

EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS (Lesson 11) - Pastor Joh. W. Matutis www.nnk-berlin.de

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Concerning the studying

I **recommend** you to read through the respective book in the bible at first. Our manual is the bible. And then to go through one or two pages of the material every day, which implies to also look up and read the given bible scriptures to become thoroughly acquainted with the subject. Another suggestion would be to use this material as one's regular devotion.

If you would like to **obtain a degree (certificate) at the end of the seminary**, you need to answer the **test questions** at the end of each lesson and send or email it to us with your full name and address. And now I wish you lots of joy and spiritual profit during your bible study.

Pastor Joh. W. Matutis

MISCELLANEOUS

If you compare this letter »**to the Hebrews**« with an acknowledged, real letter **of Paul**, you must notice the **different form and style**. The **letter of Hebrews** cannot be recognized as a typical letter of Paul. Everything that characterizes the Pauline letters is missing.

This letter starts **without a word of greeting**, **no** addressing or thanksgiving and is rather like a modern sermon (Hebr. 1,1-3) but ends like a normal letter (Hebr. 13,22-25). The central message of the whole letter is the sincere „exaltation of Christ“. It is a continuation of Psalm 110 and the foundation of the theological teaching that reflects the three offices of Jesus. **He is king, prophet and priest in one person**. This is how he reigns all-knowing, blessing and sanctifying. There is no other book in the New Testament **that offers such a great picture of Jesus** in His godhead as in the letter to the Hebrews. It **illuminates Jesus as a man** and enlightens His ministry. The introduction of the letter sounds as if this was the last word of God to humanity, a last revelation of God to men.

This is a very important book of the bible in order to understand the fullness of God's redemption. Some call it the „**fifth gospel**“ because the other 4 gospels speak of the work of Christ on earth. This holy text, however, announces the **divine works of Christ Jesus** in His knowledge as our **high priest in heaven**, who oversees all things from above and reigns with authority and wisdom. The book of Hebrew might be difficult for us to understand because it deals with the theology of items, of which we have no experience. It speaks about the **sacrifice** of the Old Testament (OT) and the **high priest**. The author considered the OT a God-revealed text full of truth.

This letter was probably written for people who had knowledge about clerical matters. Also for people who were acquainted with religious cults, sacred ceremonies and pious service rituals. Knowledge of the OT is assumed.

The author of the letter of Hebrews enhances Jesus and exalts Him from His human humiliation and puts Him right back where He originally came from – the glory and holiness of God. He **restores all honor and glory back to Him**, to whom it belongs alone, eventhough Jesus seemed to have given it away in order to become flesh. In the greatness of His salvation He left it behind, in order not to force His children to chose Him. At the place where the holy Jesus Christ was mocked, humiliated and put to shame, the author bestows upon Him the highest adoration, appreciation and honor. He portrays Him as the exceptional one, the one he was, and is, and forever will be: the eternally holy, eternally only true God of creation.

The letter to the Hebrews is a clear restoration of Jesus. Some kind of correction and illumination of his reputation and being of the Son of God. Jesus is the spiritual highpriest who entered the holiest of holies of the eternal God and fulfilled what humanity had been waiting for over more than thousands of years. Thus the Epistle to the Hebrews is centered around **the person Jesus and His work** and therewith adds a theologically unmeasurable contribution of the incarnation of God in the man Jesus, and the representative death of Christ and His eternal priesthood. The letter is a merging bridge between the **Old and New Testament** and creates a spiritual connection between both of them. It helps to harmonise the **epochs of the**

history of salvation and helps us to understand the OT better, because without a foundational knowledge of the law, the NT of grace could not be understood in its fullness. The whole meaning of our onetime redemption and the reconciling function of the work of grace of Jesus could not be fully revealed to us. Therefore it is not unimportant to have knowledge about the reason, background and author of the letter. Up to this day we do not know much about him. But the message of this letter is just so great and timeless, that in the end it does not really matter under which circumstances this letter might have been written.

Date

This letter contains no evidence of the occupation or destruction of the Jerusalem temple. Therefore it must have been written AD 70. The author still assumes that the **ritual of sacrifice**, as it is described in the OT is still being practiced (Hebr. 8, 4, 13/ 9, 6 – 9 / 10, 1 – 3). It seems as if the letter was written AD 68-69. This spiritual text was supposed to prepare the Jews and Jewish Christians for the fall of Jerusalem and for the replacement of the temple by Jesus to celebrate a real service. This letter was addressing the 2nd generation of (Jewish) Christians, when **Timothy was still alive** (Hebr. 13,23).

Theme and thoughts of the EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

The Epistle to the Hebrews is a document about the exaltation of Jesus, (Hebr. 13,20). The author exalts the **greatness of the person Jesus** before the readers in order to warn them of a renunciation of Christ (Hebr. 5,11-6,20). Subsequent to the second part, where he describes **the sovereignty of the highpriesthood of Jesus** over His priesthood, sanctuary and sacrifice of the OT, he also warns of additional sin. The believers are encouraged to steadfast endurance of any tribulation (Hebr. 10,19-39). Finally he adds **practical exhortations to faithful discipleship**, (Hebr. 13 to the third part where he speaks of faith and sanctification (Hebr. 11 und 12).

The wonderful glory of the new testament compared to the old covenant. The all-encompassing greatness of Jesus' sacrifice compared to the OT sacrifices is described by the words „how much more“ (Hebr. 9,14). The emphasis is on the immeasurable uniqueness of the wonderful act of redemption of the Lord. This unique glory of the revelation of God in the new covenant is described by the apostle by three major thoughts.

The letter to the Hebrews is an **ancient Christian document** that completes, establishes and summarizes the messiahship of Jesus (Mark. 14,62 / Acts 2,33ff.; 5,31; 7,55f. / Rom. 8,34 / 1. Cor. 15,25 u.a.). In his letter the author systematically interprets the **Messianic psalm** (Psalm 110):

- Hebr. 1,1-3 'The Lord said unto my Lord',
- Hebr. 1,4-4,13 'sit at my right hand',
- Hebr. 4,14-6,20 'You are a priest',
- Hebr. 7,1-10,18 'forever after the order of Melchisedek',
- Hebr. 10,19-12,29 'The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath'.

In the **first part** of the letter (Hebr. 1,1 bis 5,10) he speaks of the **majesty of the person Jesus**, the Son of God, who is sovereign to the heavenly forces, the angelic world as well as all the great men of the old covenant such as Moses, Joshua and Aaron. Besides this thought the **second part** of the letter (Hebr. 7,1 – 10,18) mentions the work of Jesus and shows us the **Lord as the eternally merciful highpriest**. In the third part (Hebr. 11,1-12,29) we find out **how the living encounter with the person Jesus and the personal experience of His salvation is supposed to change the lives of people**, which is by faith and sanctification.

The **practical aspect of the letter** aims at **exhortations** that are added to every major theme. All theological thoughts obviously have no purpose themselves but rather refer to the chapters where the believers who encountered Jesus in their lives are made aware of the consequences of their responsibility.

The **structure of the letter** shows us that the description of the high priesthood of Jesus (Hebr. 7,1-10,18) is the essential center of this text. The author does not only consider Jesus a spiritual mediator and high priest, but He is also the „**eternal**“ **intercessor** of the saints before God, the Father (comp. Joh. 17 and Rom. 8,34 and Hebr. 7,25). He wants to tell us that Jesus is speaking for us before God for all eternity.

Therefore the author praises the outstanding glory of Christ. He knows that **the exalted Lord is identical with the human man Jesus of Nazareth**. But the overwhelming glory of Jesus Christ that he speaks about is rather an invisible, heavenly glory. Jesus' office as the highpriest is not executed in the visible on earth, but rather on the inside and in heaven. He illustrates the earthly images as a heavenly truth. Thus the author of the letter challenges the believers in his letter to **look up to Him** (Hebr. 12,2), whom they cannot see with their physical eyes. Or they were supposed to hold on to the invisible, as if they were able to see Him (Hebr. 11,27).

Through Christ the believers are connected to the heavenly world. Through Jesus Christ they are „authorized partaker“ of the heavenly calling. Their way with Him is the true way of faith

AUTHOR

There is no prominent person of the Apostolic decade that can be fully identified as the author of this letter. Some think it might have been **Paul, Luke, Barnabas, Apollos, Silas, Peter, Priska, Aquila, even Mary (the mother of Jesus) and many others.**

Many thesis were developed as to who could be the real author. Very early **Barnabas** was assumed to be the author of the letter of Tertullian ca. AD 160-220. Paul and Barnabas had worked together on the mission field in the beginning and were closely connected to each other. He was still there when Timothy converted during the second mission journey of Paul (Act. 16,1-3). **Paulus** circumcised Timothy himself, which might have been the reason for Barnabas backsliding into the old traditions. Therefore he might have dealt with „the old and new covenant“ in detail.

If Paul was already dead at the time of composition it would be understandable that Timothy followed his former companion Barnabas (Hebr. 13, 23). The theological dispute between **Paul and Barnabas** (Act. 15, 37 - 39) was long settled. Paul warmly referred to Barnabas as the **cousin of Mark** (as in Col. 4,10 and 2. Tim. 4,11). If the letter to the Hebrews was really written by Barnabas it could also claim **Apostolic authority**. Barnabas was generally called an apostle (Act. 14,14). Of course neither Barnabas nor Paul can be fully identified as the authors of this letter.

In the old canonical codex „Claremontanus“ the letter to the Hebrews as the „**letter of Barnabas**“. In many perspectives he fulfills the requirements to be the author of this letter. As a **Levite** (Acts 4, 36) he had thorough knowledge of the **Levitical system** of the priests and their order.

If Barnabas was the author of this letter many can be assumed the recipients who would meet the requirements, such as the Christians of the old Lybian city of **Kyrene** in North Africa. Kyrene was founded AD 630 as a Greek colony and was a home to many influential Jewish churches at the time of Roman occupation. It seems like there were Christians quite early, because the church of **Antioch** in Syriy was established by missionaries from Cyprus and Kyrene (Act. 11, 20). The connection between **Cyprus and Kyrene** is especially interesting with regard to **Barnabas'** Cyprian origin. Two of his co-workers with whom he later served in the church of Antioch were Simeon, called Niger and Lucius of Kyrene (Acts 13, 1).

Many names were discuss with regard to the Epistle to the Hebrews, but the question who the real author is still remains. **Origenes** once said: „Who the real author of the letter was, only God alone knows!“

The author is part of the second or third Christian ancient generation (Hebr. 2,3). The time of the first proclamations was long past. Some of the missionaries had already died (Hebr. 13,7). The apostle Paul is revered by the mention of Paul's students (Hebr. 13,23). Also scriptures as in Hebr. 8,4 / 9,8 / 13,11, that seem to assume the existence of a Jewish cult in Jerusalem, cannot enforce this: The Epistle to the Hebrews does not speak of a **Herodian tempel**, but rather following the holy scripture concerning the meeting tent and the tabernacle.

The author of this letter is assured that his word has divine authority and will be accepted by the church. Therefore he does not introduce himself. He himself must have been one of the church leaders and must have been a teacher there. This would also explain the request, that he wants to be »restored to them« soon (Hebr. 13,19).

The person who wrote the letter must have been closely related **to Paul for a time**. The mention of **Timothy** and his remark concerning the theological themes support that assumption. These statements can only be a fruit of apostle Paul's teachings (for example **Hebr. 6,8ff.** from 2. Cor. 6,2 / **Hebr. 5,12** from 2. Cor. 3,1ff. / **Hebr. 6,13ff.** from Rom. 4,1ff. / **Hebr. 10,37ff.** from Rom. 1,17 / Gal. 3,11 / **Hebr. 11,1ff.** from Rom. 3 / Gal. 3). At the same time the author was still someone who thought independently on a high theological level.

