

HEBREWS 1-6

Introduction to the Epistle to the Hebrews

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 1, 4-5, 14.

Among the preserved epistles in the New Testament, Hebrews is truly unique. No other work attains its grammatical correctness, style, organization, and force of argument. Even the author's choice of words for precision, clearness, and effectiveness is unmatched by any other contributor to this sacred volume of scripture. Unsurpassed is the author's testimony of the work, place, greatness, and majesty of Jesus Christ. Unrivaled is his witness of the truthfulness of the gospel and its necessity in the salvation process. With the exception of the book of Revelation, there is no clearer warning as to the consequences of turning from the truth. The work is exceptional, compelling, and forceful.

The question of who actually wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews has been debated from at least the early second century AD and continues up to the present time. Since the text itself does not say who the author was and the external evidence is meager and ambiguous, this question cannot be answered with certainty. The title found in King James Version that assigns the epistle to Paul is not found in any early Greek manuscript. The shorter, rather vague title *πρὸς Ἑβραίους*, "to [the] Hebrews," which is found in all extant Greek manuscripts, is almost certainly an editorial label added later rather than part of the original composition.

Among Latter-day Saint scholars, ample disagreement and debate concerning the author continues due to the lack of an official Church position on the subject. Many General Authorities and Apostles have used the phrase "the author of Hebrews" instead of "Paul" when referencing the epistle. The differences between Latter-day Saint scholars concerning who wrote Hebrews range from those who continue to

support Pauline authorship to those who support other candidates like Apollos. The Church has not come out with a definitive statement declaring an official position on who wrote Hebrews.

The audience of the epistle remains an open question. Even so, it seems clear that the target audience consisted of Christians who had long been associated with both Christianity and Judaism and who were well acquainted with Greek and Hellenistic ways of thinking. In many ways, it appears that the audience of the epistle is as transitional as the epistle itself—situated at the crossroads between the old and the new covenants. Its audience clearly appreciated the Mosaic law and were apparently open to instruction that highlighted the old law in connection with Jesus’s new one.

Hebrews 1

1:1–4

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 87–90, 93–94.

Hebrews 1:1–4 serves as neither a thesis toward which the author builds his argument nor a précis of points he wants to make nor facts he wants to establish. Rather, it complements his style of interweaving themes to create the total picture he wishes to present. In it he introduces the means by which the Father has and does reveal His will to His children. The author’s witness is that God does speak to His children. He is not distant, unconcerned, or impassive but rather near, interested, and involved.

The author of Hebrews emphasizes the important role that the Son now plays as the means that God currently uses to communicate with His people. The author lists seven facts about the Son. Altogether they stress one point: the revelations now coming through the Son carry the heaviest weight that can be given and, therefore, must be taken seriously. In doing so, the author also reveals the superiority of the new covenant that the Son has now revealed. In the process, the author has reinforced and helped to preserve, for modern Saints, the understanding that the leadership of the early Church had of the Savior, His station, and His work.

In 1:2–3 the author has used three relative clauses to describe the greatness and grandeur of the Son as a means of establishing the magnitude of the new covenant He mediates and which the Hebrew Saints should follow. The first clause focuses on his pre-mortal appointment as heir over all that is God’s and His role as Creator; the second focuses on His revelation of the glory, nature, and physical form of the Father; and the third discusses His continued sustaining power that keeps the cosmos in order.¹

The Son is in the brightness of the glory of His Father (1:3). The Father can bestow His glory upon others, which in turn brings them due honor and respect. Its bestowal, however, does more. It bequeaths to striving individuals power by which they can increase in obedience, ability, and understanding. It gives them access to an ever-greater comprehension of truth. Thus, the Lord has promised—to all whose eyes

are single to His glory—that their bodies will be filled with the power of light. This endowment will enable them to comprehend all things (Doctrine and Covenants 88:67). Great truths shall be available to them, and by living in accordance with these truths, they shall inherit eternal life. The Son received the glory of the Father without measure and, thereby, became the brightness of the Father’s glory.

In describing the Son, the author of Hebrews notes that He has the “exact appearance of [God’s] actual being” (1:3). The noun he chooses to express his point is telling. The Greek word is *χαρακτήρ* (*charaktēr*), and it points to an express image. The word denotes an “impressed stamp” or “engraved image.” By extension, it connotes a “physical likeness” or “shared qualities.” The text here is, therefore, the most vivid biblical comparison of the close resemblance between of the Father and Son.

In order to stress the Lord’s greatness, the author notes that He has a better name than the angels. Besides denoting what a person is called, the nuance behind the word *name* can designate the reputation that a person has or the title he or she holds. In this case, it is likely that the author of Hebrews is referring not to the Lord’s actual name (Jesus) but to his title as Son (1:2, 5–6). If that is the case, it could connote Jesus’s title Only Begotten, meaning the “Only Begotten of God in the flesh.”² The name, therefore, would also suggest that the Savior, as God’s Son, had the qualities of one who was divine. This would certainly give Him a reputation and station above that of the angels.

1:5–14

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 94–95, 109–117.

This section contains a *catena* (that is a series or chain) of seven biblical passages that concentrate on the Savior’s station as Son and that is designed to verify that He is superior to the angels. The writings of biblical Judaism show that many Jews had a very high regard for angels. They primarily functioned, as their Hebrew name (מַלְאָכִים, *mal’āk*) indicates, as messengers. Those holding this station could be either earthly or heavenly, and to distinguish the latter from the former, the biblical texts often used designations such as “the angel of the Lord” or “the angel of God.”³ As superhuman entities, they could perform acts as Jehovah dictated. They were viewed, therefore, as both beneficial and powerful but also as dreadful and were, therefore, highly respected. Unfortunately, this respect opened the door to undue reverence, which became a problem in both Judaism and Christianity. The Epistle to the Hebrews, however, shows no concern for such a development. This section is not a polemic against angel worship. Instead, it posits a high and respected place for them. In doing so, it emphasizes the greatness of the Son of God.

The author of Hebrews, in order to make his point about why his readers should not abandon the Savior, begins his reasoning by showing how much greater Jesus was than the angels. There was good reason he should start there. Indeed, the universe of ancient Jews and Christians was filled with spiritual forces that affected humankind and their destiny. The Greek culture, into which the Church was spreading, held

high place for spiritual beings called *δαμόνια* (*daimonia*) that could work both good and ill. For these people, the membrane between the spirit and physical worlds was very thin, thus allowing for easy access by spiritual beings into the human realm.

Jews and Christians were well aware of “the angel of the Lord” (*ὁ ἄγγελος τοῦ κυρίου*, *ho angelos tou kyriou*) who acted as Jehovah’s messenger and agent but also represented Him with full power and authority.⁴ They could also act as mediators between the mortal and divine spheres (for example, see Zechariah 1:9, 12; 3:1).

The Christians especially were well aware of the appearance of angels acting as God’s messengers and believed that they would continue to play an important role in earthly events, especially in the latter days and beyond.⁵ In short, Christians knew that these heavenly beings held high position and great power. The author of Hebrews skillfully uses his readers’ understanding of them as his foil to showcase the greatness and supremacy of the Christ.

The first scripture he used, quoted in verse 5, is Psalm 2:7. Its purpose was to stress the Savior’s relationship with God that no other being, including angels, shares—namely, that of Son. At first blush, this idea seems strange since all humankind, both physical and spiritual, are the Father’s premortal children. But in this case, Son is a title that nuances a special and unique relationship. It was a title that even the Savior did not have initially but received at a specific point in time. The concern with this idea is that other passages in Hebrews suggest that sonship was a permanent attribute of the Christ, not one that He obtained.⁶ Further, there is no denying that Jesus is the Son of God and the firstborn of His creations.⁷ Indeed, one of His titles is Firstborn (Doctrine and Covenants 93:21). The solution is likely that the use of the word here is technical rather than general.

When Lucifer volunteered to save humankind, he said to God, “I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind” (Moses 4:1). Since he was already God’s son, what position was he volunteering for? Likely it was that of the “Only Begotten of God in the flesh.” The duty that the one bearing this title required was redeeming humankind.⁸ This may be the reason that Satan felt he needed that title.

The second scripture the author used, also quoted in verse 5, is 2 Samuel 7:14. It functioned to bolster and expand the idea contained in the first scripture. That one emphasized the relationship between Father and Son as a result of Jesus’s being “fathered” (*γεννάω*, *gennaō*) and, therefore, becoming the literal Son of God in the flesh.⁹ By using this scripture, the author emphasized the result of that relationship. God will treat Jesus as a Son with all the love, care, and honor that is due Him and that the Son will reciprocate in exactly the same way.

