

Life and Letters of Paul Series—Hebrews

We are getting into the book of Hebrews. This is a very important book. There is an awful lot packed in here, and we are going to try and cover it. We will focus on an overview of God's great plan and purpose: the primary emphasis of the role of Jesus Christ, His role as our High Priest, our Mediator, the role of the priesthood and a transition to take place. We will also notice the theme of perseverance. It plays a major role in Scripture.

Hebrews was written to Israelite Christians in general but particularly to those of Jewish background. It was evidently written at the end of Paul's first imprisonment. We will note some places that give us indication of that. You will find that many of the commentators want to dispute the fact that Paul wrote the book of Hebrews. This is something that is commonly done today. There's a reason for that and there's a reason why we would accept Paul's authorship. In fact, I can give you seven reasons for accepting his authorship, and I will explain why many of the critics don't want to accept Paul's authorship.

(1) Who was better qualified than Paul to write a book like this? One-third of the book of Hebrews is a direct quotation out of the Old Testament. Whoever wrote it was thoroughly grounded in the Old Testament, in the intricacies ("ins" and "outs") of the Jewish religion, the symbolism and all the things connected with the temple, priesthood, the tabernacle, all the various ceremonial aspects, sacrifices, etc. Who was better qualified than Paul? He was more highly educated than any of the other apostles. He was more qualified to explain the intricacies of Judaism. He was a student of Gamaliel, the foremost Jewish teacher of the day. Most likely, just in terms of qualifications, there wasn't anyone who was better grounded in the Old Testament than Paul to write a book like this.

(2) We find that the author of the book was writing from Italy.

Hebrews 13:24, "Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you."

Verse 19, "But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you sooner." Here is a reference of someone writing from Italy and who was in prison. The author was not at liberty; he

was in prison in Rome, which of course, Paul was.

(3) Whoever wrote this, Timothy was his companion.

Verse 23, "Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly." Here was someone writing at Rome. He and Timothy had been there. Timothy was now at liberty and was hoping to be shortly restored to them.

(4) Peter testifies of a book that Paul wrote like this.

II Peter 3:15, "...as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you."

I & II Peter address basically the same audience.

I Peter 1:1, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." Israelites dispersed in Gentile areas. This is the same audience that Hebrews is written to—people of the Dispersion.

II Peter 3:15-16, "...as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which those who are untaught and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures." Peter acknowledges to the audience he addressed (the Israelites of the Dispersion) that Paul had also written a letter to that group. Now if Paul didn't write Hebrews, then he had to have written a letter addressed to that group that has been lost because Peter testifies to it.

(5) The letter has Paul's style. I won't go into all the reasons for that, but there are many aspects of it to show that. The critics write that off as someone trying to copy Paul's style.

(6) The unanimous tradition of the early Church recognizes Paul's authorship. The earliest writers (up through the second century) and any tradition in the Greek world are pretty unanimous in acknowledging that Paul wrote this book. It was only in the aftermath that these questions began to come in. The reasons for the questions was to undermine the authority of the book because there isn't any book in the New Testament that more clearly speaks of tithing, Sabbath keeping and various things like this. It is a book that has a "Jewish flavor."

Frankly, the real objection to Paul's authorship by some of the early so-called "church fathers" was simply an effort to undermine its authority in the canon. Some of the later critics, and even some of the early Protestants, reject Paul's authorship. It kind of "fed on itself." They

quoted Augustine and various ones. Augustine didn't think Paul wrote it. Of course, he didn't! Augustine really didn't want the book in the Bible because it contradicted what he taught and was a little harder to wrest and twist than some of the other things. So, they objected to it on that basis.

The reality is that while the Catholic Church likes to claim the credit for "giving the world the Bible," they didn't have anything to do with it. The only thing they tried to do was take it away. They didn't put it together. It was already in existence when they came on the scene. The church council didn't put the Bible together. They simply recognized the canon that was already in existence. The only thing they argued about was how they could get books out of it. Primarily, they desired to somehow discard James, I & II John, Hebrews, the book of Revelation and various ones like that. They looked for ways to try to get rid of anything that had a few pointed hints at them.

However, the books were simply too widely known and recognized to be effectively discarded. The reality is that the Apostles Peter and John were responsible for creating and providing the canon of the New Testament. The earliest Church sources and records recognized Paul's authorship. It didn't begin to be questioned until later.

(7) If the book of Hebrews was not written by Paul, it would totally break the pattern of "seven" in the New Testament and in Paul's writings. Counting the book of Hebrews, Paul wrote 14 books. In the sequence, the order that was preserved by the Greek Church, it comes "sandwiched" in with Paul's epistles. The order that the Greek Church preserved (the order that we have commonly called the inspired order) consisted of four parts or divisions: the Gospels and Acts (the historical books that told the story), the General Epistles (James, Peter, John and Jude), Paul's Epistles, and fourth came the book of Revelation.