Many of the **church fathers** (especially of the Eastern church) considered **Paul** the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. But early doubts came up. However, Paul can also not be excluded as the author. The reason was the following: The letter to the Hebrews did not apply to the usual Pauline style when you compare it with the many other letters of Paul. It is concluded that the author must have belonged to the **inner circle of Paul**, but that Paul himself was probably not the author of this letter.

The letter to the Hebrews differs from the Pauline letters in terms of the straight enforcement of the homiletic main theme (homiletic = preaching teaching) which has a major practical concern and a teaching and exhorting character. The letter is called a „**word of exhortation**“ in itself (Hebr. 13,22). All of the exhorting scriptures in Hebrews want to strengthen the church in their faith in the exalted Christ. It refers to the majesty and highpriestly office of Jesus. It is aiming at an exhortation to turn understanding into a deep assurance. The author knows very well that there is no firm decision without active revelation and deeper understanding of the consequences of Jesus' work. The believer learns the obedience of faith by the example of Jesus' life. From time to time **other possible authors** were mentioned, such as Silas, Luke, Priscilla or Apollos. Not without reason.

For example Apollos: through the Book of Acts and some comments of Paul we are more or less well informed about his mission work. He met Paul during his third mission journey and obviously even worked with him but finally remained working independently (1. Cor. 16,12). We also see that Apollos was connected to the circle of Paul's students (Tit. 3,13). He seemed to enjoy an excellent reputation as a travelling preacher and missionary (1. Cor. 1,12/ 3,4f,6). Perhaps his workfield was basically the same as Paul's mission field. He had a strong influence upon the believers in Corinth (Act.18,27).

In the letter to the Hebrews we face **influences of gnosis**, some kind of mysterious, religious secret knowledge and philonic – alexandrian thought patterns. Those include for example the assumption of the pre-existence of the redeemer and the typically gnostic image of a **decension of the redeemer** through the heavenlies (comp. Hebr. 9,1,24). This thinking also implies the entrance into a heavenly sanctuary and the incarnation (becoming flesh, embodiment of an primordial man (Hebr. 7,1-3) or also the thought that Christian originate directly from God and are related to Him as His children and are therefore depending on Him (Hebr. 2,11). Their imagination of the way of faith back to our heavenly home is also mystical. The author lays out **the biblical exodus theme** (Israel leaving Israel) without enforcing the specific idea of an ascension into higher levels of consciousness.

Special characteristics of the Epistle to the Hebrews

The author represents a very simple world image. For him the true world is the heavenly, invisible world. To him this is the „eternal being“. The earthly world with its perishable items is only a »**shadow**« of the higher reality of God. He especially emphasises the cultic establishments of Judaism. The center is the onetime and eternally valid sacrifice of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary at the „end of time“.

The „**end of time**“ refers to the end of **the old time of the world**, which was determined by the people of Israel. A time that is only for a time and just a shadow. It ended with the ceasing of the „temple service“ - when the curtain between the sanctuary and the Holy of Holies tore. Therefore the heavenly reality radically outweighs the perishable earthly world (Hebr. 8,5). **Jesus reigns as the eternal and perfect priest.**

In His personality He is far superior to the Levite priests, all sinners and carnal men. **Jesus is executing the heavenly service from a far sovereign sanctuary**, that can be found in an eternal, larger realm (Hebr. 8,1-5; 9,11). Opposed to that the old symbolic sanctuary such as the tabernacle or the sanctuary in the temple are only a material shadow that represented a spiritual entity (comp. Ex. 25,40).

The divine exaltation of the humiliated Jesus on the cross, the author considers God's act of the Last Days. Thereby all men finally have access to the heavenly sanctuary (Hebr. 10,19ff., 32ff.). The external lifting up of Jesus Christ on the cross is already a spiritual image of His internal position as the high priest.

This act of completion will become visible reality when Jesus returns. Until then the church and every believer has to wait with patient endurance. Furthermore all tribulations, enmity and trials have to be resisted with steadfastness.

In the letter to the Hebrews we see a very unique presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The author of our text must have read many of the Pauline letters. Because of this divinely inspired words in the letter Christianity finally found **its own self-definition** in contrast to Judaism. This also led to a clear **spiritual relationship** between the old and the new covenant. The author of this letter is well acquainted with the OT. He knows the Jewish legend of the slobbering of Isaiah, and is also familiar with text exegesis (interpretation). By word combinations of two different texts he creates a new situation and foundation or a new motive (i.e. Ps. 94,11 / Gen. 2,2 / Hebr. 4,3-5). Or as in the comparison with the high priest Melchisedek in Gen.14 and Ps.110,4. About 150 of such linguistic and metaphorical comparisons and

allusions can be found in the content of the letter.

The Epistle to the Hebrews is written according to the pattern of a synagogue lecture. The topic is illuminated by biblical texts, typological important persons and metaphorical thoughts. The statements are constantly compared to the foundational truths of the old covenant, in order to lay a foundation for the act of Christ. Systematically the author starts with small and simple things to advance to great and sovereign contents.

This helps to give insight into the deep truth of God, that lead to an exhilarating experience with God and an awareness of a deep knowledge of God (i.e. Hebr. 7,1-3). The style and the method of procedure in the interpretation of the OT text with its rules, regulations and laws are very **typical** for this letter. It is really about the reader who is supposed to understand all of the content. The structure is very complex and multi-layered.

It is also evident that the author has emphasised topical chapters by the use of similar terminologies in the beginning and at the end. In every chapter the author uses clear and certain terms as well as typical motive words, so that the reader will find it easy to understand and capture. It is a very memorable description of the character and works of Jesus Christ. This clear description is based on the foundational Old Testament and its cultic rituals. It especially highlights Jesus' office as a high priest.

We can see how in the old, the new covenant was already prophetically introduced.

The church father Augustinus said: *„because the old covenant is nothing but **the concealing** of the new, and the new covenant is nothing but the **revelation** of the old“.*

In the OT all is aiming at and preparing for Jesus. All of the Old Testament services, such as the priesthood, the tabernacle, the temple, the altar, the sacrifice, the ceremonies and the feasts, they all point to our redeemer Jesus. All of this will then also be fulfilled and finished by Him. The OT unfolds a deep and rich picture of the coming "Messiah" (Greek: Christus) who was filled with the fullness of life through **Jesus of Nazareth.**

In the letter itself **there are no great, NT-like church structures to be recognized.** It just tells of gatherings and saints (Hebr. 13,24a). There were also no verbally communicated **episcopal offices** (bishops), **deacons** or **elders**. It just speaks about **leaders**, whose job it was to teach (Hebr.13,7) and give counsel (Hebr. 13,17). It does also not mention any charismas, which means spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit or some kind of church internal conflicts, as we can read in the 1. Epistle to the Corinthians.

RECIPIENTS

Just like the author does not mention his own name, there is no direct greeting or kind of mention of certain recipients. We do not know who wrote the heading **„to the Hebrews“**, maybe this happened when they added the letter to the Pauline letters. This heading surely leaves the impression, that we also receive when we read the letter - it is addressing **Christians of Jewish origin.** The **Jewish Christians** are often called **„Hebrews“** in the new testament (2.Cor 11,22/ Phil 3,5 / Act 6,1). The author is presuming a great familiarity of the readers with the history of the people of Israel, the law, the Jewish service and its order, etc.(Hebr. 1,1; 5,7-8,10; 2,6,12 etc.).

The gospel had reached them through apostles or other eye-witnesses of Jesus (Hebr. 2,1-3). They were direct witnesses of divine signs and wonders that the Holy Spirit had worked (Hebr. 2, 4). They must have been believers for a longer time. Because the author is reproaching them, saying that they should have been

masters and teachers of others a long time ago(Hebr. 5,12). Then he challenges them to remember the former days (Hebr.10,32) and reminds them of their teacher who died (Hebr.13,7). They had endured a great battle of suffering (Hebr. 10,32-34), which did not lead to a martyrdom in their case (Hebr. 12,4).

The recipients of the letter were endangered **to return to Judaism.** The Judaistic services and impressive ceremonies (Hebr. 9, 6-8,10,11; 13,10 etc.) were in strong contrast to the **simplicity** of their gatherings that were only spiritually oriented towards the heavenly and invisible and often took place in the houses of the poor. This also reveals to us that the recipients must be **Jewish Christians** who usually lived scattered across Jerusalem and perhaps even scattered across Palestine. Especially those were endangered to **fall**

back into the old structures of Judaism.

The **Epistle to the Hebrews** is supposed to strengthen the "Christian" church that has gotten into difficulties. He does this in several forms, for example by means of prophetic promises and threads.

The content is definitely addressing readers / hearers who are familiar with Jewish cult. Therefore it can be assumed that the authority of the Old Testament as a binding testimony of Jesus would be acknowledged by them. To acknowledge that God has proclaimed them »fathers« (Hebr. 1,1). This statement needed no further commentary or in depth explanation. They all knew about the promise and needed no further evidences. The believers knew that they were surrounded by a large „cloud of witnesses“ . Just as the identity of the author of this letter is hidden, so is the identity of the recipients. Also in this point there are different assumptions: The recipients of the letter were definitely a special group or community. It might have addressed the „Essenians“ or "Ex-Essenians". Besides the **Pharisees and scribes** there were also the Essenians who lived in community of goods and did not agree with the priestly caste . In the New Testament they are called „those who wait for the kingdom of God". They were looking for a pure and true church service.

The author referred to a certain story when he said: „*In the former days*“ (Hebr. 10,32-34). He also knew about their former and current charitable services for other Christians (Hebr. 6, 10). In the end he was informed in detail about their former and current spiritual condition (Hebr. 5,11 – 14). Obviously there was a real connection between the author and the recipients, because he expresses his intention to visit them - maybe together with Timothy (Hebr.13,19,23). He also asked them for **intercession** (Hebr. 13,18). Probably the potential readers had a Jewish background - the whole content of the letter suggests that assumption.

The heading: „**To the Hebrews**“ is surely something that was **added later** and totally suits the content of the letter. In the text a massive polemic against the pointless continuation of the Levitical system catches the eye. It is a clear denouncement of the limited, earthly Jewish- national thinking. The presented arguments are supposed to urgently warn the readers of falling back into their old faith.

We cannot say much about the **geographical location of the church of the recipients**. But it should be assumed, that this letter was rather addressing **Jewish-Christians** in Palestine, who were still relating to the Jewish ceremonial cult. The destruction of Jerusalem and its temple was imminent in the year of AD 70... Because of the allusions we have some evidence that the recipients of the letter might have been former followers of the Essenian Sect. They were firm against the existing priestly caste in Jerusalem and wanted to see the restoration of the true priesthood. They were established about 150 b.C. and separated themselves from religious Judaism because of their attitude toward the daily routine of temple service. This separation was effected after the victory of the Maccabees, as the Jewish community received a new order and conflicts in terms of temple and temple service came up. At last their protest was against the office of the highpriest and against stiff, alienable temple rituals. They wanted to be the true Israel. At the time of Jesus the Essenians had about 4000 members.

Furthermore many priests followed them and their Christian faith (Act. 6,7). These Essenians were a dissociation of the Sadducees. The **Sadducees** were a mighty Jewish group during the time of Jesus. Even though they were small in number they had great political influence. Sadducees followed conservative philosophical principles. They denied faith in resurrection, the continuation of the immortal souls and the existence of angels. They **denied** God's intervention in human affairs. To them only the law, the Thora had religious authority. They profited most by the temple market and the cult affairs in Jerusalem. Together with the Pharisees they formed the high council. Out of their rows the high priest was chosen and ordained (Mark.15,43 / Luk. 2,25,38). Therefore it is understandable where all of the people came from who continuously followed Jesus and listened to Him, such as in the wondrous feeding of the 5000 people, etc!