For the third scripture the author used, quoted in verse 6, there is no known source. It does, however, have elements found in Deuteronomy 32:43 and the Septuagint version of Psalm 96:6. It served to show the reverence that the Father expects from the angels due to the station of the Son as the “first begotten” (*prōtotokos*). This title, translated as “Firstborn,” applies to three time periods. The first was when Jesus was initially begotten as the firstborn son of God in the premortal world.¹⁰ The second was when He came

into mortality as the Son of Mary and of the Father as “the Firstborn Son of God in the flesh.”¹¹ The third was when He was resurrected. At that time, he became the firstborn from the dead.¹² Each of these gave Him station and reason to be revered.

The fourth scripture the author used, quoted in verse 7, is Psalm 104:4. Its purpose was to point out the place and ministry of angels and to show that they are lower than those of the Son. The Old Testament psalm praises Jehovah for His power by which He is master over water, cloud, wind, and fire. All these He enlists to do His bidding. The scripture equates angels with the winds and ministers with flames of fire, two forces that when in full power, mortals cannot control yet God always can. But the point of the quote is that the job specifically assigned to angels is that of messengers, not creators or executors as is the Son.

The fifth scripture the author used, quoted in verses 8–9, is found in Psalm 45:6–7. Its purpose was to reinforce the fact of the high station of the Son and explain why He achieved that station. The first reason is that though He is the Son, He is still God (Mosiah 3:5; 7:27). He holds the title, rank, dignity, and power of that office. Those who hold this office “have no end,” and thus, they are “from everlasting to everlasting.” Further, “all things are subject unto them” and, therefore, they are “above all” such that even “the angels are [also] subject unto them” (Doctrine and Covenants 132:20). Clearly, this station is superior to that of any of the angels.

A number of New Testament scriptures refer to Jesus as God.¹³ The author of Hebrews, citing as he does this Old Testament psalm, deliberately puts scriptural authority behind this point. And he does something more: he ties the mortal Son to the deific office and in that way stresses that Jesus of Nazareth, though fully mortal, was also divine.

The second implication of Jesus attaining the high position, as noted in verse 8, was that He would hold kingly power forever. The divine throne is His, and He will never step down from or be forced therefrom.

The third implication of Jesus’s honored position, as shown in verse 8, is that symbolized in the imagery of the righteous scepter. He will administer divine law over His kingdom with correctness and propriety. According to Psalm 45:2, His judgments will “be fairer than the children of men” because of the grace—that is, the compassion and favor for others—that He possesses.

The fourth reason the Savior achieved His high station, as shown in verse 9, is that He has loved righteousness from the beginning. In the premortal world, all were given the opportunity to obey or disobey the words of God the Father and, thereby, gain in light and truth (see Doctrine and Covenants 93:29–33; Alma 13:3–5). The continual reception of light and truth gave one ever greater abilities and power eventually leading to exaltation. Disobedience, on the other hand, resulted in the loss of these elements and led to damnation. The Savior’s love of righteousness from the beginning expressed itself in superior obedience. As a result, He acquired power to the point that the Father ordained Him to godhood with authority to create, redeem, and rule.

The fifth reason Jesus achieved His high rank, as noted in verse 9, is that He “hated iniquity.” The noun *ἀνομία* (*anomia*) denotes lawlessness. The word does not mean being without law, but rather rebelling

against it. For the ever-obedient Son, acts of rebellion would have been especially odious. Because “that which breaketh a law, and abideth not by law, but seeketh to become a law unto itself, and willeth to abide in sin, and altogether abideth in sin, [that being] cannot be sanctified by law, neither by mercy, justice, nor judgment.” It must, therefore, “remain filthy still” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:35). Given that, it is little wonder that the Son hates lawlessness and promotes righteousness.

It was because of Jesus’s superior love for and living according to righteousness—including standing up for what was right—that the Father anointed the Son with “the oil of joy more than [his] companions” (Hebrews 1:9). Indeed, that anointing gave Him the title of *Χριστός* (*Christos*), “Christ,” the Anointed One (מָשִׁיחַ, *māšîaḥ*, “Messiah,” in Hebrew). The scripture highlights His anointing through which He gained royal status.

The sixth scripture the author of Hebrews used, quoted in verse 10, that he designed to show the supremacy of Jesus over the angels was Psalm 102:25–26. While all the other passages that the author has used up to this point emphasized Jesus’s station as the Son of God and, thereby, heir of all things, this one begins by focusing on His creative power. It supports the point made in verses 2 and 3 that Jesus created all “the worlds” and “upholds all things by his powerful word.” The emphasis is on a power He holds that no angel does. But there is more. In Latter-day Saint theology, as the prime executor of God’s will, the Son became the Father of all creation and rules from that high rank.¹⁴

Apparently, the main reason the author chose to use this scripture, however, is not to stress the Lord’s station but to emphasize one of His attributes: immutability (see Hebrews 1:11–12). Though the definition of the word points to something that is “not capable or susceptible to change,” Latter-day Saints agree with a more limited definition as it applies to the Savior that restricts His unchanging nature to His will, His character, and His keeping of covenantal promises.¹⁵

The seventh and last scripture the author uses, quoted in verse 13, is Psalm 110:1 and is designed to forcefully stress the supremacy of Christ. Its use is a well-calculated and climactic close to the catena. Its purpose is to recapitulate all the points made by the preceding quotes and drive home but one idea: Jesus really is far superior to the angels. The focus here is twofold. The first is on the station to which God has exalted Jesus. The Father has placed the Son on His right side, the position of prestige and power. Thus, the Son becomes enthroned beside His Father. The second is God’s promises to overcome all of His Son’s enemies (see Psalm 8:6). That the plural noun *ἐχθρούς* (*echthrouς*), “enemies,” is not limited in the text suggests it refers to all beings who oppose the Lord. What must not be lost is the open and hostile hatred these people show toward the Lord. This hostility is the ground of their active opposition against Him. Thus, they are His chief enemy. There is an echo here of the sons of perdition, those beings who knowingly and willfully pervert the principles of righteousness and promote wickedness. Their great sin includes both covertly and overtly fighting against God and His ways.

The author concludes, in verse 14, with his own observation that the best that can be said for angels is that they are God’s ministers. That is not to say that such is a lowly office. It is not, for they are empowered to

carry out God's dictates. Even so, they act as His servants and perform his will. Further, they are subject also to the Son (compare Doctrine and Covenants 7:6; 76:88).

Hebrews 2

2:1–4

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 119, 127–129.

The author of Hebrews, in the first four verses of chapter 2, fires a hortative salvo designed to grab and hold his readers' attention. It allows us to see why the author spent so much time and effort in the last chapter detailing the activities of the Son and defining the station He now holds with its attendant honors. In doing so, he puts real clout behind the strong admonition he ends with.

His words here expose the reason for his concern and reveal why he wrote with such earnestness and passion. His readers had become inattentive to the gospel principles revealed by and through the Son. Some appear to have gone so far as to disregard their covenantal relationship with Him and, therefore, stood in danger of drifting off the course He had set.

The author makes no explicit mention as to what had distracted his readers from openly following the Savior, but the positive position he assigned to the angels in both chapters 1 and 2 along with his reverence for the Mosaic law in 2:2 suggest that his audience continued to have spiritually unhealthy intellectual and emotional ties to certain aspects of Judaism and were slipping back into it, thus leaving the gospel of Christ.

In 2:1–2, as well as in the chapter as a whole, the reason the author stressed the superiority of the Son over the angels becomes abundantly clear. It was to make the distance between the Mosaic law and the word spoken by the Lord apparent in order to stress the magnitude of the consequences of leaving the gospel law. It did this by pointing out how infractions against that Mosaic law demanded full and complete retribution from which there was no reprieve. When necessary, that included the forfeiture of one's life. Whether done through acts of outright rebellion (*παράβασις, parabasis*) or unwillingness to hear (*παρακοή, para-koē*), consequences followed (verse 2). This law, however, was administered through angels, the servants of the Lord. The new law, identified as *τηλικαύτης σωτηρίας (tēlikautēs sōtērias)*, "so great a salvation," on the other hand, was delivered by none other than the Lord Himself (verse 3). The author made his point by asking in essence, "If breaking the law administered by angels brought dire consequence, how much greater would be the consequences of breaking the new law administered by the Son?"

That there are so many witnesses is an important point: the author of Hebrews is careful to meet the standards set down in Deuteronomy 19:15 that in all matters pertaining to life and death, "at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established." All the acts the author lists

were designed to confirm what was happening among the people to whom this epistle was addressed. Indeed, if his audience is not experiencing these things, his whole argument falls apart. But his position stands because they are living witnesses to the reality of the manifestation of this spiritual power. The author can, then, cite the Father, the Son, those who heed Him, and the divine displays by the Holy Spirit as confirmations of his point. His care to meet the standard of two or three witnesses acts as a tacit testimony to the gravity in which he sees the condition of his readers. These are matters of life and death and must not be trivialized.