Paul's Epistles were arranged. First are his nine letters to the seven Churches beginning with Romans and ending with II Thessalonians. Then came the book of Hebrews and the Pastoral Epistles (Timothy, Titus and Philemon). In that order, Hebrews is "sandwiched" in with his epistles. If you take it out, you don't have 14. If you take it out, you mess up the sequence because you have four divisions: the Gospels and Acts, General Epistles, Epistles of Paul and Revelation.

When you take the four divisions of the New Testament and add it to the three of the Old Testament (the Law, Prophets and Writings) that Christ discussed (Luke 24:44), you have seven divisions. There's completion in the New Testament. The Jews counted 22 books of the Old Testament and the 27 in the New Testament. That's 49—seven times seven. When you take out the book of Hebrews and try to rearrange it or assign it to somebody else, you mess up a consistent pattern that runs all the way through the Bible, a pattern that "smacks" of God's design and purpose and the fact that there was an order and harmony to it.

Let's understand a little bit about the audience to whom he is writing. If Paul is writing toward the end of his Roman captivity, we're looking at about 62 A.D., which means the destruction of Jerusalem was only a few years away. The deaths of the Apostle Paul, the Apostle Peter and the other apostles were coming very quickly. In fact, if James was not dead when the book of Hebrews was written, he was probably executed right around that time or very shortly thereafter because he died in the early 60s. He was thrown from the precipice of the temple; he was thrown over and dashed on the rocks below.

You have to put yourself in the situation a little bit. At the time Paul was writing, probably around 62 A.D. during his Roman imprisonment, there was a situation where you had many of the people to whom he was writing who had been in the Church 25 or 30 years. There were a number of those who were receiving this letter who were there on the Day of Pentecost in 31 A.D. and when the thousands were converted during those early weeks. Primarily, the book of Hebrews is written to old-time Christians, long-time Church members, people who were in the Church for 25 to 30 years. Here were individuals who came into the Church in those earliest days of exuberance, excitement and miracles; individuals who came in with that eagerness, anticipation and sense of urgency; individuals who sacrificed for the work.

Remember in the book of Acts, in 31 A.D., many of those who were in Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost came only for the holy day season. They came into the Church and all the excitement was going on, the gospel was being proclaimed, great miracles were being worked. There was a sense of imminence and urgency and they didn't want to leave. Many of the people who were based there in Jerusalem liquidated property; they converted their property into money and gave it to the apostles. They

gave everything they had. This was the situation. There was a sense of imminence and urgency of Christ's return. That was the last question the disciples asked Jesus when He ascended to heaven.

Acts 1:6, "...Lord will you at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?"

Verse 7, "And He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.'" He didn't tell them the time setting.

What happened? A couple of years later, in 33 A.D., Stephen was stoned. Stephen was the first in the New Testament Church to suffer martyrdom. Many there in Jerusalem began to be scattered as time went on.

Acts 12, when Peter was arrested and put in jail, God sent an angel and brought him out. Great miracles occurred even to the point that when Peter's shadow passed over someone, they would be healed (Acts 5:15). But 30 years had gone by and Paul had now been languishing in jail for years. James, the brother of John (one of the twelve) had been executed years ago. Some of the other apostles were scattered and some were dead. James, the brother of Jesus was at the point of being executed.

What had happened? Well, there was an erosion of that first love, of that zeal and intensity. There were some tired old Christians—people who had sort of lost that sense of zeal and urgency. Individuals who, when they first came in the Church, never anticipated that they were running a marathon and would still be around for 25 or 30 years.

I think we have to understand that Hebrews has some special significance for all of us if we stop and put it in that perspective. I saw a man who was in college with me back in the late 60s. Did he expect to be here in 1991? I didn't. Various ones of you started hearing Mr. Herbert Armstrong way back in the 50s and 60s. We didn't expect to be sitting here in the 90s. The 90s seemed forever away. But they are here.

So Paul is writing to people who were in that circumstance. He is writing to people who were maybe in their 20s and 30s when they came into the Church and who were now getting on up into their 60s. People were going through and experiencing things that they hadn't expected.

There were heretical movements that were beginning to make inroads. There were various ideas floating around. In Revelations 2:4, we are told that the Ephesians era of the Church ultimately lost its first love. We find Paul dealing with some of those things.

Notice the way he starts out.

Hebrews 1:1-2, "God who at various times and in different ways ["many different times and many different ways" would be the more literal rendering from the Greek] spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds."

Paul is writing with a couple of major things in mind. **First**, he wants to clearly explain and establish the rank and function of Jesus Christ and the Melchizedek priesthood in relationship to the Levitical priesthood. **Second**, he wants to exhort old-timer members to persevere to the end.

Think about it. Most of the Jewish element and those in Jerusalem had been accustomed to continuing to go up to the temple and participate in temple service. They would go up to Jerusalem for the Feast or many of the Festivals. It was common that they would travel to Jerusalem and took part in the temple service. The temple had continued to function. It seemed a part of the eternal order of things. It would have been very difficult to imagine that something would happen to it. It was certainly hard to imagine that something would happen to it and that Christ wouldn't instantly return, but that was going to be the case.