In the Epistle to the Hebrews there are many interesting statements that the author „**uses against**“ the **Essenians**. He depicts, for example, the desert experience of old Israel as a time of disbelief and spiritual failure. These are partly direct attacks against such sect members, for example the members of the Essenian Qumran sect, who **idealized a return into desert**. In addition this also explains the statement that the readers received „**their knowledge of the Lord**“ from people who heard Him personally (Hebr. 2,3). For example in Bethany, where **Lazarus**, Martha and Mary came from, was a typical „**Essenian colony**“. Jesus was often a guest at their house.

The letter might also have addressed the Jewish-Christians in the diaspora (diaspora = scattering) It is noticeable that they are advised not to leave their path and not to grow weary in the good fight of faith. The possibility of falling off to Paganism is not mentioned or referred to. It does also not speak about a **threatening Judaistic danger**, but rather only the omission of salvation and the fade of hope is pointed out.

The message of the letter simply expresses the concerns of a Jewish Christian preacher for a Jewish Christian church (Hebr. 2,1/ 3 / 4,1 / 10,38,35 / 3,18).

The falling from living faith in 'God is described in Hebr. 3,12 by the word „**hardening**“ of the heart, which can only refer to the children of Israel (also read Hebr. 6,1). This is not so much „**falling off**“, but rather **falling back** and repeated „*crucification of the Son of God*“ (Heb.6,6).

This fact goes forth from a remark in the letter. The author mentions that they already experienced persecution earlier and brought material offerings(Hebr.10,32ff.). He also points to it, that they are facing an argument again, that requires full attention (Hebr. 12,1ff.).

The greetings in the end of the letter are: "***Salute all them that have rule over you and all the saints!***"(Hebr. 13,24,7).

This might refer to James, Peter, John and other leading brothers of the Jerusalem church, or such that temporarily did the work or continued it. Therefore they underline this formulation: The word was first spoken by the Lord and then confirmed by those who heard it (Hebr. 2,3). The words of the author (comp. Hebr. 10,19 ff.; 12,1 ff.) addressing the concrete situation of a certain church, whose foundation obviously took place some time in the past, maybe even 2 or 3 generations before. The church members had to suffer trials and persecution but did not die as martyrs. They were facing a new storm that was coming up, maybe with regards to the final fall of Jerusalem in the year AD 70. They had to assume that again a serious time of persecution and need was going to come. In order to snatch the saints out of their fear and slackness (Hebr. 10,25) and to prevent another back sliding, the unknown apostle wrote this warning letter.

After the **martyrdom of James, the leader of the Jerusalem church and brother of Jesus** about AD 62 n. Chr, almost the whole **primitive Christian community** had emigrated to Pella in the East Jordan country by AD 66, which was shortly before the destruction of the temple.

From this letter we can **gather a complaint**, that is referring to a certain dullness in the hearing of God's word (Hebr. 5,11), the decrease of the former "love of His (God's) name" , lack of ministering to the saints (Hebr. 6,10), no more eagerness in their former works or service attendance (Hebr. 10,23-25). **It sounds as if the author fears** that the recipients of this letter would not prove themselves in the trials that were to come (Hebr. 12,4) as in the trials they had already gone through (Hebr. 10,32-35). In addition it mentions **typical problems** of Christian churches or groups of the second and third generation. Obviously they did not know how to deal with the prolonged time until Parousia (the expected second coming of Jesus. But especially Hebr. 5,11-14 and 6,9-12 let us assume that the author was aiming at special readers.

Miscellaneous about the Epistle to the Hebrews

In a text of the **gnostic Valentin** in Rome during the second century we find quotes from Hebrews 2,17; 3,2; 9,16 and a special emphasis on the "**peace of God**". Also the apocryphal text of the **Barnabas-letter** (perhaps about AD 150) which was written in one of the Christian churches of Alexandria, there are quotes from the letter to the Hebrews.

The letters of Paul and Peter reflect the external and internal situation of the first Christian churches with all their joy and needs, trials and difficulties. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we rather see a theological main thought that is a complex theme and artfully developed in the text. This essential difference between the letter to the Hebrews and the other letters in the NT always caused people to assume that this is actually not a letter but rather a **written sermon**. It is more a text of proclamation and teaching than a letter. The letter to the Hebrews addresses a certain situation within a church. This church is in the process of cutting the cord of the OT and Judaism in order to develop progressively. This letter was not a spontaneously written text, but rather shows a concrete and systematic structure for the education of the believers.

Everything in this letter **is focusing on the personality of Jesus** in His symbioses of divine and human nature. We encounter an endlessly merciful Jesus who suffers and feels with us, facing all of our human weaknesses. Merciful, human compassion and sympathy are important and foundational for an effective ministry of an excellent priest (a good shepherd). This way the „saints“ (believers) who have to dwell here on earth are connected with the spirit of heaven and God. This is the church on earth – formed and blessed by the Holy Spirit. They represent Jesus through the Spirit of God on earth as His body and His members. Jesus is our eternal intercessor in heaven for every one of us and the only divine connection to the eternal and holy God.

This new perspective finally puts away Judaism spiritually as well as mentally. Those who believe in Jesus Christ have no carnal, but only a heavenly calling. While Israel was rather called in the flesh and had a spiritual symbolic meaning. But true Christianity knows no call according to the flesh. Jesus also states again and again, that His kingdom is very different and not of this world or consisting of material substance. The relation can be compared to the body which is the external vessel in the visible and the soul and spirit which is the fruit of the inside, the invisible side.

When we die what's on the inside will separate from the external, and one part will remain here on earth, and the spirit will return to God, the omnipresent heavenly Father.

The „heavenly priesthood“ of Jesus represents a new thing.

The Godhead Christ forms the foundation of the authority of the revealed word of God through the voice of God (Ch.1). This topic is continued in **Chapter 3**. There also the high authority that Christ had - as opposed to Moses - being the Son of the house (till Ch. 4,13). This chapter closes with the divine promise of a peaceful rest for the all those who believe in God. **Chapter 2** lays the foundation for the future reign and the present priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ in His human nature. This topic is continued in chapter 4, 14. In **Chapter 5** the glory of the person and ministry of Jesus Christ is unfolded. After that the author emphasizes, that it is now impossible to return to the elements of Judaism. If somebody turns away from the heavenly, or Christian things, that the word of God had revealed there would be no power to bring them back. The Hebrews were supposed to continue in their personal growth on the foundation of divine word revelation.

God Himself encouraged them, by confirmation of the promises of His counsel by a divine vow. We can already look into the inside which is hidden behind the holy curtain where Christ is a forerunner for us and already works as the high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Surely the letter of Hebrews is addressing such Christians, who are showing weariness and a tendency to fall back as soon as they face disappointment. They developed their tendency to go back to the old Judaism which was enflamed anew. These zealous Zealots formed a paramilitary rebellion of the Jews against the Roman occupation. They wanted to deliver Israel and Judaism from the Romans in the style of the Maccabees and re-establish the reign of God according to their belief. This text was supposed to keep all the believers from the destructive fall back into the conservative Judaism. It can also be assumed that in **Hebr. 6** and 10 that it addresses backsliding Jews, that were strongly influenced by the ceremonial temple cult of Jerusalem. These were perhaps encouraged by the Jewish zealots in a fanatic way, to turn to the temple cult and Judaism with more intensity. Behind it was the purpose to save the temple which was about to be destroyed.

During the civil war the Zealots who were Jewish fanatics, usually belonged to the priestly party that ruled in the temple. They were the left wing of the Pharisees and were the thriving power in the rebellion against the Romans. As we know, the temple of Jerusalem and the Jewish state were destroyed and the Jewish cult was prohibited. In the year AD 70 the last 973 Jewish rebels committed suicide at the fortress of Masada. Since the destruction of Jerusalem and the corresponding conditions are not mentioned in this text, we can assume that the letter was written at a time shortly before these events could be foreseen. It is impossible that the author missed such tremendous events or just did not mention them.

In **Hebr. 8,4** and **9.6** the offering of sacrifices are addressed in the present tense. This shows us that the author is referring to the sacrifices offered in the temple. Therefore the author probably made a prophetic declaration in Hebr. 2,3 concerning the destruction of the temple and the subsequent abolishment of the sacrificial offerings.

Therefore the author of the letter wants to warn the Christians of the backsliding into Judaism which was doomed to fall and rather encouraged them to strengthen their confession in Christ Jesus. The believers were supposed to be delivered "from their bondage to the temple services". They were supposed to be delivered from the Jewish cult, and the author tries to help them by showing them the „better part“. The main target was probably to encourage the faithful believers for the coming fight of faith where they would have to suffer the destruction of Jerusalem. God in His merciful patience and love, does nothing without sending warnings to His beloved, His children, His servants and maids through prophetic announcements (Amos 3,7).

It further shows, in what kind of condition the church was and what they had to expect in the future (Hebr. 10,32 ff. / 12,1 ff.). As Christians who confessed Jesus they had to be prepared for massive,

threatening **persecutions**. In such a severe situation that was about to come over them, there was the real danger of **rebellion** in their spiritual disposition, because many their faith was weaker than the fear that rose in them (Hebr.12,4).

Even when we read the letter we feel how the author is leading us in the Old Testament and shows a certain form of interpretation and understanding of the text.

In the letter of Hebrews we see the foundation of the interpretation of the Old testament. In addition it also teaches us **how to interpret and understand the Old Testament the right way**, and that all that was prophesied in the text, was **fulfilled in Jesus**, or will continue to be fulfilled in Jesus. The Old Testament can **only be understood through and with Jesus** and also the other way around. The Old Testament finds its purpose and meaning only in Christ Jesus.

The whole OT is a **christological – messianic book**. The **OT is interpreted from the point of knowledge of Christ** and serves the purpose of unmeasurable importance and the higher glory of Christ and His church. The author of the letter sees how the way of salvation is already pointed out in the OT, in a similar way like Paul also described it (1. Cor. 10,1-13). He finds the words in the old text that described the character of Christ, His priesthood and the way of His suffering. In **Hebr. 3 and 4** he shows us how Jesus **"apostel and highpriest"** encourages the people of God not to reject the promise of salvation.

Everything that the apostels taught and wrote was based on the Old Testament and used as a foundation for all their claims and statements. The OT was their bible, the **"Logos"**. They were in perfect harmony with the logos, the old text. The preachers and authors of the New Testament preached about the available material with great spiritual liberty. They preached and interpreted the text of the OT and tried to help all who listened to understand the precious word of God. The clear focus on Jesus as the only center of all revelations of God kept them from backsliding into philosophical speculations. The depicted message of the OT shows us that the matters were not regarded from a scientific or historical background, but that it is only about **the message of the Holy Spirit**, what God wants to tell us, and how we can see the Son of God by the help of the Holy Spirit.

The author interprets the OT in the light of the new order of salvation and sees the shadow of the old law as an already accomplished truth of God. Through the parables of the OT he unlocks and reveals the hidden remarks to the present time of salvation (Hebr. 9,9). Even the way he describes the history of **Moses : ... choosing rather to suffer with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of Egypt and choosing the reproach of Christ** (Hebr. 11,24 ff.). He also claims that Christ is speaking to the believers in **Psalms 95** (Hebr. 3,7-11). The interpreters and authors of the NT have interpreted the words of the scripture based on the **present time** and therefore made it understandable for the reader. **They turned the past into the present and future**, established a new understanding of time and named Jesus the center of God's plans. Jesus Himself also practised the interpretation of scripture in that manner. It is looking at all aspects of the scripture from the viewpoint of eternity and eschatology. Reminder - **Eschatologie** is the theological teaching of the external and last things, of the hope for perfection of all creation. Therefore the words of the Old Testament are translated into the invisible world of spirit and faith.