2:5–9

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 140–143.

In this pericope, the author continues to build his case as to why his readers should not abandon the Lord. He begins again by contrasting the rank, dignity, and station of the Son with that of the angels. He testifies that God gave no angel control (*ὑποτάσσω*, *hypotassō*) over “the world to come” but instead placed the whole under Christ’s power (verse 5). His point was not only to assure his readers about the reality of the coming world but also to convince them that the Savior was the Master there. He did so by building on the fact that Jesus’s Resurrection and enthronement had been confirmed (*βεβαιόω*, *bebaioō*) by the many witnesses which the author cites (verses 3–4). Thus, they can bank on its reality and the attendant reward or punishment.

To further develop his argument, in verses 6–8 the author cites Psalm 8:5–7 from the Septuagint: “What is man that you remember him, or the son of man that you are concerned about him? You have made him less than angels. You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have put all things under his feet.” In its Old Testament context, the scripture looks at the distance between Jehovah’s power and majesty and humankind’s weakness and inadequacy. It does so, however, not to belittle humankind but to highlight Jehovah’s graciousness in caring for them.

One aspect to the term “Son of Man” is unique to Latter-day Saints and would explain why holding this station (that is, being mortal) would not disqualify the Son from divine care. The Father identifies Himself in scripture, saying, “I am God; Man of Holiness is my name; Man of Counsel is my name; and Endless and Eternal is my name, also” (Moses 7:35). That being the case, an angel commanded Adam to “teach it unto your children, that all men, everywhere, must repent, or they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God, for no unclean thing can dwell there, or dwell in his presence; for, in the language of Adam, Man of Holiness is his name, and the name of his Only Begotten is the Son of Man, even Jesus Christ, a righteous Judge, who shall come in the meridian of time” (Moses 6:57). Thus, the nuance of the phrase shows the close, even paternal association, between the Man of Holiness and the Son of Man—that is, the Son of God.

Taking verses 8–9 as a whole, the following insights become evident: The ministry of Jesus as man—that is, as one who was fully mortal just like all who come to earth—reveals humankind’s true vocation.

The trajectory of Jesus’s life displays what the Father intended for all His children from the beginning. Any who might object to the idea of Jesus’s enthronement because somehow becoming mortal disqualified Him for divine honor cannot be sustained. Indeed, the author insists that the Savior’s debasement lasted but for “a little while” and has already been replaced by divine glory, honor, and station. Further, His condescension was necessary in order for Him to accomplish the redemption of humankind.

Also, verse 9 underscores another idea that must not be missed. It is at this point in the narrative—where the emphasis is on the period of Jesus’s condescension (His being lower than the angels when He was fully human)—that the author for the first time mentions Him by name. In so doing, he draws attention to the juxtaposition between the Lord’s own subjugation and His triumph in overcoming death for all. Indeed, as verse 9 shows, the very purpose of His mortality was so that (ὄπωσ, *hopōs*) He could perform the Atonement. In this way, the author affirmed the terrible cost the Son had to pay for His place on the right hand of God. As a direct result of accomplishing this, He received His honor, glory, and station once more. In this way, the author of Hebrews stresses the soteriological aspect of the Savior’s act. He shows that the Lord’s death was substitutionary in character: He died on behalf of all humankind. Indeed, He was “the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (see, for example, Hebrews 13:12; 1 Peter 2:21).

2:10

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 151–153.

In Hebrews 2:10, the author “boldly asserts his shocking thesis: it was ‘appropriate’ to the character and purpose of the sovereign God, the source, judge, and goal of ‘all,’ to use suffering to equip the Savior so that God could fulfill his purpose for his ‘sons and daughters.’ Christ’s suffering was neither a logical necessity forced upon God nor a mere decision of his will, but an appropriate expression of the divine character.”¹⁶ This whole idea is underscored by the author’s use of *πρέπω* (*prepō*), “to be fitting,” rather than *δεῖ* (*dei*), “to be necessary.” It was fitting for Jesus to be perfected through suffering because of what it would allow Him to do and to be.

The Greek verb *τελειόω* (*teleiōō*), “to make perfect,” does not carry the same force as the English word used to translate it. The latter reflects the ideal of being without flaw and having no defect, fault, or inefficacy of any kind. The Greek comes closer to the English word *whole* in its moral sense more of completeness than flawlessness. The Greek word especially looked at the idea of being suitable to perform a task.

The author makes it clear that Jesus was made perfect through suffering. His words suggest that it was by that means and that means alone that He was able to reach His goal of atoning for all. It also made him the perfect High Priest. When both aspects are at play, the point of Hebrews is that “by undergoing death, God accomplished his purpose whereby the Son would become a high priest [verse 17], able to cleanse God’s people from their sins, thus enabling them to approach God in true worship.”¹⁷

It was by the means of the Savior's sufferings (*παθηματα, pathēmata*) that God perfected Him so that He could lead the Father's sons and daughters to honor and glory. The plural "sufferings" in 5:8 includes all the trials, temptations, disappointments, and heartaches the Savior experienced as a mortal. It was both His willingness to suffer and His actual suffering of these vicissitudes that validated His perfect obedience and provided the flawless example of faithful endurance for the rest of God's children (5:8–10; 10:5–10).

2:11

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 155–156.

The author makes an important point in verse 11 through the use of the generic phrase *ἐξ ἑνός (ex henos)*, "from one (source)." His point is that whether one is sanctified or sanctifier, a common font makes them brothers and sisters. God is the Father of both Christ and the disciple, albeit in differing but complementary ways. "The Son enters into the full exercise of his filial relationship through providing salvation and taking his seat at God's right hand (see 1:1–4). The 'sons and daughters' enter the fullness of their filial relationship through the provisions of the Son. This correspondence reveals the fitting relationship between the Son and the 'sons and daughter,'" meaning that they are all God's children and heirs of glory.¹⁸ In sum, in whatever way holiness comes, whether it is intrinsic as in the case of the Son or extrinsic as in the case of His people, it makes them the same—they are godlike. They are all separated from the world and devoted to the Father in carrying out His work of saving His other children.¹⁹

2:12–13

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 154, 156–157.

In Hebrews 2:12–13, the author quotes twice from the Old Testament. The first scripture is found in Psalm 22:22. Though the psalm starts out as a discouraged lament, in verse 22 it turns into a song of trust and praise, stating, "I will declare thy name unto the brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee."

The author of Hebrews then quotes two sentence fragments from the Septuagint version of Isaiah 8:17–18. The first, "I will put my trust in him," and the second, "Behold I and the children God has given me," combine to declare how the Savior and His children will put their full trust in the Father. The author's point in doing so is to proclaim his praise to the Father for what He has done in the sanctification of Jesus and the children.

The quotes are a clear confession of Christ's brotherhood with the Father's other children and forcefully affirm His delight in accepting them on equal footing. But the quotes do more: they act as a clear invitation "for the sons and daughters to enjoy the benefits of their filial relationship with God now made available through their heavenly representative."²⁰ The mortal suffering of the Lord likely touched and

strengthened the beleaguered audience to whom the author wrote, as they too had to endure hardship and rejection under very difficult circumstances (Hebrews 10:33–34).

With the phrase “the children God has given me” in verse 13, the author of Hebrews makes an important point: as a sacred trust, God has put into Christ’s care His children’s lives. The Savior perfectly understood His charge. With great desire He wished to be reunited with the Father in glory but also to take with Him those whom the Father had put in His trust. The Savior’s intent is highlighted in His heartfelt prayer in John 17:5–10, 20–24. It thus was Jesus’s intent that the faithful share in God’s glory—that is, in His approbation and also in His power.

2:14–18

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 164–167, 169–170.

Having established the oneness between Christ and the other children of God—a oneness brought about through the power of sanctification—the author now turns to the great battle Jesus fought in order to deliver God’s children from the forces of evil and death. The idea of the divine heroes fighting for and giving relief to the needy was well established in the Greco-Roman world. Thus, the idea of the Savior’s death and exaltation as battles fought and won to liberate His brothers and sisters fits well into the world of the community the author addressed.