There was going to come a transition. The temple was going to be destroyed and the Levitical priesthood was going to cease to function. Yet when we go through the book of Acts, we find that many in the Church (particularly there in Jerusalem and Judea) continued to take part in certain of those things. There needed to be an explanation of the transition; a transition had already been made on a spiritual level and a transition that needed to be understood on the level of those in the Church there.

Paul starts out by showing that in different ways and different times God had spoken in the past through the prophets.

Verses 2-3, "has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person..." The word translated "express image" is "character" in the Greek language. In fact, it is spelled the way we spell it. What it really means, the sense of the word in the Greek language, is something that is engraved or etched very deeply into your character—the traits that are fundamental to you

and are etched deeply into you. Jesus Christ reflected exactly the character of the Father. He was the engraved image. He reflected exactly the same attributes.

Verse 3, “who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person and upholding all things by the word of His power when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

Verses 4-8, “having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He ever say: ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You?’ And again, ‘I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son?’ But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: ‘Let all the angels of God worship Him.’ And of the angels He says: ‘Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire?’ But to the Son He says: ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom.’”

He shows that Jesus Christ possesses a rank far above any angel. He is not an angel. He is the express image of the Father. He is the Son of God and holds the rank of God.

We are told that angels are ministering spirits.

Verse 14, “Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?” The world has a distorted idea that if you are good when you die, you will go to heaven and become an angel—you sprout wings and have a halo, etc. It’s a pretty vague idea, and you don’t find anyone anxious to go do this. They don’t seem really excited about trying to hurry up and get there.

That’s not where angels come from. Human beings were not created to become angels. Human beings were created to become God. Angels are ministering spirits. They are servant spirits—spirit beings created for service. They are sent forth to serve those who will be the heirs of salvation. We are not going to rise to the level of spirit servants. We are inheritors. We are heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). We become heirs of salvation. We will inherit because we literally become a part of God’s Family and will literally be born into God’s Family.

Hebrews 2:1, “Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away [KJV, “let them slip”].”

Now he begins to exhort a little bit.

Verses 2-3, “For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast [referring to the Old

Covenant], and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation....”

Verses 4-5, “God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will? For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels.” The world that then was, the world that has been and is, has been under the subjection of angels. Satan the devil is the god of this world (II Corinthians 4:4). But the world to come will not be put in subjection to angels.

Verses 6-8, “But one testified in a certain place [a quote from Psalm 8], saying: ‘What is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You take care of him? You made him a little lower than the angels [You made him temporarily lower], You crowned him with glory and honor, and set him over the works of Your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet.’ For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him.”

He is quoting from the Old Testament from Psalm 8. —All things being put under man. But he makes the point, “...but now we do not yet see all things put under him.” When God created man, He gave him dominion over all things (Genesis 1:26; Psalm 8:6).

Man, right now, is a little lower than the angels because man can die and the angels can’t. He kind of leaves us hanging.

Verse 9, then, “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death....” He was also temporarily made lower for the suffering of death. When Jesus came to this earth, He was made lower than the angels where it was possible for Him to die. We see Him now “...crowned with glory and honor, that He, by grace of God, might taste death for everyone.”

Verses 10-11, “For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.”

We are all of one. We share one Father. We literally become partakers of the divine nature. Peter tells us that in II Peter 1:4. Our sonship is in God’s Family. “*Huiiothesia*” is a term used in Hebrew that was a common term for adoption in the Roman world. If you take the word literally,

it means “sonship”; “*huio*” is the normal Greek word for “son” and “*thesia*” means “position of” or “rank of.” So the word literally could be rendered “position of a son” or “rank of a son” or “sonship.” It was the term commonly used for adoption in the Greek and Roman world. Our relationship with God is “adoptive” only in the sense that we are “chosen” sons. It goes beyond the relationship of an adoptive child with his adoptive parents. The adoptive parent can bequeath property to the son; he can bequeath his name, all things, but the one thing he can’t bequeath is his own genetic inheritance. You do not become a partaker genetically of the nature of the adoptive parents.

That’s where the adoption analogy breaks down because Peter tells us we become partakers of the divine nature (II Peter 1:4). That’s what God’s Holy Spirit is. It’s the mind of Christ in us. There is actually a transformation that takes place at the resurrection because flesh and blood can’t inherit the Kingdom of God (I Corinthians 15:50). This mortal puts on immortality (v. 53). We make a transition from physical to spiritual. We step into eternity. That’s why Jesus Christ is called the firstborn from the dead.

Colossians 1:18, “And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead...” If He is the firstborn from the dead, then that means there are others born from the dead. We will be born from the dead. Not an obvious human physical birth but into the realm of immortality. Jesus Christ became flesh, as we are flesh. He did not become an angel or an angel in disguise.