Our letter to the Hebrews was already **famous and acknowledged in the Christian churches at an early time**. The admission into the canon of the New Testament was decided by the responsible leaders of the churches under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. The Epistle to the Hebrews was also supposed to be revealed to all Christianity, along with the other scriptures that were chosen.

PURPOSE AND GOAL of the Epistle to the Hebrews

This letter has **two purposes**: First of all it is **teaching material**. Through logical reasoning the untouchable sovereignty of Jesus Christ and His works based on evidence of the scriptures of the OT. Apparently the readers found it hard to believe **that the time of the Mosaic law was irrevocably over**, and that Jesus was not only someone who brought reformation to renew the religion of their fathers. **He was the creator of the ultimate redemption era** of merciful grace and love.

The **second** was a **practical purpose**. The **Jewish Christians**, still „children of faith“ were **supposed to become mature** and be aware of the dangers: falling back, being luke-warm, disbelief. Their lack of

knowledge of the holy person Jesus Christ had to be met. Therefore he explains to them how Jesus is the wonderful and perfect fulfillment of all that their OT role models said and did. He showed them how they were only the shadow of the appearance of Christ. Because only a deep knowledge of Christ Jesus could fill the spiritual gaps in their life.

Melchizedek and the priesthood of Jesus

Melchizedek is more than just a legendary character. In the holy scripture he is only mentioned two times besides in this letter: in Psalm 110,4 and in Gen. 14. According to Gen. 14,17-20 Abraham gave to the priest king Melchizedek the **„tithes of everything“**. As a giver he acknowledged the **higher dignity** of Melchizedek. If now (the great) Abraham pays his tithes to Melchizedek, then he acknowledges the position of the priest king. For the Jews Abraham was and is a central character of faith, so that the descendants of Abraham and of Levi would pay their tithes to Melchizedek. Therefore the high priest Melchizedek is above Abraham and over all of his descendants (Hebr. 7,4-10).

That which was said about Melchizedek, the author applies it to Jesus. In addition there are more reasons: the priesthood of the old covenant (of the Levites) did not lead to true fulfillment. Therefore a new priesthood according to a new order was necessary. This came through Jesus, who did not come from the tribe of Levi, but of the tribe of Judah.

Jesus is the highpriest according to the divine order of Melchizedek. The author is well aware that he risks a lot with this statement. To him the cultic order of the old covenant, which includes all regulations concerning the sacrifices, the cleansing and priesthood belong to the main topics of the bible. If this order is now dramatically changed - and this happened by the introduction of a new priesthood according to a different and totally new order - then also the divine law in its entirety changes from the viewpoint of the author.

According to Hebr. 7,18 all of it was abolished **„because it was weak and useless“**. Now Jesus started something new that was more effective than the sacrifices of the old covenant. Psalm 110,4 gives an explanation by God Himself, because God personally sealed the new priesthood of Jesus (Hebr. 7,20-24). **Jesus is therewith the bail** of a new, better and eternal covenant and His priesthood is eternal.

The meaningful main topic of this letter is Jesus, the only true and right highpriest. Hebr. 4,14-16 strongly emphasises it and further explains this in Hebr. 5,1-10,18. Father God appointed Jesus as the highpriest. He finished God's plan of salvation which was from the beginning. This way Jesus received all honor and sovereignty over all imaginations of redemption that people had, especially the imaginations of the Jews. Because everything that the Jews knew up to this point **were only the shadows of preparation**, more metaphorical events of lower but necessary and foundational order (Hebr. 9,1-14).

The Epistle to the Hebrews depicts the sovereignty of Jesus:

- Hebr. 7,1-28 The sovereignty of Jesus as the highpriest according to the order of Melchizedek.
- Hebr. 8,1-5 The sovereignty of Jesus as a highpriest of the heavenlies.
- Hebr. 8,6-13 The sovereignty of Jesus as the highpriest of the new covenant.
- Hebr. 9,1-7 The sanctuary of the old covenant in its function and order.
- Hebr. 9,8-14 The sanctuary of the old covenant as a metaphor.
- Hebr. 9,15-28 The sovereignty of Jesus as the mediator of the new covenant.
- Hebr. 10,1-18 The sovereignty of Jesus as the true sacrifice.

In this text we find more exaltations of Jesus: The priests of the old covenant were the **Levites**. Jesus, however is from the tribe of Judah. It has to be explained how Jesus can also be a priest even though He was not a **descendant of Levi**.

The author finds the explanation which is not quite easy for us to understand in the biblical character of priest king Melchizedek, who is already mentioned in Hebr. 5,6.

The Lord Jesus is greater than Aaron (Hebr. 4,14 bis 10,18). Aaron and his descendants were surely great, but Jesus is greater. He is without sin, but they were sinful (Hebr. 4,15). He is priest according to an older and higher order than that of Aaron (Hebr. 5,6). Aaron and all His descendants would never have been able to take on that position (Hebr. 6,20). Abraham realized that Melchizedek was greater than he

himself (Hebr. 7,4). **The order of Melchizedek is an eternal order** (Hebr. 7,16-17). Aaron was rather a shadow and Jesus the reality (Hebr. 8,1-5). Jesus served as the perfect mediator of a better covenant (Hebr. 8,6-13) in a better sanctuary (Hebr. 9,1-25) offering up a better sacrifice (Hebr. 9,25-28). **The old covenant is only a shadow of the new covenant** which could only replace the old by fulfilling it. The covenant was sealed with blood (Gen. 15 compare with Ex. 24,6–8 and Mat. 26,28) and enforced by a common meal.

Christ is the perfect priest before God (Hebr. 7,25-28). In Him we have a highpriest who can bring our requests directly before God and who saved us by His sacrifice once and for all. While all the Jewish priests were human and imperfect. By the vow of God Jesus is the true Son of God (Psalm 2,7) and is therewith the eternal priest (Psalm 110,4).

Christ is the mighty mediator of the new covenant (Hebr. 8,1-13). This new covenant was already announced in Jer. 31,31-34 and started with Jesus. Forgiveness and reconciliation with God is the most important thing. That which was the old covenant and the priests and sacrifices could not do Jesus Christ can do. In Hebrews it is the fruit of the sacrifice of the high priest Jesus. **The forgiveness of sin and reconciliation** is also the foundation of salvation for the fellowship with God. The Levite priesthood, the whole order of ceremonies and the sanctuary are only a weak image of the heavenly. Only the heavenly is eternal and truly real. **A very bold statement** and a strong contrast to the ideas and faith at that time.

The center of the book of Hebrews is salvation and redemption. First of all the author displays the majesty and the humiliation of the Son of God who became a man. And in His perfection (Hebr. 4,15) He offered himself as a sacrifice to pay the ransom for all the guilt once and for all (Hebr. 7,27/ 9,27ff.). The redemptive act of Jesus cannot and is not supposed to be repeated.

Christ represents reconditioning of the old sacrifices, the law and the old covenant. This is the overcoming of the old covenant. Jesus Christ is therefore **witness and bondsman** of a better covenant (Hebr. 7,22 / comp. also Hebr. 8,6) which is the new covenant sealed with His blood. He is the mediator of the new covenant / testament (9,15; also read 12,24). The **better promises** of this better covenant (8,6) lead us on a wonderful way of salvation to a better hope, the patience and endurance (Hebr. 10,36; 12,1) in the tribulations of this world. After that the author is mentioning many exhortations and encouragements (Hebr.10,19ff.) with regard to the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebr.12,22/ comp.13,14).

A **special theological problem** can be found in the warning of the author of the **impossibility of a „second“ repentance:** Hebr. 6,4–8;10,26–31. On one hand the rejection of a second repentance can be considered a consequence of the onetime self-sacrifice of Christ, which is promoted in this letter (Hebr. 10,12.14.18), on the other hand it has to be added that this is not an inevitable consequence: compare for example Hebr 6,9ff. Remember that this is not a teaching about repentance but a christological text. The remark about the **impossibility of a second repentance** are mainly to be understood as ultimate warnings that warn not to just give up so easily on things we have accomplished in Christ and therefore jeopardize your own salvation.

Jesus is highpriest according to the order of Melchizedek

In Hebr. 7,1-10,18 we find the „**highpriest - christology**“, that builds the foundation of the whole letter to the Hebrews. **Melchizedek** was the king of Salem (Jerusalem)(comp. Gen. 14,18-20). In the Old Testament he is called the highpriest of God the most High who blesses the works of God. He appears in the story of salvation when he blessed Abraham, the father of the Jews and he offered his tithes to him. You can only be blessed by someone who is higher. **Melchizedek is also translated „king of righteousness**, who holds a divine office (comp. also Ps.104,4). Also the title is transferred to Jesus. King of kings, lord of lords and prince of princes, God the Father, in Jesus Christ.

Therefore **Melchizedek** as one of the oldest and acknowledged by God from eternity as a highpriest is the right term to describe the characteristics of Jesus as king, priest and prophet. These **offices** of Jesus were publically mocked and ridiculed by the Jews and the people when he was whipped and crucified (Mat. 26,67-68; 27,27-31).

Melchizedek was a highpriest also for the Gentiles, respectively all people. That there is no date of his birth or death in the bible, the OT presents **Melchizedek** as a mysterious character without a beginning or an end. Just like the Godhead exists without time and space. **Melchizedek's** character and actions seem to be a parallel to Jesus. With this thought the NT follows a simple line of Rabbinic thinking: **If something is not written in the Thora it does not exist in the world.** This also addresses the antique distinction between carnal and immortal (comp. Hebr. 7,8). I

In this case **Melchizedek** (Hebr. 7,7) was superior to Abraham. He blessed him. This gesture of sovereignty makes it clear that the Levitical priesthood was inferior, not perfect. It was not yet born or established (Hebr. 7,10-19). The highpriesthood of Christ does not apply to the order of Aaron (Hebr. 7,11). Jesus Christ originated from the tribe of Judah. He was from the house of David (Mat.1,3), about whom there is no word concerning a priestly office in the Thora (Hebr. 7,13ff.). He did not become the priest of God according to the fleshly law, but according to the power of eternal life (V. 15-17).

Hebr. 7,20-28 again shows **the sovereignty of Jesus as a priest** towards the human priests **in three ways** : (1) He became priest with a divine vow, but they are **without a vow** (V. 20-22). (2) He is **immortal**, they are mortal (V. 23-25). (3) He is **without sin** but they have to bring a sacrifice for their own sins (V. 26-28).

In **Chapter 8** the highpriest Jesus is seated at the right hand of God in heaven, „a servant of the heavenly sanctuary and the true tabernacle“. Jesus has now reached the original of the tabernacle, that Moses could only see from afar and built in the desert based on his own memory (comp. Ex. 25,8,40).