The author’s argument in Hebrews 2:14 is based on the unexplored assumption that the devil has the power of death. Satan’s power to inflict death actually comes not through his actions as tempter but through humankind’s yielding thereto and sinning. It was a transgression of God’s law that initiated the Fall and brought in the mortal condition of death.²¹

Christ took on mortality so that through the power of His own death He could completely incapacitate (*καταργέω*, *katargeō*) the one who had power over death. The author of Hebrews leaves it at that and by so doing emphasizes the reason for the Savior’s mortality and why He became like His brothers and sisters. Playing in the background, however, is just how He was able to thwart Satan and his undo power. It was through the power of the keys of the Resurrection which He held.²²

Both the idea and fact of death have haunted humankind from the beginning. This fear is evident in the Greco-Roman world and the Hebrew community. Verse 15 explains how the Savior ended the fear of death for humankind. He did so by delivering us from its permanent effects and, thereby, bringing life and immortality to light (see 2 Timothy 1:10). It was in entering into the spirit world that He opened its gates so that those within could escape from spiritual bondage. Indeed, even the gates of hell could not prevail against the keys He turned to initiate work for the dead. Ironically, even paradoxically, through the sin of those who killed Him, He overthrew sin by opening the way to their repentance and return. And in being grasped by the grave, He was able to break its grip. Thus, by dying He slew death.

Though the Savior did what He did for all humankind, there was one group for whom he had particular concern. The author identifies these as “the seed of Abraham” (Hebrews 2:16). According to the Pearl of Great Price, these are they who are charged to “bear this ministry and Priesthood unto the nations.” Indeed, God promised Abraham that “this right shall continue in thee, and in thy seed after thee [and by it] shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Abraham 2:9, 11). Given their responsibility, it is little wonder the Savior would have special care for them. One of many positive effects of being delivered from the fear of death is that these people could courageously carry out their mission no matter the cost.

In Hebrews 2:17 the author shows the task that Jesus, as the Great High Priest, had to perform as to “things relating to God” (*τὰ πρὸς τὸν θεόν, ta pros ton theon*). That task was specifically one of reconciliation (*ἰλάσκομαι, hilaskomai*) between God and His children through expiation—that is, satisfying a wrong. The idea of reconciliation as carried in the scriptures stands in marked contrast to the Greek idea of propitiation. Greek and Roman sacrifices were largely based on the notion that the world was an adversarial place, and the gods had powers but could be placated to assist those in need. Due to this view, propitiation, the process of averting anger and winning favor, was absolutely necessary and was the main thrust of the sacrifices.

The King James Version translation of 1 John 2:2 states that Jesus is “the propitiation for our sins.” The Greek verb is *ἰλάσκομαι (hilaskomai)*, and it suggests that Jesus did much more than assuage God’s anger. In fact, the word is never used to describe any act on the part of worshippers through which God is coaxed, bribed, cajoled, enticed, or forced into having a gracious disposition or favorable attitude toward them. In short, the scriptures never speak of God as losing His love for a child even when He hates their actions. He is ever anxious to be reconciled to anyone who will turn to Him, and the Father has done His part to make that happen. The scriptures do show that it is the person who must be reconciled to God. Thus, any continuing resistance that exists is on the part of the person *alone*.

The author’s conclusion (in Hebrews 2:18) is poignant. Because the Savior became fully mortal, He endured (*πάσχω, paschō*) all the pain, suffering, heartache, disappointments, and temptations that humankind faces. In addition, through the Atonement, He also experienced something He never knew as a mortal—namely, the crushing and excruciating power and pain of sin. All these tried (*πειράζω, peirazō*) Him to the core and in their wake left Him with understanding, compassion, and mercy (see Doctrine and Covenants 62:1). As a result, He not only willingly but also anxiously reaches out to assist His mortal brothers and sisters as they are tried.²³

Hebrews 3

3:1–6

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 197–198, 208–210.

In the first section of Hebrews 3 (verses 1–6), the author clearly states the lesson he wants his readers to get from what he has told them about the Lord. That lesson is strong and poignant. He stresses the need for his readers not to abandon the Lord but rather to imitate His faithfulness. To make his point, the author contrasts Jesus with Moses. Doing so discloses his genius. Moses was revered second only to Abraham by most Jews, and the author takes nothing away from the prophet’s greatness. In doing so, however, he heightens that of the Savior. He does this by contrasting Moses’s station as the builder of the house of Israel with that of Jesus, who is its ruler.

By focusing on two of the Lord’s offices, those of Apostle and high priest, the author emphasized the divine authority through which the Savior operated (verse 1). An Apostle (*ἀπόστολος, apostolos*) was one empowered and sent out (*ἀποστέλλω, apostellō*) to do a task in behalf of another. Behind the title stood the authority of the one who made the assignment. In this case, it was the Father. Thus, the title witnessed that Jesus operated under divine authority. This verse gives evidence that the Savior organized His Church and that it continued to function under divine authority and apostolic leadership.

The high priest in the Aaronic order was chief administrator. During the period of his service, he was authorized to make expiation for the sins of Israel and, having done that, bring them into association with the divine as God’s own people.²⁴ This imagery, therefore, looks not at the Lord’s power but at what He was to do with that power—cleanse the people (justify them), make them holy (sanctify them), and bring them to God.

The author states in verse 3 that Jesus was considered worthy or deserving (*ἄξιος, axios*), “to be held in highest esteem,” of the glory he received. The force of the verb, here a divine passive, tacitly shows that it was the Father who considered the Lord worthy. What made the Son worthy was that He fulfilled His twofold responsibility as Apostle and Great High Priest.

A notable theme in this section is the noun *οἶκος (oikos)*, used six times in verses 2–6, which like its Hebrew counterpart, *בַּיִת (bayit)*, in its basic sense means “a dwelling, house,” but can also be used metaphorically to describe the members of a household, or a family. It can even denote a whole group of people descended from a common ancestor, or a nation. In verses 3–4, where it is used with the verb *κατασκευάζω (kataskeuazō)*, “to build,” the sense is “house,” whereas the sense “family” applies in verses 2, 5, and 6. The author contrasts Moses, who “was faithful as a servant *in* all God’s household” with Christ who “is faithful as a son *over* God’s household, whose household we are” (verse 5, authors’ translation). This highlights a common topic in the scriptures: that those who acknowledge Christ as their Savior and strive to keep His commandments become members of God’s family, with God as their Father and Christ as His Firstborn Son.

Christ’s followers, however, had to meet a twofold requirement in order to remain as God’s household (verse 6). First, they had to hold fast (*κατέχω, katechō*)—that is, adhere firmly—to the traditions and teachings they had received and do so with a cheerful confidence (*παρρησία, parrēsia*) that precluded any fear of the consequences of declaring and defending what they knew to be true. Second, they had to hold

fast to the “hope they were proud of,” or the favorable and confident expectation they had in Christ and the delight (*καύχημα, kauchēma*) that caused them to both rejoice and glory in Him (verse 6). If they did these things—centering their faith in Christ—they would be in no danger of losing their reward.

3:7–19

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 198, 224–225, 227–228, 230–232.

In the second section of chapter 3 (verses 7–19), the author gives his readers a stiff warning. They are not to follow after the disobedience of their ancestors, who had been given every opportunity to enter into the promised land where they could find rest but instead rebelled. Using Psalm 94:7–11 from the Septuagint as his scriptural text, the author emphasizes that through their lack of faith, the Israelites lost everything (Hebrews 3:7–11, 19). Showing the results of history, the author assures his readers that the same could happen to them (verses 11–12). His point is that his readers are fully accountable to the word of God as now revealed not through prophets such as Moses but by the Father’s own Son. Therefore, they must pay heed lest they let the reward slip away and they find themselves, like their ancestors, cut off from the rest of the Lord (verse 19).

In Psalm 95:10, the inspired Old Testament poet sets out clearly what the Israelites’ problem was by quoting Jehovah as saying, “They are always going astray in their hearts and they have not understood my ways” (see Hebrews 3:10 BYU New Rendition). With these words, the poet reveals both the cause and effect of Israel’s rebellion. The cause was the condition of the Hebrews’ hearts. These were continually leading the people astray. And why? Because of deception. The Hebrews took something false as true. In this case it was their perceived good situation under Egyptian rule and their belief in the power of the Egyptians gods.²⁵

What made their rebellion so particularly onerous was that Jehovah’s power was fully revealed in Egypt and at Sinai. Even if the Egyptian gods had existed, His display of power proved them impotent before His omnipotence. Even so, these hardened people refused to be persuaded by it and accept Him as their God (Ezekiel 20:7–8).

As Hebrews 3:10 shows, the driving force behind the Israelites’ obdurate stubbornness was their hearts (*καρδία, kardia*). As used here, the imagery connotes not simply emotions, as it does in English, but also the full spectrum of a person’s mental and emotional activities and more. It also points to the very depths of their soul, that which determines who and what they are. It was here, at their very center, where the Israelites were deceived.