Hebrews 2:16-18, “For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted [tested].”

Verse 14, “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.” Jesus Christ became flesh. He took upon Himself the nature of the seed of Abraham. He became born as a human being. He lived life. He knows what it is to be a human being because He went through the things that we go through as a human being.

Verse 10, “...to make the author [KJV, “captain”] of their salvation perfect through

sufferings.” The sense of the word “perfect” is completely mature, fully developed or matured.

Christ learned through the things that He suffered. He learned what it felt like to suffer pain. He learned firsthand what it’s like to be a human being. He went through that experience and therefore is able to lead us to salvation. Christ’s role is described and the fact that He has gone before. He is the firstborn from the dead. He is the captain of our salvation, but we can ultimately share life with Him on the God level, the God plane. We can literally be born into the very Family of God, having and becoming in this life a partaker of the divine nature, and ultimately transformed completely from physical to spirit. Right now the process begins—the transformation, the conversion process.

We speak of being converted or when we were converted, but I think we realize that in the true and full sense of the word, we are not completely converted until we are born of the Spirit into the Family of God at the resurrection. That will be when all the change takes place. Conversion simply means change. There is a level of conversion that takes place at the point we make the commitment. We are baptized and God places His Spirit within us. That begins the conversion process, and He begins to write His law in our hearts and in our minds through the power of His Spirit. That’s the beginning of conversion. But it’s only the beginning.

You’re not completely converted are you? Is God’s law completely written in your heart and mind to where the only way you ever react to anything is spiritual? I wish it were completely written in mine, but I’m sorry to admit to you it’s not. It’s in the process. In that sense, the new covenant will not have been completely made until the resurrection. At that point, we will have been completely converted from flesh to spirit.

God begins the conversion process with our minds to change the way we think. He ultimately changes us from mortal to immortal, from flesh to spirit. He can accomplish that in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet (I Corinthians 15:51-52). But what can’t be accomplished like that is the mind because if God changed your mind that way, you would lose free moral agency. Your mind has to change because you choose for it to change. You voluntarily surrender your will to God and want Him to take control. You want His Spirit. You want Him to write His laws in your heart and mind. You want Him to change and transform you and make you something that you’re not. You can’t make yourself that way. You can’t

convert and transform yourself. It's not a matter of human willpower. You have your part to do; you have to follow. But it's the power of God to transform, and that transformation process will not be completed until the resurrection.

Christ has a function now as our High Priest.

Hebrew 3:1-2, "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house."

Verses 3-5, then he goes through and talks about how Moses was faithful.

Verses 7-8, "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness.'" He is quoting from Psalm 95, which in turn is quoting back in Exodus 16 and 17. Paul begins to go into an exposition of Psalm 95.

Psalm 95:7-11, "...Today, if you will hear His voice: 'Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, and as in the day of trial in the wilderness, when your fathers tested Me; they proved Me, though they saw My work. For forty years I was grieved with that generation, and said, 'It is a people who go astray in their hearts, and they do not know My ways.'" So I swore in My wrath, "They shall not enter My rest."'"

It is a Psalm of David that takes the lesson of Exodus 16 and 17 and develops it from a spiritual standpoint. Paul quotes it in Hebrews 3 and 4 and develops it even further. He is quoting the Psalm, which in turn is alluding back to what Moses said. Paul is expounding the spiritual significance of it.

Verse 11, "'So I swore in My wrath, "They shall not enter My rest."'" We find in Deuteronomy 12 and other places (Joshua 1, 21, 22, 23) a reference to the fact that through Joshua the children of Israel ultimately entered into rest. They spent 40 years walking through the Sinai. When they got to one place and they didn't have to pick up and move the next day, this was rest. If you have been on the move for 40 years and somebody finally lets you sit down, you're going to think you've entered rest. All you have been doing is camping.

I have gone to Big Sandy many times and camped there and I enjoyed it. But I tell you what, by the time eight or nine days were over with, I was kind of glad to have something a little more permanent than a tent.

For 40 years! We're not talking about eight or nine days. We're talking about 40 years. It took

them six years to subdue the land; the seventh year, which was the Sabbatical Year, they moved into the dwellings where the Canaanites had lived. They now lived in fixed homes and dwellings and ate the crops that had been harvested the previous year. They weren't on the move. They weren't fighting. They were settled. They finally had rest. They could finally stop; so, in that sense, Joshua gave them rest.

They were denied rest because they didn't believe Joshua and Caleb. They could have had it almost 39 years earlier than what they had, but they wouldn't cross the Jordan. They wouldn't go into the Promised Land because they didn't believe Joshua and Caleb (Numbers 13-14). They believed the ten spies and as a result, they wandered in the wilderness 40 years.

Hebrews 3:10-11, God said, "'Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, "They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.'" So I swore in My wrath, "They shall not enter My rest."'"