The priesthood also required the offering sacrifices. But before the question of sacrifices is dealt with, the change of the covenant is introduced. Based on this change the whole priestly ministry is established. **Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant.** He is perfectly human and yet He was God. In Him dwells the fullness of the mighty Godhead (Col. 2,9), and therefore He is the only mediator between God and humanity (Rom. 5,15-19 / Tim. 2,5 / 1.Cor. 3,22-23 / 2.Cor. 5,14-20.). He is the God who was made visible to us children of God. He is the true mediator of Divine grace, patience, mercy, love and kindness (Joh.1,16-17 / Eph.1,7). He also mediated the final revelation for us (Hebr. 1,1-2). In heaven He stands in the gap for us as the eternal intercessor (Hebr. 7,25). His pleas are similar to those of the Holy Spirit and He is filled with the the spirit of the Father with the most intimate unity (comp. Rom. 8,34,27 / 1. Joh. 2,1). In the heavenly and better tabernacle there are no longer any animal sacrifices required and there will be no more animal sacrifices offered.

But in the tabernacle there was one difference. In the old Jewish tabernacle the curtain was not torn. **It separated the holy place from the holy of holies.** But now it is torn. Therefore the Holy Spirit is pointing to the fact that as long as the first tabernacle existed the way to the holy of holies was barred.

The high priest was only allowed to go there once a year under very strict security measures and regulations of purity (comp. Lev. 10,1-5 etc.). Different from the sacrifices of the old covenant the blood of Christ cleanses not only our sins but also our conscience and effects the whole relationship between the creature and the creator. The other difference is that Christ **did not have to be offered up more than once**, to enter into the heavenly holy place. Then He would have had to suffer more than once. Because of the original sin of humanity which caused them to have hard hearts without love and a very weak will, the sacrifice of Jesus was, is and remains **once and for all**. This powerful, divine, sacrificial work of Jesus never has to be repeated anymore.

God Himself offered up Himself in His fatherly love and wisdom in His Son Jesus Christ, to pay the ransom of the guilt of all fallen souls who were therefore separated from their creator. In the moment of His sacrificial, physical death His unflinching love flows into the heart of every soul. With this divine salvation our fall was put to an end and the way back home to our heavenly Father was opened. He will return to all those who wait for Him faithfully and patiently (Ch. 9).

CONTENT AND CHAPTERS

I. teaching part

a) The sovereignty of the person Christ

Jesus is greater than the **prophets**.

Jesus is greater than the **angels**

First exhortation: How do we want to escape...

Humiliation of angels...

...the fact

...the necessity

...the blessing

Jesus is greater than **Moses**.

Second exhortation: Today as you hear His voice...

Jesus is greater than **Aaron**.

Third exhortation: Do not grow wear...

Jesus is greater than **Melchizedek**.

Ch. 1, 1 - 7, 28

1, 1 - 3

1, 4 - 14

2, 1- 4

2, 5 -18

Vers 5 - 9

10 - 13

14 - 18

Ch. 3, 1 - 6

3, 7 - 4, 13

4, 14 - 5, 10

5, 11 - 6, 20

7, 1 - 28

b) <u>The sovereignty of His high priestly office.</u>	8, 1 - 10, 18
The heavenly ministry.	8, 1 - 5
The new mediator (New Testament)	8, 6 - 13
The priestly office	9, 1 - 10
The onetime sacrificial death.	9, 11 - 10, 18

II. Practical part

a) <u>exhortation to steadfastness in faith</u>	Ch. 10, 19 - 13, 25
we can boldly enter heaven's most holy place	10, 19 - 25
it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God.	10, 26 - 31
The righteous will live by faith.	10, 32 - 11, 40
looking up to Jesus the beginner and fulfiller of faith	12, 1 - 11
Work at living in peace and living a holy life	12, 12 - 29
Remain steadfast in brotherly love	13, 1 - 19
Blessings and greetings	13, 20 - 25

key word: **perfection** (better)

key verse: „***But now Jesus, our High Priest, has been given a ministry that is far superior to the old priesthood, for He is the one who mediates for us a far better covenant with God, based on better promises***“ (Hebr. 8,6).

b) MISCELLANEOUS

Five dangers:

- | | |
|--|-----------------|
| 1. The danger to disregard salvation. | Ch 2, 11 |
| 2. The danger of hardening . | 7, 8 - 15 |
| 3. The danger of falling back | 5, 11; 6, 1 - 2 |
| 4. The danger of conscious sin. | 10, 19 - 39 |
| 5. The danger of neglecting salvation. | 12, 14 - 29 |

Detailed INTERPRETATION

I. Teaching part

The sovereignty of the person Christ. (Hebr. 1,1 - 7,28)

In the following chapter the Holy Spirit reveals the whole importance of the sacrifice of Christ.

Somebody who has been cleansed by this sacrifice has no bad conscience and no bad feelings based on sin anymore. He has a clean conscience because his heart was cleansed by the sacrifice of Jesus. He is no longer burdened. The devil can no longer accuse him. There is nothing that can separate us from God anymore.

In the old covenant there were always **continuous sacrifices** and therefore a continuous remembrance of the sin and immorality. In the new covenant God gave His Son a carnal body. Christ offered up Himself in the place of all humanity. Therefore all God-given requirements and expectations were met. Just like Jesus came into the physical body, He assumed His seat at the right hand of God as our eternal intercessor and mediator, after the fulfillment of His mission on earth. With only one sacrifice Jesus Christ satisfied our creator God Father, sanctified us and reconciled us with Him.

Also the Holy Spirit testifies that when He says: „***I will no longer remember their sins and lawlessness.***“ Thus we have perfect, unchangeable peace and assurance of divine health, confirmed by the Spirit of God. That is what the author of this letter wants to tell us. The curtain that once separated man and God is torn forever. Everybody who enters the sanctuary by faith in God and receiving Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour, is welcome in the sanctuary of God. At the same time he can also enter the holy of holies, where earlier only the highpriest could enter once a year. Since this is now, once and forever, the author warns not

to disregard or disrespect the works of Jesus, because there is no other chance for us to be redeemed, there are no more sacrifices that can be offered.

This letter is addressing the Hebrews and therefore **connects** two big chapters of the salvation story. The era of the law had past. The sacrifices of the temple who were once so meaningful had lost their importance. To practice what God required earlier had even become sin for the saints now. This is one of the things that the letter emphasizes. It is addressing Jewish-Christians, even though the statements also apply to all believers of all races and all times, at the same time. His words are still of great importance for as Christians nowadays.

Since we cannot **prove who exactly is the author of this letter**, we just have to assume that this was the way of the Holy Spirit. Only He can truly describe the heavenly ministry, office and function of Jesus Christ, comment on it and glorify it. Therefore the exact date of the letter is also secondary.

Straightforwardly the author gets concrete about the central figure of Jesus Christ.

The one who is superior to all the other prophets, redeemers, saviours, priests, judges, leaders or helpers of all times. Yes, He is even greater and higher than the highest angels. The Son of God, Jesus, is the one who carries revelation and is the key witness thereof. 'The first 10 chapters of this letter show, that Christ is better than the old system of the OT. The second and last part of this letter is very practical. It highlights that Jesus brings better charitable works and better requirements. We can also find this scheme in some of Paul's letter. He starts with the teaching part and ends with a practical part.

Jesus is greater than the angels. (Hebr. 1,1 – 2,4)

Jesus is greater than all the prophets before Him (Hebr. 1, 1-3). Already in this first verse of this book the author speaks about God. And it is similar Genesis where there is no attempt to prove the existence of God. Both books presume without a comment that God exists and that there is an Almighty creator.

The first verse of the letter of Hebrews emphasizes, that the scriptures we have were inspired by God. The revelation he is referring to is the revelation of the Old Testament, as we know it today. God's revelations were given to men „several times“ or "in several ways". The author of the letter of Hebrews wants to show us that the revelations of God were given to us in „different“ ways. The **prophets** always adapted the message to the time they lived in. He puts emphasis on the fact that God spoke, for example, through **Moses** but before that He spoke to Abraham.

To **Abraham** He seemed to speak through dreams or by sending Him the angel of the Lord. But when He spoke to Abraham, He did not say what He told Moses later. To Abraham God did not mention the law. He also did not give Him the 10 commandments that He gave through Moses. And much later, when **David** was already an old man, 'God revealed to him, that a king would come forth of his ancestral line, who would be the saviour of human kind. This information God did not reveal to Moses nor Abraham. This first verse shows us that God did not reveal all of His truth to Abraham, but rather revealed it piece by piece as he dealt with different people. And when the time was full, God sent His only Son. **In the bible we can see the process of the revelation of God's truth.**

Furthermore the first verse reports **that God used different methods**, to speak or communicate with people. Sometimes He used dreams, sometimes the law, another time symbols or rituals. He communicated in very different ways and also revealed Himself in historical events. Often God spoke and still speaks through prophets. God the Father used a multitude of methods. He used about **45 authors** within a timeframe of **about 1500 years** to communicate His holy, divine word to His children. That means, people that God used as His tools only contained a certain, chosen part of the absolute truth. Always just as much to meet the needs of the spiritual conditions at that time. It was never something untimely, unimportant or not understandable. It was always fitting the requirements regarding the current season of that time.

This revelation was in fragmentary at the same time, because the limits of receptivity of that time had to be considered. It is interesting **that each prophet received was motivated by a certain idea.** For example **Amos** by the call for social justice, **Isaiah** by the thought of God's holiness. **Hosea**, however, was aware of the miracle of God's love, due to his own personal experiences. All of the prophets, because of their own experience and the knowledge of the people of Israel, had captured a part of God's divine truth and expressed it in their ministry. But none of the prophets had understood the fullness of the truth. Opposed to this Jesus Christ is the personified God, who does not know only one part of the truth, but rather is the fullness of the truth Himself now and forever more.

After many prophets who prepared the way, God sent a special messenger who was more than just an assigned speaker like the others. **He is the „Son“** (comp. Mark.12,2 - 6 / Rom.1,4).

He Himself is the word (Joh. 1,14). Jesus is the „work of God“ Himself (also read 1. Thes.1,10 / 1. Cor. 6,14; 15,15 / 2. Cor. 4,14 / Gal. 1,1. / Rom. 4,24; 10,9).

In Jesus God did not reveal Himself only in part, but in a perfect way. In Jesus God did not unfold a certain aspect of the truth, but God revealed Himself fully through Him and made Himself known to us. The prophets had used all kind of methods, such as speech, or if that did not succeed they used a very dramatic action (1. Kin. 11, 29 – 32 / Jer. 13, 1 – 9; 27, 1 – 7 / Ez. 4, 1 – 3; 5,1 – 4). The prophets had to use human means to demonstrate their knowledge of divine truth to the people. But Jesus revealed God merely by His **“presence”**, the great **„I am“** who He was and is. Even more so, by His words and deeds Jesus showed us through His life who God really is.

Jesus is the end of a long, step by step revelation of God regarding the O.T. Jesus was the likeness of God. The Son is the visible revelation of the Father, the invisible God (Phil. 2,6 / Col.1,15). He carries all things by the power of His word (Hebr. 1,3). The carrying is referring to the maintenance and rulership. Both are contained in God (Numb. 11,112 / Is. 9,6).

Through the prophets God revealed Himself in a wonderful and manifold way. But all that was only in part. Jesus revealed God to us in a perfect way. In other words: the prophets were only very close friends of God, but Jesus was and is the Son of God. Or in other words: the prophets were chosen children of God and Jesus is God the creator Himself, He is the embodiment of the Father. The prophets understood the Spirit of God in part, Jesus was the Spirit of God. In the letter to the Hebrews we see the superiority of Jesus in the way of all revelations and messages of God. Therefore it does not claim that there is a breach between the revelation of the Old and New testament. On the opposite the author much more points out the continuity which climaxes in perfection. **“After God used to speak to the fathers many times and in many ways...”** - these are Abraham, Isaac, Joshua, Moses, David, Isaiah, etc. It is said: „God said“. In the Old Testament God spoke through His prophets, it started with **Enoch**, the first of all prophets (Jud. 14,15).