The problem with their hearts was that they were hard (*σκληρόνω, sklērynō*). The imagery points to the very depths of their character and shows its rigid stubbornness, an obdurate nature that continually resisted the word of God. It made them unwilling, if not unable, to repent—that is, to abandon their seductive

idolatry and return (שוב, *šûb*) to Jehovah. It was for this reason, according to the Old Testament, that Jehovah threatened on more than one occasion to destroy them (Exodus 32:9–10; Deuteronomy 9:13–14).

None of those who came out of Egypt received such a blessing because of their faithlessness. But there was another and even more severe result of Israel's rebellion. The author describes it in Hebrews 3:8 with the noun *παραπικρασμός* (*parapikrasmos*), "rebellion". The word denotes a state of affairs that provokes a person to intense anger. In this case what Israel did was incite Jehovah's wrath (Hebrews 3:10). And it is little wonder. These people were so brazen as to continually put Jehovah on trial (verse 9). The two words the psalmist used to describe what they did are *πειράζω* (*peirazō*), "make trial of, put to the test," and *δοκιμασία* (*dokimasia*), "testing, examination." Together these words suggest the wearing and exasperating character of Jehovah's forty-year dealings with these people. And although Jehovah came through in every instance, they were unrelenting in their distrust of Him.

The result was that Jehovah would not allow these rebellious souls to enter into His rest (*κατάπαυσις*, *katapausis*). The term has two meanings. One denotes the conditions that the faithful would find in the promised land. There they would experience ease under Jehovah's care. The other more typological meaning connoted God's heavenly realm. These rebellious souls, however, would have access to neither.

The specific Kadesh-like trial the author's readers were facing, the text does not reveal. The idea that the Christians were suffering from social unacceptance and were worried that more severe persecutions were looming in the near future is widely accepted. Whatever else his concern, the author was worried about their reaction thereto. The possible rejection of the new covenant placed them in a situation as precarious as that of ancient Israel. His desire was to awaken within them the awful consequences of their current tendency to "neglect so great a salvation" and let it "slip away" (Hebrews 2:1, 3). They must hold fast to the end or, like their forbearers, lose all.

To give punch to what he says, the author not only uses scripture but also makes it relevant to his hearers through his emphasis on the word "today" (*σήμερον*, *sēmeron*). The term designates a specific and short period of time during which something must be completed or the result is either compromised or forfeited. What is at stake here is eternal life. We find this same usage in Doctrine and Covenants 45:6, where the Lord gives the Latter-day Saints much the same warning, noting that this period is one of "sacrifice, and a day for the tithing of my people" and that "after today cometh the burning."

The admonition "do not harden your hearts" is instructive (Hebrews 3:8, 15). It shows that it is the person who makes the heart hard. How does the person do that? He or she must have access to God's word and then deliberately resist it. But why the resistance? Because of the enticements, the initial intoxication, and the deception of sin. When a person yields to those enticements, the hardening process begins and continues until the person's heart becomes so hard it resists both the influence and power of the Spirit to soften it.

The irony is that even though sin becomes a hard, demanding master—one that will all too often brutalize the soul—it is still a binding one that the person no longer has the will to escape. The tragedy is that

even though the individual cannot break sin's grip, there is a power that can. Indeed, God is ever willing to help, but that cannot happen to these people because their hearts have become too hard and unyielding to the influence of the Spirit of God.

Hebrews 4

Overview

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 235.

Having examined the seat of ancient Israel's rebellion against Jehovah and its disastrous results, in chapter 4 the author states the lessons he wanted his readers to learn. He admonishes them not to be faithless as were their ancestors, a faithlessness that cost them the great blessing of entering the rest of the Lord. As he builds his case, the author uses subtle and, with a superficial reading, what appear to be somewhat illusive arguments. The seat of his case centers on the force of the richly nuanced noun "rest" (*κατάπαυσις, katapausis*), which he introduced in chapter 3. Up to this point, however, he has not provided a clue as to how he wants it understood. A reason may be that he did not want his readers distracted from his main point: that the ancients lost their reward due to faithlessness and its final manifestation: outright rebellion. Now through the development of a skillful, exegetical argument he at last discloses what he understands God's rest to be.

4:1–3

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 255.

The author's focus in Hebrews 4:1–3 section is on God's rest (*κατάπαυσις, katapausis*) and how important it is that his readers obtain it. He uses as his introductory text Psalm 94:11 from the Septuagint, which speaks of those whom Jehovah swore "in [His] wrath that they should not enter into [His] rest" because of their faithless disobedience. The author strongly warns his readers the same could happen to them and, therefore, they must act (verses 1–2).

The author begins his admonition in verse 1 by noting that ancient Israel's entrance into the promised land did not mean that Jehovah's promise of rest had been exhausted. Indeed, the present generation also had the promise of entering into God's rest. In fact, they had access to a better, higher spiritual rest than did their ancestors. Entrance, however, was not guaranteed. Therefore, they should have a genuine fear that they too might miss it (*ὑστερέω, hystereō*), "to fall short." The parallel between the two people was similar enough that a comparable disaster could overtake them, for both had the same word preached to them (verse 2).

The author does not place his stress on the result of rest (*ἀνάπαυσις*, *anapausis*, “rejuvenation, refreshment, and relaxation”) but on the place where it is found (*κατάπαυσις*, *katapausis*, denoting a place where one finds security, peace, and happiness). Given the threatening climate in which they were living, this emphasis would have been the real draw to the Hebrew brothers and sisters.

4:3–11

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 255–256, 259.

Having introduced the theme of rest, the author next defines its nature and assures his readers that it is yet available. He does this in two parts, in verses 3–5 and 6–11. In the first part, he begins by introducing another scripture, Genesis 2:2: “And God did rest the seventh day from all his works” (Hebrews 4:4). This verse defines the term rest as something the divine does, and therefore, it is ultimately celestial. Thus, he contrasts it with and sets it apart from its Old Testament definition. His development follows his usual use of verbal analogy to connect disparate ideas and bring out new meaning. There it referred to Jehovah’s promise that He would give Israel rest by providing a promised land. The rest would come through two stages. The first was by Israel’s conquest of their enemies, through which they would secure the land.²⁶ The second was by being able to live securely and in peace, enjoying the produce from vineyards and orchards (1 Kings 4:25).

To give his readers a feel and a hope for what is in store for them, in Hebrews 4:9 he introduces the Sabbath rest (*σαββατισμός*, *sabbatismos*). The impetus for the author’s appeal is likely his readers’ discomfort in the present. They are not enjoying a state of rest to any noticeable degree. He wants them to realize, however, that even though they are not enjoying it in the present, it does belong to them as a future inheritance.

That a person enters into divine rest suggests it is not just a state but also a location.

There is a place of rest, and that is where the Father dwells. It is the place of the eternal Sabbath celebration where the righteous cease from the toils and struggles of this mortal life and enter into a fullness of joy (verses 4–5, 10).

The reason the author stressed the place rather than the state of rest may be because his readers, feeling the pressures and threats of this world, needed the assurance that an actual place above and beyond this one existed—a location with concrete reality. Though there may be times when the abstract and ethereal have their place, this was not one of them. These people needed to be assured that an actual celestial place awaited them where they would be free from the cares, concerns, and pressures of mortality, a place where “God shall wipe away all tears” and there would be “no sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Revelation 21:4). In short, a place of rest.

4:12–13

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 259–261.

To give even more force to his exhortation, the author of Hebrews uses bold and forceful imagery that gives to God’s word (λόγος, *logos*) a dynamic and energetic quality expressed in four aspects. First, it is living. As with God’s works, there is no end to God’s words (Moses 1:38). They are ever in force.

Second, it is active and powerful (ἐνεργής, *energēs*). With the noun *energēs*, the author stresses its continuing dynamic quality. What the “word” has done before, it continues to do and, therefore, cannot be ignored or discounted.

Third, it is razor sharp. Therefore, it can penetrate and separate spirit and body, joint and marrow (Hebrews 4:12). The first two elements look at the two aspects of each person, their spiritual and physical natures. The second two elements focus on elements of their physical being. Both sets of images, however, are to be taken metaphorically and make the same point. Nothing, no matter how deeply concealed, can be hidden from God (verse 13).

Fourth, God’s word is able to discern (κριτικός, *kriticos*) the thoughts and intents generated at the very depths of every individual (verse 13). To stress his point, the author again brings in the imagery of the heart, assuring his readers that God never ceases to gaze upon it (verse 12).

