s eternal rest is clear. God’s Sabbath was not nailed to the cross. God’s weekly Sabbath is a rest that points to the fulfillment of the eternal rest God promised Abraham.

The world will soon hear the command to worship the creator on His holy Sabbath day. Notice the parallel. Before the Exodus was possible, the Jews had to rest on God’s Sabbath. This made Pharaoh furious, so persecution began. Likewise, before the exodus from this world, God will command Abraham’s heirs to rest on His Sabbath day. This will make Babylon’s leaders angry, and persecution will begin.

Consider the mindset of Hebrew converts in AD 64 who observed the seventh-day Sabbath but couldn’t conceive of its prophetic importance. These could have been some of their thoughts: “Our forefathers were slaves of Pharaoh, but God sent Moses to tell us that, as a condition for deliverance, we had to put our faith in God and rest on His Sabbath day. God then mercifully set us free from slavery to observe His Sabbath. To illustrate God’s rest, He made the land produce enough food every sixth year so the land could rest every seventh year. He also required us to set our slaves free every Sabbath year so that they might taste the joy of His rest. Thus, God’s Sabbath has been a recurring example of Eden throughout history. Since God’s promise to Abraham remains intact, and His rest has not yet been established, we must make every effort to live by faith. Or, like our forefathers, we will not be permitted to enter His coming rest because we rebelled against the Holy Spirit.”

(c) Hebrews referred to Moses, Joshua, and David to warn

the AD 64 generation not to repeat their forefathers' fatal mistakes in rejecting God.

So, who is the Israel that will be saved? Jesus makes it clear that only those who have been born again, have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.<sup>1</sup> This means that when we walk by salvific faith, the Lamb gives us His righteousness by transferring our sins away.

When a sinner brought his lamb to the Altar of Burnt Offering, his sins were transferred to the altar, and the innocence of the lamb was transferred to the sinner, whereby the sinner walked away with the righteousness of Christ, his sins atoned for. What a beautiful lesson. I look forward to living in the Garden of Eden. What a day that will be! Please pray with me.

*Dear Lord, thank you so much for the privilege of being an heir. What a patient and loving God you are. We see in Israel a mirror of ourselves. We see the times you've tried to lead us forward, and we wouldn't go because of rebellion. Thank you for your grace that covers us. Thank you for your patience that deals with us. Thank you for your kindness and for loving us. And like Moses, teach us your ways so we might continue to please you. This is our prayer in your wonderful name. Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 7:17





Larry Wilson began studying and investigating the great truths found in the Bible after his return from the Vietnam War. Although his primary focus was understanding Daniel and Revelation, he taught on many subjects and other Bible books. Larry's study led him to conclude that God's plan to save man can only be understood when a person looks at the Bible as a whole. He believed each Bible writer left clues regarding God's plan, and as we become acquainted with these clues and how they interconnect, we then can begin to understand the full meaning of God's grace, love, power, justice, and mercy.

Hebrews' eternal riches belong to those willing to dig for buried treasure. This book helps us to understand the imparting of Christ's righteousness which occurs during the judgment of the living. Hebrews explains the concluding ministry of our high priest in heaven's temple, the deity of Jesus as a sovereign God, the properties of faith, and the establishment of God's kingdom—God's rest.

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