Nobody is called by name so that one name would be exalted: Jesus (Mat. 1, 21 / Acts. 4,12). Those are especially the patriarchs and prophets. Many of them received very impressive and remarkable messages from God, which they collected. All prophetic messages together form the Old Testament. But all of that was far from completion. There was the Babylonian captivity. In this exile the revelations of the Lord continued. Ezra was the first scribe. He collected all the revelations. In the ongoing discussion the knowledge of God was continuously advancing. This is when they started to interpret the scriptures. Usually without the help of the Holy Spirit but the Rabbinic ways of disputing their doctrines. And then Jesus came, the Son of God, who revealed and communicated God in a very different, unknown way.

In these „last days“ He spoke to us through His Son...(Hebr. 1,2). This is the central statement of the letter. And it closes the Old Testament. All divine revelations and every prophecy of the Old Testament are fulfilled when the Son of God appeared and started to work among us.

This was the culminatin highlight of all former communication of God. From this point on every divine revelation and every work of God is focused on Jesus Christ alone, including the works of the Holy Spirit. In the following verses the author describes the „glory of the Son“. The author wants to lift up high the Son of God.

Christ according to Ch 1

1. The heir of all things.	Vers 2
2. The creator of the universe	Vers 2
3. The hope of glory.	Vers 3
4. The image of God.	Vers 3
5. The sustainer of all things.	Vers 3
6. The saviour.	Vers 3
7. The king upon His throne.	Vers 3
8. The Father's begottenn Son.	Vers 5
9. The anointed of God.	Vers 9
10. The Lord of eternity.	Vers 10 – 12

In Jesus we have seven better things:

1. A better covenants.	Ch. 7, 22
2. A better office.	8, 6
3. A better inheritance.	10, 34
4. A better hope.	7, 19

5. A better sacrifice.	9, 23
6. A better home.	11, 16
7. A better resurrection.	11, 35

7 eternal things:

1. An eternal High Priest.	7, 2
2. Eternal salvation.	5, 9
3. Eternal judgment.	6, 2
4. An eternal Spirit.	9, 14
5. An eternal inheritance.	9, 15
6. Eternal redemption.	9, 12
7. An eternal covenant.	13, 20

Just like Jesus is superior to all the prophets, He is also the highest Master over all the priests and their sacrifices according to the law of the old covenant. He was created for „**the cleansing of our sins**“ (Hebr.1,3). This spiritual, cleansing of the soul contains the reconciliation with God in His untouchable holiness (Hebr. 2,17). It is the fulfilled satisfaction of God and His regulations concerning our sins. The reconciliation is a fulfilled work.

God made Him heir of all things. He is the ruler of the universe appointed by God (Luk.1,33 / Phil. 2,2,5 -11). And He is already enthroned. He is the one who was from the beginning. He is the creator of the universe (comp. Joh. 1, 3 / Col. 1, 16 / Hebr. 11, 3). He Himself is the reflection and presence of the eternal God (comp. Col. 2,9). He is the creative expression and genius incarnation of the holy being of God (comp. 2. Cor. 3,18).

He saves us from all of our sins. Remember: Sin is rebellion against God. Jesus stopped this rebellion by perfect submission and obedience to the will of God (also read 2. Cor. 5,19 / Is. 53). When He created the earth the angels rejoiced (Job 38, 7). But when He bore our sins He was all alone. Alone in Gethsemane and alone on the cross. In psalm 102 His emotions are expressed (Psalm 88,19) until He cried: „**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**“ (Hebr.1,6) **His throne remains from eternity to eternity**, even though for a short time He was lower than the angels. His kingdom comes soon. Soon He will come back with power and glory (Rev. 19,11ff.) and He will reign over all, the visible and invisible. In the invisible world Jesus already assumes this high position. To Him is given all power (Mat. 28,18). The glorified Christ already performing with this unlimited power within true church on earth and in heaven (comp. Mat, 6,10 / Joh.17,2 / Phil.2,10 / Rev.12,10).

Because of the greatness and sovereignty of the Son of God every study of some angels or other spirits are totally pointless (comp. Mat. 17,5). Jesus is greater than all the authors of the old testament (O.T.) together, because He is the perfect fulfillment of the whole O.T. (comp. Joh.16,15 / Joh.1,3). To Him alone belonged and still belongs the whole creation. He proved this by action when He entered this earth, the deepest point of creation. In every area He worked amazing signs and wonders. He had perfect divine control over all of His established laws of nature, just like He once granted them to Adam and Eve before the fall of men in the Garden of Eden.

Christ is the one who will inherit all things. Such a promise was granted to none of the prophets. The author of the letter is pointing out that Christ is greater than the prophets of the O.T. **Jesus is the reflection of God**, denn He reveals God to us. He is the image of God, which means that He has the same character like God (also read Col. 2,9).

He is greater than the angels (Hebr. 1,4 - 14). In the Old Testament angels always play an important role in the course of events. The law, the commandments and all the regulations for church services were once given to the Israelites by the help of angels (comp Acts 7,53 / Gal. 3,19). But now Jesus outshines all the angels by far. He is much better, sovereign and higher than all the angels, because He once created them. This is the message of this text. Jesus reflects the glory of the Lord. In HIM we know that the purpose of the glory of God is not to squash us, or make us slaves or any such thing. He loves us, ministers to us and even died for us. The glory of God is not glorious violence but rather glorious love.

The Son is higher than the angels. (Hebr. 1,5 –14) because He is the Lord of the world and mediator of creation (Hebr. 2,5,10). For the purpose of His holy ministry He was humiliated and hidden for a time – made equal to His brothers – because this was the only way He could become the High Priest of them (Hebr. 2,17; comp. also Hebr. 4,15). The center of Christology (the teaching about Jesus) in the letter of Hebrews reveals to us the High Priest who is the warranty of the new covenant. Christ is a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek and sovereign to the Aaronical and Levitical priesthood (Hebr. 7,1-21).

In the bible the angels form the heavenly **royal household of God** (Hebr. 1,4,6). The exaltation of the Son over the angels underlines the eternal reign that includes all things. It is very possible that the author wants to distinguish the salvation of Jesus from all faith in angels, angelic cult, etc.

Jesus is more sovereign and powerful, and therefore much better than the angels.

At first the sovereignty over the angels is emphasized. The Jews boasted how they received the law through the angels (Hebr. 2,2 / Act. 7,53 / Gal. 3,19). In addition the Jews also worshiped the angels (Col. 2,18 / 1.Tim.1,4). The author proves that Jesus has revealed more to us and has done greater than things than the angels ever did. Jesus even prepared the way for for the coming of the Holy Spirit (comp. Joh.17,1-11). The revelation that was bound to the Mosaic law (Thora) and the Israelites, had now come to all men through Jesus.

The names of Jesus in the bible already proclaimed Him greater than any angel. Angels bow down in reverence before Him and rejoice in Him. God Himself calls Him „Son“ and commands His angels to worship Him. Nevertheless God also says great things about the angels. They have great assignments such as rolling the stone away when Jesus rose from the dead.

The angels are called and also are „God's children“ (Job1,6; 2,1; 38,7 / Psalm 89,7). The believers are also called God's children (Joh. 1,12 / Röm. 8,16). But no angel was ever called like Jesus „Son of God“. He also introduced Himself as the Son of God and the Jews also understood it that way (Joh. 5,18). All the angels of God are supposed to worship Him (Hebr. 1,6 / comp. Deut. 32,43).

Through Jesus the true and good word of God was spread among all people. He did not bring the law, but the gospel for all human kind. Jesus is the „first born“ of the human race. He is the friendly king of His beloved brothers and sisters (comp. Gen. 27,27 - 29). **Hebrews 1, 5-9 The main theme of the whole chapter is in the Sonship of Jesus Christ**, which the author interprets as the promised Son of the king according to the covenant with David (Psalm 2,7 / 2. Sam. 7,14). The Sonship and the privileges that He brings along, exalts Him high **above all the angels** (read Mat. 28,18). The glorified Christ is executing unlimited power in heaven and on earth (comp. Joh. 17,2 / Phil. 2,10 / Rev. 12,10 / Mat. 7,29; 9,6; /21,23). This **authority and power** was given to Him by His heavenly Father (comp. Joh. 3,35). According to the will of the Father all is in Jesus' hands and His power (Joh. 10,28,29 / 13,3). This is the foundation of His reign (Joh. 12,13-15 ; 18,36 - 37). After the salvation of God was proclaimed to **the people of Israel** (Mat.10,5; 15,24) it also had to be offered to **all nations** of this world without exception (Mat. 8,11; 21,41; 22,8-10; 24,14,30, 25,32, 26,13 / Act.1,8; 13,5 / Rom.1,16).

Jesus is more important, higher and mightier than any angel. In the O.T. we read about Father Jesus as the **angel of the Lord**. This was always the case when such an angel was there to receive divine honor. A usual angel did not receive the worship. We have to adhere what happened in the invisible world billions of years ago. Lucifer who was once a lovely angel before the throne of God, disregarded God's sovereignty and rose against God, wanted to receive the worship for Himself. Therefore he had to leave his heavenly, holy home and was banned to creation – on earth. And now Jesus came to this earth as the „angel of the Lord“ and Satan has to experience how this „**Jesus – angel of the Lord**“ was honored and worshiped. Therefore he required from Jesus to fall down before him and worship him as the supposed ruler of this material world.

Because of the different revelations of God that happened by the mediation of angels Judaism had developed a strong „**faith in angels**“. Angels were the messenger and mediators between God and men. They were always supposed to help men to get in touch with God. They became aware and felt that God became more and more unreachable because they removed themselves far away from Him. They allowed that their God became to them a far away, strict Godhead.

At the time of creation of the New Testament the Jews believed God gave the law to the angels who gave it to Moses. A direct contact between God and men was unthinkable at that time (comp.Acts 7, 53 / Gal. 3,19). With the help of Persian and Babylonian influence Judaism developed an independent „**faith in angels**“. They started to give anonymous angels names and functions. **Gabriel as prince of God's mercy** was the angel who mediated the messages of God; **Michael as prince of the will of God** was the angel who watched over Israel with his sword. They were the messengers of God who **disappeared** as soon as they had delivered their message (Judges.13, 20). They intervened into the course of action for God (2. Kin. 19, 35, 36). In the meantime they had a certain angel for every need and circumstance. In Judaism there were about **200 different angels** who alone took care of the movement of the luminaries. One angel controlled the endless sequence of the years, months and days. One angel, a mighty prince, dominated the sea. There was an angel of frost, dew, rain, snow, thunder and lightning.

This reminds us of the different gods of Paganism. There were angels as watchmen of hell and tormentors of the condemned. There were angels that wrote down every written word of men There were angels of

destruction and punishing angels. There was **satan** who kept collecting material for accusation of the human race before God. There was the angel of death who only went out upon assignment of God, impartial of good and bad. Every nation had their own special guardian angel, just as every man and every child (Matth. 18, 10). There were so many angels that the rabbis claimed that every blade of grass has its own guardian angel. In some Rabbinic schools it was taught that God created a new regiment of angels every day.

With this expanded and exaggerated doctrines of angels there was the danger and temptation for man to deal more with the angels as messengers of God than to believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God who carries the Father on the inside. In this relation it was therefore very important to prove that the divine Father in the Son was not only greater than them, but also the creator of all things, so that all who have received the Son Jesus Christ do not need the angels as messengers of God anymore.

'The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews was introducing the message that the Son assumes a higher position than any of the angels ever did or ever will. Since Jesus' fulfilled work we now have direct access to God, so that we need no other mediator, not human or supernatural. Jesus tore down all barriers and He unlocked the way that takes us home, directly back to the source of all life – our God. Jesus is so unique just like God Father in Him is the eternal only one. **Only** He himself could die for this world and our sins.