The focus of this passage is, then, not on the act of the executioner’s sword but on the exposing power of God’s word. In nonmetaphorical terms, this passage is about the futility of trying to hide anything from the divine. By extension, it is about being honest with self and God. The Hebrew Saints are going through a dark time, one that might tempt them to turn from the Savior. This they cannot do without losing “so great salvation” and forfeiting entering into God’s rest (2:3). These Christians, therefore, must stay true to their God and be faithful to their core. Only then can they be judged fit for the Sabbath rest.

4:14–16

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 267–272.

Using the anxiety he has created, the author now turns to assure his readers that they can make a more than adequate response to what is demanded of them. More importantly, they will have divine help in doing so. This assurance is grounded on the reality of the Son’s enthronement (Hebrews 4:14). He now sits at the seat of power. In addition, He is not only a heavenly King but also the Great High Priest who has already exercised that priestly power to purify His people from sin (1:3).

Now comes the point. Given what the Savior is and what He has done for them, there is no reason for the people not to hold fast to their confessed allegiance (*ὁμολογία, homologia*) to him (4:14).

But in case that incentive is not enough, the author presents another reason for them not to abandon their faith in the Son nor hesitate in bearing their witness of Him. This Son of God, this Great High Priest, can sympathize with His people. And why? Because He has been tried and tempted (*πειράζω, peirazō*) in the same way they have (verse 15). Indeed, He has suffered “in every way” (*κατὰ πάντα, kata panta*).

Though tempted on every point and tried in every way, the Master never yielded to sin (verse 15). Throughout His ministry, He remained pure and holy in thought, emotion, and deed. But there were certain ramifications for the rest of humankind for His doing so. Joseph Smith not only recognized but clearly admitted that no one, including himself, could live perfectly. Jesus showed, however, that what was theoretically possible was actually possible, but only under a certain condition. Being enabled by being God’s Son and having a fullness of the Spirit, the Lord possessed powers that no other mortal ever has. These gave Him the unique ability to resist sin.

That Jesus was perfect, however, should not be construed to mean that Jesus did not feel the press of mortality with all its burdens and temptations. But by resisting—by never yielding to the pangs of hunger or thirst or pain of body or of spirit, by never giving into temptation or seduction no matter how strong—He felt their full and crushing weight as no mortal ever has. And as He endured the crucible of Gethsemane, where He prayed—no, begged—the Father not to make Him drink the bitter cup, He learned the full cost of obedience. Thus, He can sympathize fully and completely with all His fellows.

The operative word in verse 16 is “boldly” (*παρρησία, parrēsia*, or “with confidence”).

Because of what the Savior has done—because of how He can sympathize with those who suffer under the plague of weaknesses and flaws—those who stay true to Him need have no fear in approaching either Him or the Father (verse 16). Indeed, He is their advocate (*παράκλητος, paraklētos*).²⁷

What is the purpose of approaching the throne of grace? The author gives two reasons (verse 16). The first is so that the faithful may obtain mercy (*ἔλεος, eleos*). The noun connotes compassion and sympathy grounded in love that the Father has for His children. It expresses itself most clearly in the Father’s forgiveness of sin, the result of which is the cessation of the misery such evil brings. The second is so that they may find the power of grace in their time of need. The noun “grace” (*χάρις, charis*) denotes the enabling power that flows from the Father and the Son to the faithful individual because of their love and kind benevolence. By means of this gift they are enabled to do what they could not do on their own.

As the two blessings of mercy and grace are taken together, we see the power that comes from approaching the throne. Through grace, all guilt is removed; through mercy, all misery is removed.

Hebrews 5

Overview

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 273.

At the conclusion of the Hebrews 4, the author successfully admonished his readers not only to hold tightly to their testimonies but also to take advantage of what their faithfulness could bring them. The author, in chapter 5, continues to develop this theme by expanding his consideration of Christ's high priestly office and what flows out of it. In doing so, he answers two questions that many of his readers may have had concerning the Lord's priesthood. First, "if Christ is the kind of High Priest intimated in these verses, how does he relate to the God-established Aaronic priesthood?" and second, "What biblical authority does he [the author] have for Christ's priesthood in light of the perpetual character attributed to that earlier priesthood instituted by Moses at God's direction?"²⁸ By comparing the new High Priest with His old counterpart, the author very successfully answers these questions.

5:1–10

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 287–289, 291–294.

Following his exhortation in the last chapter, the author here resumes his explication, this time focusing on the implications of the office and duties of the Levitical high priest that shed light on the work of the Son as the eternal Melchizedek High Priest. Noteworthy is that the author's thrust, at this point, is on the priest not as the servant of God but as the servant of humankind.

He emphasizes the weakness—that is, the humanity—of those who hold that office, not to put them down but to show that it is because of this that they should know how to relate and minister to those whom they are called to serve. The Savior shares this condition. The author, however, used his comparison between the Eternal High Priest and the mortal high priest to dramatically emphasize the superiority of the Savior's priesthood and service.

In this pericope, the author emphasizes this point through the use of a chiasm structure (in which verses 1–3 parallel verses 7–10 and verse 4 parallels verses 5–6). By using this structure, the author highlights the importance of authority for any person to hold this office but also showcases the additional power held by the Lord. For example, while the Aaronic high priest could but "deal gently" (*μετριοπαθέω*, *metriopatheō*) with those in need, the Melchizedek High Priest could save them (verses 2, 9). Thus, this chiasm formula is integral to the author's point and allows him to stress the superiority of the new order over the old.

During the Levitical administration, not all ordinances were available (Doctrine and Covenants 84:23–27). The author of Hebrews notes this lack in the way he constructed 5:1–3. These verses stress the insufficiency of the Levitical high priest and point to the need of another who is fully sufficient—namely, the Great High Priest. The contrast between the two priests is arresting. The Aaronic high priest is chosen from a select few (the Aaronites), while the Son of God is selected from the whole of humanity (verse 1). The old high priest is beset with weakness and must, therefore, make offerings for himself as well as for others, while the new High Priest shares in the common weakness but never succumbs and, therefore, has no need to make a sin offering on His own behalf (verses 2–3). While the high priest can only deal gently with sinners, the High Priest can save them (verses 2, 9).

The author brings out an important lesson when he notes that the high priest’s sacrifices are to cover two kinds of sins (verse 2). First, those done in ignorance (*ἀγνοέω*, *agnoeō*), when people, due to no neglect of their own, did not know the law and unintentionally violated it. And second, those done due to weakness (*ἀσθένεια*, *astheneia*), when people, due to their own vulnerability, were drawn to sin due to the actions of another. In both cases, the people did not initiate the move but were led astray. These the high priest was to “handle with gentleness” (*μετριοπαθέω*, *metriopatheō*; verse 2).

The author had already introduced Jesus as Son in 1:1–3 and as the Great High Priest” in 2:17–18. Now in 5:5–6 he uses Psalms 2:7 and 110:4 to join the two ideas. His point is that the same divine Being who made Jesus Son is the same one who declared him Priest. By wedding these two scriptures, the author of Hebrews shows that the Lord’s right to preside over the Melchizedek Priesthood was because He was the Son of God, receiving the Father’s power and authority by right.

The author does not move to hortatory at this point, but his message is clear. In Hebrews 5:8, he presents the Savior as one who learned the joy of obedience (*ὕπακοή*, *hyrakoē*) through suffering, because that is what the author is calling on his readers to do. Jesus understands firsthand (*μανθάνω*, *manthanō*) the full cost of obedience since he was fully obedient not only throughout His life but even into death and beyond. As a result, He can be fully sympathetic in understanding the toll that obedience takes. He can, therefore, be moved to make divine intercession on behalf of His people.

The result of the Lord’s obedience was “to become perfect” (*τελειόω*, *teleioō*), the word denoting the completion of His mission, including both dying and overcoming death (verse 9). To emphasize the point, Jesus’s perfection was one of vocation, not of moral excellence. In the realm of obedience and adherence to the will of the Father, Jesus was always without flaw.

That the Savior was made perfect is of special note. The passive force of the participle used in verse 9 (*τελειωθεῖς*, *teleiōtheis*, “being made perfect”) points to the work of God. It tacitly reveals the Lord’s total dependence on His Father both to show Him the way and to give Him power. Here, too, the Lord is the exemplar. He declared that the Father “gave me of his fulness” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:4). Indeed, “power [was] given unto him from the Father to redeem [His people] from their sins”

(Helaman 5:11). No one, including Jesus, was ever meant to go it alone. Even so, salvation is only for those who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9).

5:11–14

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 301–302.