God said, 'This generation that doesn't believe will not enter into rest. They'll never know what it is to just dwell in one place and be able to settle down. They are going to die on the move in the desert. And the next generation will enter into rest.' This is just a matter of history. It is alluded to in Deuteronomy 12:9 and Joshua 1, 21, 22 and 23. David quotes that and uses some of that terminology in Psalm 95. It talks about entering into God's rest.

Paul then begins to quote it here in Hebrews 3 and 4.

Hebrew 4:8, he says, "For if Joshua [KJV, "Jesus"]..." "Jesus" is derived from the Greek spelling of "Joshua." In the New Testament, instead of "Elijah," it will say "Elias." It's just a matter of a different spelling. Jesus is simply our English spelling of the Greek form. In the Old Testament, we translate it Joshua because that's the English rendering of the Hebrew form. But it's the same word and the reference is to the Joshua of the Old Testament. A lot of modern translations for the sake of clarity render it Joshua because when we see Jesus, we think of Jesus Christ.

We have to realize that was a very common Jewish name. There are many Jews who were named after Joshua. The name had significance. "Joshua" means "the Eternal is Savior." All the names had significance and had meaning. It had special significance for Him because He was literally, in the flesh, the Eternal who was the Savior. But there were many Jews who were

named after Joshua, the hero of the Old Testament.

Verse 8, what Paul is saying, "...if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day."

Verse 7, "...saying in David [quoting from Psalm 95, a Psalm of David]...." The point he is making is that it's true that Joshua gave them rest. The Israelites entered into rest under Joshua, but was that all God was talking about when He talked about the promises and entering into rest? If he did, Paul says, 'then why (writing over 400 years later) did David talk about listening to God? If you listen to God, you can enter into God's rest?'

David wouldn't have been talking about it in the future tense 400 years later. The account we have in Deuteronomy and Joshua was a literal account, but it was a figure, a type of something that had significance for us. So he quotes Psalm 95 and shows the ultimate rest into which God's people may enter; the Kingdom of God is the rest.

Right now we are pilgrims, sojourners. We are travelers through this world. When we enter into the Kingdom of God, we will finally enter into rest. The rest into which ancient Israel entered through Joshua of old was merely a type of the permanent and eternal rest that the people of God can enter into.

It's interesting. All the way through Hebrews 3 and 4, Paul keeps using this word "rest" over and over and over again. It is the word "*katapausis*," which means "rest" or "repose." But what's not obvious in most English translations (some have marginal notes) is in Hebrews 4.

Hebrews 4:9, "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God." The word "rest" in verse 9 is totally different than any other place in Hebrews 3 and 4. It's the word "*sabbatismos*." You don't have to be a Greek scholar to figure out that "*sabbatismos*" kind of sounds like Sabbath and that's what it means. It means "Sabbath keeping," "a Sabbath rest." "There remains therefore a Sabbath keeping to the people of God." Paul uses play on words because in the Hebrew, the word "*shabat*" came from a word that meant "rest." "There remains therefore a Sabbath to the people of God."

Hebrews 4:4, the example and what he is using here is a reference to, "For He has spoken in a certain place [in relationship to rest] of the seventh day in this way: 'And God rested on the seventh day from all His works.'" The rest Joshua gave the Israelites, which, interestingly enough, if you go through the chronology of

Joshua, was entered into in the seventh year. The Sabbath which God rested on (the seventh day) was a type of the Millennium, the Kingdom of God, the 1,000 years. The first 6,000 years are a time for man's work, effort and endeavor, but finally in the seventh 1,000-year period, it's a time of rest.

Isaiah 14:7, that's why we are told, "The whole earth is at rest and quiet...." That is ultimately God's rest—His Sabbath rest. The seventh 1,000-year day is the millennial Sabbath, the Millennium. There remains therefore a Sabbath keeping to the people of God.

Hebrews 4:10, "For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His." If you're entering into the eternal rest that God promises His people, then you quit doing your work on the Sabbath just like God quit doing His work on the Sabbath. There remains a Sabbath keeping for the people of God because when you keep the Sabbath, you are being reminded of the rest that God's people will ultimately enter into.

When you really go through *Hebrews 4*, it is one of the strongest places in the New Testament to clearly prove that there remains a Sabbath keeping for the people of God. It's about as plain as you can get. The Protestants and commentators claim they're not sure what Paul meant by this. What do they mean they're not sure what he meant? If he had said, 'There remains a Sunday keeping to the people of God,' I'll bet they would be able to figure that one out.

I Corinthians 5:8, that's kind of on the par when he said, "...let us therefore keep the Feast..." and they say they don't understand exactly what Paul meant by this. What if he had said, 'Let us therefore keep Christmas.?' They would understand that one. They wouldn't have any trouble figuring that one out. But when Paul says, 'Let us keep the Feast,' they say, 'Paul must have meant something by this, but we're not quite sure what he meant.' Why don't we just figure he meant what he said? That's a good assumption. You just kind of start from the premise "people mean what they say and they say what they mean." This is one of the reasons why some desire to dispute Paul's authorship of Hebrews. They would have liked to conveniently dispose of Hebrews altogether because it's a little bit inconvenient.