Only Christ could become a man and pay the ransom, which was spiritual death (Rom. 6,23). It had to be **His blood** that was shed, because man and his disobedient stubbornness forced this event. Something else could not have saved us.

The angels have never been rulers in the past and will not reign in the future. In the past they were always servants and messengers, and also in the future they will be faithful servants of God in love and humility. This is the summary of the thought expressed in this letter.

At the same time the author says that Jesus of course is also **sovereign to all the prophets** and must be preferred over them. **The reconciling Son of the Father God, Jesus Christ surpasses** them all and was announced by the prophets. He brings a new, eternal thing. We are living in the last days, where salvation can be experienced. We are all addressed by God (Vers 2). The author picks up the O.T. traditions and interprets the new things accordingly.

Hebr. 1,6 „and when He brings the **firstbegotten** back into this world... (Ps. 97,7)... let all the angels of God worship Him. This refers to the second coming of Jesus. The point when the royal privileges of the Son and the angels who worship Him will be revealed to all. God will send Jesus back into this world, but this time He will return as the Lord of all Lords (read Deut. 32,43).

The angels belong to the Lord. They are His children, servants and worshipers(Psalm 104,4 / Hebr. 1,7). **For the angels of God it is an honor** and joy to serve Jesus in His kingdom. And He, whom all angels serve with thanksgiving, became a man of flesh and blood and lived among us. But now He is sitting at the right hand of God. This way the author is trying to lead the Jews away from their faith in angels. The Jews thought that the angels are the highest beings of God, because they once delivered the law to them, as we can read in the O.T. (read Acts 7,23 / Gal. 3,10). They had developed an unhealthy „angel worship“ (1.Tim.1,4 / Col. 2,18). Until the revelation of Jesus they did not know a higher revelation. But then the promised Son of God Himself appeared on earth.

The diligent author of „Hebrews“ shows in many ways that Christ is higher than all angels of God and he uses the text of the Old Testament to prove it. This alone is evidence that already the first two chapters of this letter are of extreme importance. They are laying the foundation of the rest of the letter, which deals with the ministry of Christ to the believers. Every important statement of this letter is proven by quotes from the Old Testament. For the author the O.T. is the God-revealed scripture. The O.T is the divine revelation, the holy word of the voice of God, given by the Spirit of God.

Christ is seated at the right hand of God, the bible is trying to tell us that there is a perfect order of creation and spiritual beings in the supernatural. It also underlines the fact that Christ is more than any angel in the whole universe.

Hebr. 1,5-14 God spoke in many ways!

God's word is the effective spiritual word, that brings the world back to order and assigns the position of angels and men (comp. Hebr. 1,5-14). The word tells the story between God and man (Hebr. 1,1) and reveals the sins of men (Hebr. 4,12ff.).

His **covenant with Abraham** proves that His wise counsel is unchangeable (Hebr. 6,17). His oath

concerning the priesthood of Christ (Hebr. 7,21ff.) reinforces the unbreakability of Christian hope for salvation. The holy scripture is not used in order to prove the scripture but rather to prove the reality, which can be understood as a revelation of God.

The counsel of God is to bring many children back to salvation, which means back home (Hebr. 2,10). He had started a story with the fathers (Hebr. 6,13 – 17; 11, 4 – 22) and the people of Israel (Hebr. 3,7 – 19; 11,23 – 38) and set an order for the old covenant (Hebr. 8,3; 9,20) fulfilled it and brought it to an end (Hebr. 8,8 -12). He appointed Jesus Christ as the high priest (Hebr. 5,5ff.) and appointed His suffering (Hebr. 2,10) and then brought Him out of death (Hebr. 13,20ff.). He supports the proclamation of Christ by signs and wonders (Hebr. 2,4 / comp. Gal 3,1 – 5) that means He could be experienced (comp. Hebr. 6,3; 12,7 as well as Hebr. 10,31) in the life of the church.

The apparent downside of His loving, sacrificial work of salvation, is His holy and righteous wrath as another expression of His love, this wrath is a working power of history (Hebr.3,17), present and past (comp. Hebr. 10,26-31; 12,25 – 29).

Outside of Christ or before His coming there was no direct access to the love of God and could not have a personal relationship with Him, because man was in sin and therefore not holy (Hebr. 2,11; comp. 10,29). The stubborn man had sinned and urgently needed saving redemption (Hebr. 2,17). The devil has the power of death (Hebr. 2,14) therefore life on earth is servanthood and fear of death (Hebr. 2,15). Being so far from God it was almost impossible to lead the man out of the cult of the old covenant. The sacrifices were also offered by carnal and sinful men and had to be renewed continuously – therefore they could not lead to perfection (Hebr. 7,18ff.).

It was rather a prophetic act as a **preview** of the coming, perfect sacrifice of Christ. We are looking **back** to the sacrifice Jesus already brought / accomplished for us.

Jesus Christ is high priest because of God's appointment which is described in Psalm 110.

The author says this about Jesus because God basically gave Him the title from the beginning. Even when He was born the angel proclaimed to the shepherds that this is the One who will redeem the people of their sins (Mat. 1,21). In the baptism and glorification of Jesus on the mountain top, God publically confirmed His sonship (Mat.17,5) and to Him was given all divine authority. Many Jews used the **110th Psalm** for **non-priestly claims**. And the historical Jesus was not a descendant of Aaron (comp. Hebr 7,14!).

Because of the redemptive work of Christ as the true event for the remission of sin and the reconciliation, the culture of the old covenant is now **needless** (Hebr. 10,9). Through His resurrection Jesus and His work was accepted by God. The author of „Hebrews“ describes the course of events like this: In Ch. 7 the **personal „aptitude“ of Jesus** was already established by the priest Melchizedek and brought to our conscience. In Ch. 8 **the objective frame** of the ontologically sovereign and eschatologically final counsel of God is called by name. Ontology refers to an area of the philosophical meta physics, that deals with being and nothingness of existence. Eschatology is a religious, theological teaching of death and resurrection, rebirth, etc. And Ch. 9,1-10,18 describes **Christ's onetime, eternal sacrifice** (Hebr. 9,26) with the offering of His body (Hebr. 10,10) as an obedient execution of the intention of God, which spares the necessity of any other sacrifice or practices for the forgiveness of sins (Hebr.10,17f).

Das ganze **Heilsgeschehen** umfasst dann nach dem Inhalt des Briefes:

- die „**Reinigung**“ (Hebr. 1,3; 10,2),
- die „**Heiligung**“ (Hebr. 2,11; 10,10 u.14),
- die „**Sühnung**“ (Hebr. 2,17), und
- die „**Vollendung**“ (Hebr.10,1.14; 11,40; 12,23).

In the letter to the Hebrews the **new covenant** is placed above the old covenant. The new covenant is greater in its ministries and institutions. It is bigger and wider and more sovereign than the old covenant could ever have been. It emphasizes that Jesus brought a perfect and pleasing sacrifice for sin. It expresses what Paul only briefly mentioned in his writings (Eph. 4,10 / Röm. 8,34). In Gal. 4,3 Paul also speaks about the failures of the law, but this letter brings it to the point.

Hebr. 1,8 and 9 are expression and interpretations of Psalm 45 and reveals that we are dealing with a great Messianic Psalms, because it deals with the eternal throne of God. The king, that the psalmist speaks about, **loved righteousness and hated unrighteousness**. Those remarks point to the holiness and obedience of Christ in His life on earth. One point, that is discussed later, such as in Hebr. 3, 1 - 2, 5, 7 – 8; 7, 26 and 9, 14. The description: „Your throne“ refers to „God's throne“ (also read Ps. 45,7,8). „His reign“ refers to „God's reign“. The angels are only servants. **Jesus is the „God man“ who is enthroned on the throne of the universe**. He is referred to as God because He is God and therefore is the ruler of all, because He is the

divine king. Therefore Jesus could say this last word on earth: „**To me is given all the power...**“ (Mat. 28,18).

(Hebr. 1,10) **Jesus assumes the highest position in the whole universe.**

The author proves this statement with the help of many scriptures that are speaking about the Son to whom is given all power (Psalm 2, 7 / 2. Samuel 17, 14 / Psalm 97 or Psalm 104, 4; 102,2 – 28). It is supposed to show that the „Son“ is the Lord Himself, the one who created heaven and earth. Even if this first earth and first heaven shall pass away and change is going to come **the Son will always stay the same, the eternal truthful and holy one** (i.e. 2. Petr. 3,10 – 13). The author of the letter teaches us that the Kingdom of the Messiah will stand firm even when everything is shaking (Hebr. 12, 26 – 28).

The **sacrifice of Jesus** is in the center of consideration. Jesus is the role model, the beginning and the end of faith. God's work through His son Jesus is a **powerful work of change** from the old to the new form of existence by one and the same Lord. Therefore the „Christocracy“ (dominion of Christ) the the world historical form of „Theocracy“ (dominion of God).

God Himself introduced His son into the world (Hebr. 1,13 – 14). The holy spirit as a part of the Godhead caused the pregnancy of Mary and the birth of Jesus (Mat. 1,18) as well as the guidance and conviction of Joseph, etc. (Mat. 1,20 – 24). Also in the baptism and transfiguration God introduces His Son into the world by confessing Him and answering His prayers (Mat. 3,16 -1 7; 12,18 ; 17,5 / Is. 42,1 – 4). God Himself called Jesus **“my Son”**. He was supposed to enforce David's throne for ever (2. Sam. 7,16). When David wanted to build the temple for God, God told him that his **son** would do it (1. Kin. 8,17 – 19). Even though **Solomon** built a temple, this was not yet the perfect fulfillment of God's promise. 2. Sam. 7,16 tells us that the **house of David would only be sustained by God Himself**. Also Solomon says in 1. Kin. 8,26,27 that he cannot fully grasp the temple of God and that this temple cannot be the final „house and temple of God“ (comp. Jer. 23,24 / Is. 66,1 / Acts 7,47 – 49; 17,24). Jesus is greater than the first temple (comp. Joh. 2,20 - 21 / Mat. 26,61). An **obvious evidence** that there was a relation between Jesus and the temple are the curtains that tore when Jesus died (comp. Mat. 27,42 - 51 / Mark.15,38 / Luk. 23,45 / also Hebr. 6,19 - 20 / 9,3 – 5)._

First warning: How shall we escape... (Hebr. 2,1 - 4). God spoke to Israel through His son and they rejected the speech of God. Jesus already referred to that in Mat. 21,36 – 40. For such a „**crime**“ and „trespass“ there is no more grace. Therefore God gives His vineyard to others – the nations! Jesus is greater than the law that was given to Moses by the angels upon His command (Gal. 3,19 / Acts 7,38).

If the rejection of the law was followed by severe consequences and punishments, how much more will the rejection of Jesus, the Son of God be punished and judged. **Jesus is superior to every servant an maid**, every prophet and priest (Mat. 21,37,28). The Father revealed Himself personally through a man of flesh and blood (Joh. 1,2). When God spoke in the O.T., Jesus was not yet in the flesh, He was still with God. **When Jesus appeared He did not need mediation from prophets or anybody else to communicate with God**. He could just speak for Himself. He always said:: „you have heard that... but I say unto you...“ (comp. Matt. 5:39-39). He spoke with a different authority than all other prophets before Him. The whole Epistle to the Hebrews was written to prove to the Jewish Hebrews, that Jesus is the fulfiller of the law and the true high priest. It is a convincing warning letter to the Jewish Christians. They were only supposed to hold on to Jesus and not old traditions. The letter, just as the letter of James, belongs to the „**post-Apostolic time**“.