Hebrews 5:11–14 marks a transition from instruction to admonition and even to censure. Thus, they contain a sudden and dramatic shift in tone. Though he has gently chided his readers before (see 2:1–4; 4:1–3), his tone has been conciliatory (see 2:1; 4:1, where he includes himself in the admonition). Here it is strongly condemnatory with no hint of apology. He knows, however, what he is doing. He is pricking his hearers' conscience for their laziness. By doing so, he is forcing them to evaluate their current state in light of their forsaken responsibilities. To grab their attention, he deliberately uses an overstatement (as he does at 6:12 by noting that he is writing so that his readers will not be lazy or slothful in their faith). He needs them to be fully attentive, he warns, because he is about to broach “teaching difficult to explain” (*λόγος δυσερμήνευτος, logos dysermēneutos*; 5:11).

The author forcefully points out their problem using the phrase *νωθροὶ γέγονατε ταῖς ἀκοαῖς (nōthroi gegonate tais akoais)*, literally “you have become lazy (dull or sluggish) in hearing” (verse 11). The adjective *νωθρός (nōthros)*, “lazy, dull,” in this context takes on a biting force connoting not simple intellectual inertia (which would have been bad enough) but an active resistance to God's message. It strongly echoes conditions that brought on Israel's wilderness rebellion. Through resistance to hearing Jehovah's word, they made their hearts hard and lost all.

The author really castigates his readers, pointing out that by this time (*διὰ τὸν χρόνον, dia ton chronon*) they should be teaching this material, not having to be taught it (verse 12). These were not new converts but seasoned members who should have long since learned the doctrine. He concludes that there is only one reason for their failure. They are spiritual infants (*νήπιος*) unable to stomach solid spiritual food (*στερεᾶς τροφῆς, stereas trophēs*). Being restricted to milk, they have prepared themselves only to receive the rudiments (*στοιχεῖα, stoiceia*) of the gospel (verses 12–13).

In his use of physical food to symbolize doctrinal themes, the author is not unique (verses 12–14). Paul did the same thing to make the same point (see 1 Corinthians 3:2). Both authors note that only the mature can handle solid food; babes can stomach only milk. Those who are not adults in their faith simply cannot comprehend the profound realities that undergird and overarch Christian doctrine. The point both writers make is that if their audiences cannot handle the doctrine of the kingdom, they must be spiritual infants to their shame. But the author of Hebrews is not going to let his audience's immaturity stop him from delivering his message. They had better grow up fast because he is about to hit them with hard doctrine.

Hebrews 6

Overview

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 304.

The author begins chapter 6 by admonishing his readers to strive for further spiritual maturity by advancing beyond the elementary teachings of the gospel (verses 1–3). He then gives them a stiff warning that turning away from the gospel after having been enlightened by its power would bring severe and eternal consequences (verses 4–8). He assures them, however, that he really does expect better things from them. Indeed, the Father is well aware of their sacrifices and service. The author assures them that all he wants is that they continue exhibiting such a degree of faith “to the end” so they can inherit all the promises given to the faithful (verses 9–12). This leads him into a declaration of how serious God is in keeping the promises He has made to His trusting followers. The Father has even gone so far as to swear an unbreakable oath the Saints can put their full trust in (verses 13–18). If that were not enough, the author assures his readers, Jesus has Himself ascended up on high, where He works in their behalf as the Great High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (verses 19–20). All this can be for them like an anchor, firm and certain, that they can rely on (verse 19).

6:1–3

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 312–314.

The message of Hebrews 6:1–3 hinges on the meaning of the noun *τελειότης* (*teleiotēs*). Its semantic range includes being complete, finished, accomplished, mature, and perfect. Since the author used the word to contrast spiritual babes and adults in the preceding chapter, in the present context it most likely denotes that maturity of practice, insight, and understanding exhibited by the spiritually advanced Saints among the author’s audience. It does not, therefore, nuance directly a state of moral excellence and flawlessness but rather the state of completeness and spiritual maturity that the priestly ministry of the Savior is meant to provide (7:11; 10:14).

A connection, however, does exist “between the maturity (*teleiotēs*) that the addressees are urged to attain and the perfection (*teleiōsis*) that Christ affords.”²⁹ This is exposed in the careful and subtle wordplay of the author. Christian maturity follows the desirable path of leaving behind the milk of the gospel and partaking of its solid food (5:12, a reference to the doctrines the author is teaching) and then yielding to what Christ, as the enthroned High Priest, demands to perfect His people. This perfection is made possible through sanctification by Christ’s sacrifice, which cleanses the faithful, makes their souls righteous, and unites them with the Father (10:10).

In order to move ahead, the author's readers must get beyond their preoccupation with the basic teachings (6:1–2). Continually relaying these foundational principles as the only necessities for salvation is fruitless because it brings no progression. Instead, the people must attend to those teachings that are not only for the more mature but also produce full maturation. The problem with the fundamentals is not that they are false or even harmful. Indeed, they are the very foundation upon which all else rests. Their problem is that they cannot produce the faith necessary for perseverance because they do not reveal the full necessity of the Savior in the salvation process and what He ultimately requires. Further, they do not emphasize the blessing both in mortality and immortality such faith brings. Therefore, to continually lay again and again this foundation “is an exercise in futility.”³⁰ It is through the advanced doctrines that an understanding of the indispensable role of the Savior comes. It is through these that one becomes not only spiritually mature but also able to persevere in faith, doing all that is necessary until one gains the perfection (*teleiōsis*) that only Christ can give.

6:4–8

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 325–327.

The author's forceful use of the laden word *παραλίπτω* (*parapiptō*), “to fall away, commit apostasy,” gives a shocking description of what these once fully and thoroughly converted persons have done (Hebrews 6:6). Theirs is not a matter of faults or errors but of deliberate abandonment of principles and covenants, a willful walking away from the gifts and powers of the Spirit they once enjoyed.

It is in the activities of the postapostate life where we see expressed the full depth of the rancor these people feel (verse 6). They continually recrucify (*ἀνασταυρόω*, *anastauroō*) Christ for themselves (*ἑαυτοῖς*, *eautois*)—that is, they work to the same ends the original perpetrators did—to secure personal station and gain. Second, due to their spiteful disposition toward Him, they hold the Savior publicly in contempt (*παραδειγματίζω*, *paradeigmatizō*). They have come to believe that He has no value and that His life and teachings are worthless. The effect is spiritual blindness, which according to the prophet Jacob, “came by looking beyond the mark” (Jacob 4:14). In other words, these people hoped to find salvation in something beyond Christ or rejected the idea of salvation altogether. The result is that “they must needs fall; for God hath taken away his plainness from them” (Jacob 4:14). This point is arresting. Due to their determined recalcitrance, the Lord removes His Spirit, and they can no longer see what, to the faithful, is evident and clear. Being spiritually blind, these souls work actively, forcefully, and openly against Him and His Church, driven by a deep but false belief that they can destroy His work.

The author wisely chose to use the third-person plural *they* so as not to accuse his readers of so serious an evil. Even so, his is a strong warning for them not to fall into such a damnable condition. His list of requirements needed to make such a dramatic fall reveals the depth of these once-converted souls and reveals the profundity of their willful acts of not only abandoning but spurning the Lord.

To make his point, the author uses a parable drawn from agriculture (Hebrews 6:7–8). He uses the image of a field to symbolize the person, an abundant and beneficial downpour of rain to symbolize the richness of Spirit the person enjoyed, the production of edible plants as a symbol of the proper response to this gift, and the production of noxious weeds to symbolize an improper response. The result of a proper response—the use of spiritual strength to nourish others—brings additional blessings from God. On the other hand, an improper response—the production of noxious attitudes and spiritually harmful activities—brings a cursing that eventually expresses itself as a fiery destruction.³¹

6:9

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 340–341.

Having given his readers a very strict warning that likely caused them some deep reflection, the author now greatly softens his tone. Hopefully, his clear if harsh warning—that they must stop their spiritual regression or suffer possible direful consequences—has placed them in a mood for the counsel and assurance he now turns to give them (Hebrews 5:11–6:3).

He encourages them with the warm address “beloved friends” and assures them that he is very much persuaded that they will achieve “the better things that he has mentioned concerning their salvation” (6:9). His positive assurance stands in contrast to the negative assurance of damnation that he gave to the apostates (verse 8). The author assures his readers that he will not back down from his conviction of the good their works have done, even though he has had to use some forceful language (verse 9). By setting up his argument in this way, the point he wishes to make is enhanced since they have now hopefully grasped the desperate consequences that their backsliding could cause and are willing to change.

6:10

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 341.

In Hebrews 6:10, the author expresses the grounds for the assurance he has for his fellow Saints’ success. It is based on two of his favorite themes: God’s faithfulness to His people and His peoples’ faithfulness to their God. Using an emphatic double negative (*ou ἄδικος, ou adikos*), “by no means unjust,” he assures them there is absolutely no way the Father would be so unjust as to ever overlook their deeds motivated by love. These were services done on the Father’s account and in response to the immediate need of their fellow Saints. Their love was particularly evident, as the author later reveals, in their outreach to those who had felt the bitter and heavy hand of persecution. Indeed, these good Saints had put their own reputation—and perhaps even lives—in danger in doing so (10:33–34). Further, they have not let this discourage them from continued service.