Hebrews 4:11, in fact, we are told (it's kind of a play on words), "Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest..." KJV, "Let us labor, therefore, to enter into that rest..." Let's work to enter into

rest. You appreciate rest when you have been working. The Sabbath means the most to somebody who's been working hard for six days. Then you really appreciate the Sabbath.

Christianity involves work, but it's not our effort that does it. Let me give you an example. It's like a power tool. You plug in your power saw to do something. What if we plugged in the saw and sat back under the shade tree and watched? How many two-by-fours would that saw cut? It wouldn't do a whole lot. What if you didn't plug it in at all? You could work hard all day and not cut very much.

What's the point? If you're not plugged into the power source, it doesn't matter how hard you work, you are not going to accomplish anything. If you are plugged into the power source, you can't just sit back under a shade tree and wait for everything to happen. You have to work hard, but no matter how hard you work, if you're not plugged into the power source, it is of absolutely no avail.

When we receive God's Holy Spirit, we are plugged into the power source. We are tapping into all the power we need, but we have our part. If we don't exercise the Spirit and do what we need to do, the Spirit is not going to do it all. But on the other hand, it doesn't matter how hard you work, if you're not plugged into the power source, you might as well be trying to vacuum your floor without plugging in the vacuum cleaner or trying to use a power saw without plugging it in. It's only usable if it's plugged in *and* if the individual picks it up and does something with it. It takes the two together. You can't have one without the other and get anything accomplished. We have to labor to enter into that rest, but our labor is not what does it. It's Christ in us. But we can't sit back under a shade tree and wait for Him to do it all.

The world wants to go to one extreme or the other. Some have the concept of work and penance that you do it yourself. Others have the concept that it's all done for you and all you have to do is sit under the shade tree and wait for it. Neither is true.

Verse 12, "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword...."

Verses 14-16, "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest...For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Hebrews 5:1-2, "For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also beset by weaknesses."

Verse 4, "And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was." The point he makes is that the priesthood is not something you take to yourself. A priest was taken and ordained as an intercessor between God and man. His role has to do with making access to God possible through the offering of sacrifices and gifts. He deals with people and is able to mediate between God and man. He is able to have compassion on people because He was a human being and He knows what it is like. In fact, the priesthood of Aaron had to offer sacrifices for their own sins.

What he is explaining here in Hebrews 5, 6 and 7 is the transition of the priesthood. He starts out by explaining the priesthood of Aaron and then showing that there is something on beyond the priesthood of Aaron.

Verses 5-6, "So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.' As He also says in another place: 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'" It refers to Christ being a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Who is Melchizedek? The only place you run into Melchizedek is back in Genesis 14 where Melchizedek, the king of Salem, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings. He just kind of "pops up" there, and we are not introduced to anything else about him. None of the commentators understand who he is.

Mr. Herbert Armstrong wrote an article on that many years ago. If we just take what it says in Hebrews 5, 6 and 7, it is very clear who Melchizedek is.

Hebrews 7:1-2, "For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated 'king of righteousness,' and then also king of Salem, meaning 'king of peace.'"

"Melchizedek" means "king of righteousness." "*Melech*" is the Hebrew word for "king" and "*zedek*" is the word for "righteousness." He's also the king of Salem. "Salem" is derived from the Hebrew word "*shalom*," which means "peace." So He is the king of righteousness and the king of peace.

Paul interprets his name here to the Greek speakers because he wants them to understand that the meaning of the name was significant. If the meaning of the name is significant, if that title legitimately belongs to this individual and He is King of Righteousness and King of Peace, that doesn't sound like any human being I know. It refers to the Messiah as being Prince of Peace. Are you going to call some human being the king of peace or the king of righteousness?

Verse 3, this is the clincher, "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually." If Melchizedek abides a priest forever, didn't have a father or mother, is without beginning of days or end of life and is the king of righteousness and the king of peace, that doesn't sound like any human being I ever met.

Hebrews 5:6, "...You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." Melchizedek abides a priest forever, and Christ is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 7:4, "Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils." "Spoils" are what Abraham took from the kings in Genesis 14.

Verses 5-7, "And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who received the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law...but He whose genealogy is not derived from them [He preceded them] received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better."

This Being was a lot greater than Abraham. Which human being was greater than Abraham? None. This was clearly the One who became Jesus Christ, manifesting Himself in the role of Melchizedek, the priest of the Most High God.

Verse 8, "Here mortal men received tithes, but there he receives them, of whom it is witnessed that He lives."

Paul is explaining the transition because we are told in Acts 6:7 that there were a great many of the priests that believed. The law in the Old Testament was very clear. Who did you pay your tithes to? -To the Levites, the priesthood in the temple. There was a specific place to take it. There were specific individuals to give it to.

The Jews in the Church had grown up understanding and doing that all their lives. They came in the Church and continued doing that

because they were doing what the law said right now. There were a number of the priests who believed. They needed a clear understanding that God's people should no longer be giving their tithes to the priesthood of Levi but rather to the priesthood of Melchizedek, which had prior claim.

What you have to do is explain a transition to people who would go back to verses in Numbers and places like that, to where God said very explicitly that the tithes were to be given to Levi for ministering in the sanctuary. Paul is explaining, 'Yes, God did say that, but there was a prior claim that the priesthood of Melchizedek had. That's the priesthood of Jesus Christ and that priesthood is functioning today.'

Within a short time, the priesthood of the Levites was going to cease to function entirely. The temple was going to be destroyed. The scriptural basis for the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant needed to be explained and clarified in detail. There is nothing comparable today because we are under the New Covenant. This was a unique generation because it was the generation of transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. The changes that are described are the changes that were being made from the administration of death to the administration of the Spirit—the administration of the Old and the New. The only other comparable period will be when Jesus Christ returns and there is a transition made from the way things are now.

The Church is called out of the world to function as God's people in a world that is Satan's world. There will be a transition when Jesus Christ returns and He takes over the rulership of the world and Satan will be put away. There will be a transition in the way that God's people will function. We are given insight into the government being set up and things being administered, judgment being rendered, things that we don't do today. There will come a transition as we move to that point.

This was the transition period between the Old and the New Covenant. There were many things that had to be explained, particularly to those who had been observant Jews who were doing what the Bible said, or what they had understood it to say. There were explanations that needed to be given to make the transition to what we, in a sense, take for granted but what was new to them.

He spends this time focusing on the role, rank and position of Jesus Christ and how He came as God in the flesh. He became a partaker of the

nature of the seed of Abraham. He lived as a human being, died for our sins, was resurrected and is at the right hand of the Father. He is our High Priest, the One through whom we go and through whom we have access. He is the Mediator of the New Covenant.

Paul talks to the people to whom he is writing. One of the things he gets after them for is in Hebrews 5.

Hebrews 5:12-14, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age [those who are mature], that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

Hebrews 6:1, “Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ [the beginning of the doctrine of Christ], let us go on to perfection [completion, maturity], not laying again the foundation....”

There are actually seven basic doctrines of the Church. The seventh one is listed first—going on to perfection, to spiritual maturity and completion. We need to go on to become like God. There are six things that are necessary before Christian growth. Going on to spiritual completion and maturity is the final point.

Hebrews 6:1-2, the first six are: “...the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.” You need to be coming to a point where you are concentrating on going on to become like God, to become like Christ. You need to be going on to spiritual maturity. But instead, you have to go back and figure out the first foundational things (the first six).

He says, ‘You should be able to teach; yet I have to go back and explain simple things to you.’ Here were people who had been a little shaken and affected by things and were not as solid as they needed to have been.

Verses 4-6, he encourages and reminds them of the danger of falling away once they have really known the truth.

Verses 10-12, “For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish [lazy,

slothful], but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

Verses 13-15, God made a promise to Abraham. Abraham patiently endured and obtained the promise. The point he is stressing is endurance because there were people who had been around a long time that had gotten tired and were letting down. Various ideas were creeping in. There were various heretical movements around the periphery of the Church. Some of these people were being a little bit affected by certain things. Paul is saying, “As much as you have done and as far as you have gone, you can’t afford to let it slip now. Don’t be lazy. Hold fast. Remember God makes a promise. It doesn’t come instantly. Remember how long Abraham had to wait. God promised him a son. In fact, God promised to make his descendants like sand of the seashore, and Abraham had to wait 25 years for one son. He had to patiently endure. So if you have to wait for a while, what’s the big deal? Haven’t all of God’s people had to wait?”

Hebrews 7:21, he then goes on into more depth on Melchizedek and shows how Christ is a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 7:24-28, “But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them. For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever.”

Hebrew 8:1, “Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.”

Verses 2-6, then he goes through and explains the spiritual significance of the sanctuary, how it was patterned after heavenly things, that Christ has a more excellent ministry, He is the Mediator of a better covenant, established on better promises.

There was a fault with the first covenant; the fault was with the people.

Verses 8-10, “Because finding fault with them, He says: ‘Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the

house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

God is in the process of doing that right now. When God began giving His Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, He began the process of making the New Covenant. That process won't be completed until we are born into the Kingdom of God at the resurrection. But it is in the process of being done. God, through His Spirit, is changing and transforming us in the way we think. This is the New Covenant.

Hebrews 9 explains a great deal about the spiritual significance of the covenant and the fact of sacrifices.

Hebrews 9:28, “so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many....”

Hebrews 10:1, “For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.” The ceremonies and rituals of the law simply foreshadowed the reality, the substance of Christ. It was a reminder. That's why it was called a “schoolmaster to bring us to Christ” (KJV, Galatians 3:24).