6:11

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 341.

The author begins Hebrews 6:11 by expressing his strong desire that his readers will continually show their earnestness—expressed in an enthusiastic and unremitting zeal to their cause—until they receive the full assurance of their hope. In this context, hope carries the idea of a confident expectation, grounded in spiritual confirmation, that they will receive the salvation the Father has promised. The author states that he wants them to reach this state since it will be a hedge against slothfulness, sluggishness, and apathy in their duty to the Lord (verse 12). Indeed, he wishes them to show the same zeal in moving forward in faith as they have in service to one another.

6:12

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 342.

The author of Hebrews expresses his desire that his audience imitate those who have inherited, or received, the promises (6:12). That imitation does not point to external behavior but to a firm inner belief. It expresses a way of life based on accepting what the Savior has done in bringing about forgiveness and access to grace with its attendant power of the Spirit that assures one that eternal life is waiting. In short, he asks his readers to take Christ at His word.

The author witnesses that many have done this and received the reward. This is an important point because he shows his readers that the goal can be realized and that many have done so (he will develop this theme through the rest of the epistle). The virtues that make this possible are faith and patience. The former denotes assuredness, again through a witness of the Spirit, that the promised blessings will be given. The second denotes a tranquil waiting, undisturbed by doubts or events, for the promises to be realized. The author stresses that it is this “faithful perseverance” that is the assurance that his readers will receive “the kingdom that cannot be removed” (12:28). As long as they put forth such faith, the objective is guaranteed. Nothing can stop them from obtaining it.

6:13–20

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Epistle to the Hebrews (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 350–354.

The author again reaches to the Old Testament to find examples upon which to establish and illustrate his point. He once again uses verbal analogy, specifically oath swearing, as his link. He chooses, with little

wonder, Abraham as his focus. One likely reason is that it allowed him to highlight the motif of swearing an oath as well as showcasing the idea that as Abraham received Jehovah’s blessings, so too could his readers receive them (Hebrews 6:15). They would come through the Savior’s ministry as High Priest (verses 19–20). However, like for Abraham, the reward would come only through faithful perseverance (verse 15).

To really stress his point, the author goes to great lengths to show how far Jehovah was willing to go to assure His people that his promises were absolutely reliable and immutable. He did this by swearing an oath. His willingness to set aside His dignity was motivated by His desire to convince Israel that they could fully trust Him (verse 17). By implication, that same desire was true for the author’s readers. Thus, God’s promises remained under guarantee, for they were bound by His own personal integrity, His promise, and His oath. Nothing could make their realization more sure (verse 18).

The author admonishes his readers to “to seize the hope that is placed before us” (verse 18). As used in the New Testament, the noun “hope” (*ἐλπίς, elpis*) has three aspects. First, and most frequently, it denotes a confidence in obtaining an objective, mainly God’s promises to the fathers, but more particularly to eternal life “which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Titus 1:2; compare 3:7). This confidence is based on a spiritual confirmation. It is important to keep this point in mind. Confirmation looks to the Holy Ghost, who testifies “to them that are sanctified,” allowing them to “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Hebrews 10:14–15, 22). It is by yielding to this hope that they obtain “the better things that pertain to salvation” (6:9). It is what moves them “towards the fulfillment of [that] hope . . . to possess the promises” (6:11–12). It should also be noted that hope comes by the grace of Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:16). It is His free gift to sustain those who are striving to do His will.

The author uses an anchor as a symbol of that hope that is grounded on a witness of the Spirit (Hebrews 6:19). The imagery allows him to stress two aspects of this hope: its firmness and certainty. Due to these two qualities, it acts as a safeguard to the very soul of the faithful Saint. Joseph Smith tied the imagery to the assurance that comes from receiving the “more sure word of prophecy,” a revelation by which a person knows that his or her calling and election to a heavenly station has been secured. This is the assurance that the sealing power of the Holy Spirit of Promise has taken effect and guarantees the person’s reward.

In the final two verses, the author focuses on the object of that hope—namely, Jesus Christ, who is the forerunner, the One who has already traversed the necessary distance and shown not only that it can be done but also how (Hebrews 6:20). Finally, the author looks at the temple with its imposing veil, a once-impenetrable barrier to all but the high priest but now opened to all due the work of the Great High Priest, whose authority lasts forever. In the Greek text, the author places the prepositional phrase *εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα* (*eis ton aiōna*), “forever,” last in this section of his work, thus giving it final force. In doing so, he emphasizes that the saving and mediating work of Christ will never end. Being grounded on this fact, the author notes that the Saint’s hope has, as it were, already entered into the inner sanctuary, tacitly showing that as one holds onto this Spirit-inspired and -assured hope, nothing can keep the faithful Saint from the heavenly reward.

Notes

- 1 Compare Doctrine and Covenants 14:9; 76:24; 93:10.
- 2 See John 3:16; Doctrine and Covenants 93:11; Moses 6:52.
- 3 For example, see Genesis 16:7–16; 31:11; Exodus 3:2.
- 4 For example, see Genesis 16:7; 21:17; 22:11; 31:11; Exodus 3:2; 14:19; 23:20; Numbers 22:22; Psalm 33:7; Judges 2:1; 6:11.
 - 5 See Matthew 1:20–24; 13:39, 41, 49; 22:30; 24:31; 27:23; 28:2; Luke 1:11; 2:9; 22:43; John 5:4; 12:29; 20:12; Acts 5:19; 8:26; 10:3; 12:7; 23:8; 27:23; 1 Corinthians 4:9; 6:3; 11:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:7; Revelation 7:1–2; 8:2, 7, 10, 12; 9:13; 16:1–12; 20:1.
 - 6 See Hebrews 1:2; 3:6; 5:8.
 - 7 See Colossians 1:15; Revelation 3:14; Moses 4:2.
 - 8 See Doctrine and Covenants 29:42, 46; 49:5; 138:57.
 - 9 See Matthew 1:16, 20; Luke 1:33, 35.
 - 10 See Doctrine and Covenants 93:21; John 1:1–5, 14; Colossians 1:15; Revelation 3:14; Moses 4:2.
 - 11 Matthew 1:16, 20; Luke 1:33, 35; 1 Nephi 11:18–21.
 - 12 See Acts 26:23; Colossians 1:18; 1 Corinthians 15:32; Revelation 1:5.
 - 13 See John 1:1, 18; 20:28; Romans 9:5; Titus 3:4; 2 Peter 1:1.
 - 14 See Moses 1:32; 2:1; John 1:1–3; Revelation 19:13; Jacob 4:9.
 - 15 See, for example, Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Psalm 102:26; Malachi 3:6; 2 Timothy 2:13; Hebrews 6:17–18; James 1:17; 3 Nephi 24:6; Doctrine and Covenants 3:1–3; 35:1.
 - 16 Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 137.
 - 17 Paul Ellingworth, *Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 163.
 - 18 Cockerill, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 141; see also William L. Lane, *Hebrews: A Call to Commitment* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 1–8, 58.
 - 19 Moses 1:29; Ephesians 6:6–8; Mosiah 2:17.
 - 20 Cockerill, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 143.
 - 21 Moses 6:59; Genesis 2:17; Romans 3:23; 6:23.
 - 22 Hebrews 1:3; see Revelation 1:18; Alma 11:42; Helaman 14:17; Mormon 7:5.
 - 23 For a deeper discussion about the condescension of Jesus, see Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, “Excursus on the Condescension of Jesus,” in *Epistle to the Hebrews* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2021), 171–178. For a deeper look at the view the author of Hebrews had of Christ’s Atonement, see Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, “Excursus on the Atonement: A View from Hebrews,” in *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 179–196.

- 24 Exodus 19:5; 29:44–46; Leviticus 16:3–28.
- 25 Exodus 17:3; Ezekiel 20:8, 16; see also Numbers 14:2–5; 20:3–5.
- 26 Deuteronomy 3:20; 12:10; 25:19; Joshua 1:13, 15; 21:44.
- 27 1 John 2:1; see also Isaiah 51:22; 2 Nephi 2:9; Jacob 3:1; Moroni 7:28; Doctrine and Covenants 29:5; 32:3; 45:3.
- 28 Cockerill, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 229.
- 29 Harold W. Attridge, *Hebrews* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 162–163.
- 30 Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 158.
- 31 For a discussion on unforgivable sins, see Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, “Excursus on Unforgivable and Unpardonable Sins,” in *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 329–334.

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