This is ultimately the covenant that God says He is going to make.

Hebrews 10:16-19, ““This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days,” says the Lord: ‘I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,’ then He adds, ‘Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.’ Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin. Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus.” We have access through Christ to come right in to the Father.

Verses 22-27, “let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves

together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.”

He is warning to be faithful and zealous, of the danger of drifting into willful sin and the consequences of turning our back on God's calling once we have known and understood.

Verses 31-32, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings.” He tells you to remember back when you first learned the truth. Remember the things that happened, the things you went through and the problems you faced. Remember the things that happened and all the things you went through.

Verses 34-38, “for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.”

He goes on and explains what faith is.

Hebrews 11:1, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Then he shows how all the men and women of God have gone through and endured, faced all the things they had and “hung in there” through faith.

Hebrews 12:1-3, “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses [all the men and women of faith in Hebrews 11], let us lay aside every weight [things that weigh us down, discourage and beset us], and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.” Consider what He went through.

Verse 4, “You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.” Christ, that final

night, prayed so intently that He sweat great drops of blood (Luke 22:44). None of us have done that.

Verses 5-6, “And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: ‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.’”

Verses 7-11, God deals with us for our benefit. We are warned and exhorted in Chapter 12. We see that Paul places great emphasis to stir up and exhort the people.

He concludes in Hebrews 13 with a reminder to the people as to what to do. They are to look to God.

Verse 5, they are not to be covetous, recognizing that God will never leave us nor forsake us.

Hebrews 13:6-7, “So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper, I will not fear. What can man do to me?’ Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.” He refers to the leadership of the Church.

Verse 17, he brings out, “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”

There is ultimately an accountability that the ministry has. That’s why there is a certain government in the Church. There is a responsibility that the ministry has of teaching God’s people and teaching God’s truth. God is going to hold us accountable for what we do and for being faithful. He emphasizes these things.

There’s a tremendous amount that is packed into the book of Hebrews, a tremendous overview of God’s great plan and purpose. There is a primary emphasis on the role of Jesus Christ, His role as our High Priest, our Mediator, and the role of the priesthood. The transition is explained to people who are going to be going through and experiencing that transition.

Hebrews 13:14, he even makes the point, “For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.” Jerusalem was going to cease to be the center point of the Church within a few years after he wrote this. You have to realize to what extent this was going to come as a shock to a lot of people. Things had been a certain way all their life. They had been in the Church for years. These things in terms of Jerusalem—the temple, the priesthood—all these things had been functioning for centuries before they ever came

on the scene. Yet prophetically there were things that were going to be swept away. They needed to understand the transition.

There was going to be great change as the outward manifestation and functioning of the Old Covenant was swept away. It ceased. God’s people needed to understand how that fit in with Scripture and the fact that it was not permanent. It was a shadow of things to come. It was simply something that foreshadowed the reality and the substance of what Jesus Christ did. There remains a priesthood and that is Jesus Christ. He is our priesthood. There is one Mediator between God and man and that is Jesus Christ. That’s the role of the priesthood.

In the Catholic Church, the priest is the mediator between God and man. That’s where the doctrine of transubstantiation comes in. According to Catholic doctrine, the priest literally transforms the host (round wafer bread) into the reality of the body of Christ; you are literally partaking of the body of Christ. They claim there is a literal transformation that takes place. There is a “miracle” that takes place and that is the basis of your being able to commune with God in communion. They claim the basis of your fellowship with God is that you have to partake of this host that has been magically transformed into the body of Christ by the priest exercising his power. So the priest becomes the mediator between God and man. You have to go to him and confess your sins. He has to remit those sins and has to give you of the consecrated host for you to have communion with God. You don’t have access to God unless you go through him because that’s the function of a priest.

We have a priest in the Church, but it’s not me or any leader at headquarters, etc. It’s **Christ**. He’s alive. We go to God through Him. God’s ministry is just that—it’s a ministry. They are servants. That’s what “minister” means—servants of God, of Jesus Christ and of God’s people. They may function in the role of elders, counselors, advisors, pastors, shepherds, bishops or overseers. They ultimately function in the role of ministers as servants, but they are not priests. They are not mediators between God and man. They are not intercessors through whom you have to go when we are to have access to God.

We have a Priest, a Mediator, Jesus Christ. Paul expounded and explained that. You see the balance here. On the one hand, he expounds the role of Jesus Christ, the role of the priesthood, the things of transition, as well as an exhortation to people who were tired and for whom the tendency was to let down and to feel like they

lost that “spark.” We have to be on guard against that. The longer we have been around, the easier it can happen to us. If we are not careful, we can take it for granted and sort of lose the “sparkle” and the newness. This is what was on the verge of happening to this first era of God’s Church.

Paul wrote this letter as an exhortation to those people. This letter is very important and is preserved for us.

We will conclude our Bible study in Hebrews. Next Bible study we will be going through the books of I Timothy and Titus.