In the letter to the Hebrews there are 6 warning signals. They are intense warnings to the people of Israel, so that it would not miss the fullness of the blessings that God provided through His Son Jesus Christ. Those are the warning signals

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. The danger of missing it, | (Hebr. 2, 1 – 4) |
| 2. The danger of doubts, | (Hebr. 3, 7 - 4, 2) |
| 3. The danger of deafness, | (Hebr. 5, 11 – 14) |
| 4. The danger of falling back, | (Hebr. 6, 1 - 20) |
| 5. The danger of rejection, | (Hebr. 10, 26 – 39) |
| 6. The danger of neglection. | (Hebr. 12, 15 – 29) |

The believers from among the Jews seemed to be especially weak in their faith. They had a tendency to fall back into Judaism. Therefore the author speaks of the sovereignty of the new covenant where they can stand before God in Christ Jesus. The **fulfillment of divine requirements** through Jesus in the new covenant are greater than all role models of the Old Testament. Jesus fulfilled the O.T. With His death He started a new covenant (Mat. 26,28), that replace the old covenant and overruled the old law. With this argumentation the author wants to ensure the readers that the cult of the old covenant was of no value except to testify of the new covenant after the death of Jesus. Thus we often read the terminology „**once and for all**“.

It is one and the same God who sealed the old and the new covenant. In the old covenant He revealed Himself to the fathers on different occasions, at different times and in different ways. In the new covenant He revealed Himself once and for all in Christ, to the whole world. In the old covenant God revealed Himself through the prophets, in the new covenant through Jesus His only Son. **Jesus was the perfection of a revelation of God.** Alone for that reason the new covenant must be rated higher than the old covenant: It was not revealed to us by the angels, but rather by the Son of God personally. This explanation is based on Psalm 8. There the greatness of God in the beauty of nature is praised. Compared to the firmament of heaven, the sun, the moon and the countless blinking stars (all the fascinating things of His creation), a man is as small as a grain of sand. And yet every human grain of sand is loved by God and also respected and honored. All men, all brothers and sisters, are more than all of the universe together. A child in a mayor is more valueable than all material in endless space. This is how much God loves us, His children.

The **new covenant** is greater and superior, because the mediator of the new covenant is greater than the angels who brought the law. The magnitude of God is praised even by all the nature and the crown of creation was the creation of man. Eventhough in the beginning God made them a little lower than the angels, he appointed them as lords of creation.

The dignity of man can only be understood from the perspective of creation. God had appointed man as the likeness of His image for the governing of the visible and invisble creation (1. Cor. 15,44 – 45), so that everything would be submitted through men unto God.

The readers of this letter obviously had to be exhorted and encouraged to hold on to their faith in Jesus, the true Messiah because they seemed to grow weak in their faith. Therefore we read terminologies such as "**hold on**" (Hebr. 3,6) or "**let us go unto perfection**".(Hebr. 6,1). The purpose of the letter was to strengthen the believers by pointing to the fact that in Christ the whole law was already fulfilled and that the new covenant is therefore sovereign to the old covenant. We often find the terminology "**better**" in this letter. The new conditions since Jesus are better than in the time before, when the law ruled. Another focus is the emphasis on Jesus' function as a high priest who stands in the gap for the Christians before God **just like a high priest.** The believers from the Gentile nations are supposed to know how salvation was brought to them.

Hebr. 6,1 speaks of the „doctrines“ that are already passed. Now they are on their way to perfection. **The author** speaks into a situation where the enthusiasm of the beginning started to cease. He points to the past and goes deeper into the interpretation of foundational doctrines. While the Jews needed **evidence** that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the OT background helps us to understand what the death of Jesus and His resurrection means for us. The OT was very important for the NT church. The New Testament was not yet written and the Old Testament was the only written word of God at that time.

Hebr. 10,32ff.; 12,4 - 5 and 12,12 - 13 **contain exhortations** to faithful **steadfastness** in the confession of faith, so that their eagerness would not cease. The teaching is followed by exhortation to obey the revelation. The revelation through Jesus is higher than the law of Moses. Moses was not able to accomplish the purpose through the law. He was not even allowed to enter the promised land. Jesus is the true „leader“ because He was the first to accomplish the goal of God. God became a man in Jesus Christ and was lifted into glory after the time of suffering (comp. 1. Cor. 15,27).

Hebr. 2,5 – 19 The earth was not entrusted to the angels but **to man**. The author quotes Psalm 8, Verse 4 - 6 : „You have made Him a little lower than the angels“.Or correctly stated: You have made man „**a little time lower**“ than the angels until the completion of salvation. The man who was made a little lower, is referring to the man Jesus. When He became a man and humbled Himself, He was made a little lower than the angels. Therefore He could even be tempted by satan, a fallen angel. But now the world is not subject to angels, but subject to Jesus alone.

In this letter we get to know two important things about Jesus:

1. He reveals God to us, and
2. He is our advocate before God.

After Jesus has accomplished His „heavenly work“ here on earth, we now have a „**representative**“ with God in heaven, who is mediating for us. One who is our advocate, no matter what may happen and who is always on our side. The bible tells us in Revelation 12,10 that satan, the accuser of the brethren also has acces to God and keeps telling Him of our bad records day and night. Satan could tell God many bad things about us but Jesus defends us.

The „**world to come**“ is the equivalent of the kingdom of heaven (comp. Mat. 3,2) the kingdom of God, or

eternal life. Therefore the completion still has to become visible in the future. In the spiritual realm, the invisible it is already reality through Jesus on earth. Christ did not come to condemn the world, but to save it (Joh. 3, 17). The one who acts on our behalf in regard of salvation in the NT is God all by Himself. Man can receive or reject the salvation of God, hold on to it or let it go by the power of his free will (also read Phil. 2,12). Jesus was, is and always will be **the main character** in the whole plan of salvation of God (Acts 4,12). He is the author of salvation (Hebr. 5,12). While the son of God (Jesus) is exalted above all things He has to be acknowledged and taken seriously. If someone does not, he is missing his own salvation.

The humiliation of the Son is the foundation of our redemption. Without it God would never have reached us. Jesus did not come to us as an angel, but He became a man just like you and me. Being a human Jesus was lower than the angels, even though He has always been higher than the angels. He did that for us, in order to reveal God to us and become the advocate of men before God. He brought God to earth and men to heaven. Up to this point of salvation men was like a dethroned r Erlösung war der Mensch in der Schöpfung Gottes wie ein entthronter, disempowered, overthrown and expelled king. Jesus gives us back our dignity (Hebr. 2,9). Jesus Christ died, to make men the creatures they were originally designed.

The author of „Hebrews“ shows us in this chapter which ideal men are supposed to follow. They are supposed to be acquainted with God and lords of this world. But he also contrasts in which condition man was truly in. A condition of frustration instead of sovereignty, failure instead of glory. Man, who was originally designed to be a king, had become a slave. And then he also shows us **how we can accomplish to be like our role model** which is by faith and obedience to Jesus Christ. Based on that what Jesus had done and how He accomplished it we “**see**”, realize and understand Him and the importance of His redemption work.

„Jesus“ was His **carnal** name. When He was received in the bosom of Mary the angel said “*And you shall call Him Jesus for He will save the people from their sins*” (Matthäus 1, 21). In this emphasis there is already a main part of the humiliation of Jesus expressed: that He would only be lower than the angels for a very short time - **33 years** to be exact. He drank from the bitter cup and tasted death for us. An angel strengthened and served Jesus in the garden of **Gethsemane** (comp. Hebr. 26,37 - 39 / Joh.18,4 - 8 / Luk. 22, 43 – 44). Even the fact that we would **lie on the ground and pray** symbolizes His deep humiliation. The pious Jew would actually pray standing (comp. 1. Kin. 8,22 - 23 / Mat. 6,5 / Luk. 18,11). Only if it is a fervent and very humble act, he would also bow down (read Ps. 95,6 / Is. 45,23 / Dan. 6,11 / Acts7,60; 9,40; 20,36; 21,5). There in **the garden of Gethsemane** Jesus experience death and pain, which is the reality and awefulness of death. In the garden of Eden sin was committed (Gen. 3) and in the garden of Gethesemane redemption started.

In Hebr. 2,9 the author refers to the death of Jesus for the first time. His life, His struggles and His suffering made Him the „**father**“ of many sons. Therewith Jesus also ends the ancestral line forever (Mat. 1,17 / Luk. 3,23). With **Jesus begins** a whole new generation, a new people, a new race – He is the new Adam (Rom. 5,12 -19).

Hebr. 2,10 - 15 Here Jesus is called our „**captain**“, which means our leader, origin, founder or pioneer. The titles „**beginner**“ and author of salvation was a traditional, typical Christian term / name for Jesus (Acts 3,15; 5,31 / Hebr. 12, 2). Jesus is the Alpha and Omega of all. He is the beginning and the end. He started it and He also finished it. This represents the idea that the „**creator**“ starts somethin and then shares it with others. He starts a family for example, so that others can be born or added to the tribe or family, so they can continue and grew. So it is with Jesus as our fatherly „**captain**“ and founder of our blessedness (Hebr. 2,10). Jesus opened heaven for humanity, something that had not existed before. The author says that Jesus was able – through His suffering – to accomplish His work to prepare our way of salvation.

He identified Himself with us through suffering and became equal to us in all things (Ps. 22,23 / Is. 8,17 – 18). The **identification** of Jesus with us people forms the heart of the Christian message and thus God saved us through Jesus in an externally totally human kind of way, which are the physical and emotional sufferings of Jesusu. Without the „heaviness“ of human weaknesses Jesus would have been transfigured in His holiness right away. But He deliberately took on the physical body that was afflicted by **original sin** in order to live and show that by spiritual growth and maturity is available on earth. Jesus feels with us. And because He knows how we feel He can now save us and help us. According to Hebr. 10,10 - 14 the sacrifice of Jesus Christ sanctified us once and for all (Ps. 22,23). He is not ashamed to call us His brothers and sisters.

The word **redemption** had a very interesting, legal meaning. It meant to pay the **ransom** of a debt. The law already determined a redemption in the year of release/Year of Jubilee. It means if a poor Israelite sold himself to another one, he was to be granted the right of beeing redeemed by a kinsman redeemer (a blood-related relative) who could pay his debts for him (Lev. 25, 47 – 49). In the same way it also worked with material possessions that had to be sold out of a financial need (Lev. 25,25 – 28). The redemption of His people was always God's duty, because he aready delivered His people from the hands of their enemies in

the time of the Old Testament (Judges 6,14), such as captivity, slavery (Psalm 85,2) and other needs (1.Kin.1, 29) . He released them from perishing (Psalm 103,4) and also from their sins (Psalm 130,8) as well as the power of death (Psalm 49,16).

The readers of the Epistle to the Hebrews **were supposed to be reminded**, that they are no longer servants of the devil, sin or death. Through the victory of Jesus we are no longer under the curse, or the rulership of sin and condemnation (Rom. 8,1).

Jesus is greater than Moses. This thought is like the golden threat of this letter. Jesus is the promised Messiah that was promised before the time of Moses, yes even before the time of **Eve** (Gen. 3,15). In addition the present words of Jesus are **higher** than the old law and the words of **Moses** (Mat. 24,35). **The law** was only a necessary amendment (Gal. 3,19, 23 - 25 / Rom. 7,6 - 7). The first Christians did not consider it necessary to adhere the **Mosaic law**. **For this reason this text suspends the whole tradition of sacrifices, temple service and the Levitical priesthood.** All the old religious regulations were fulfilled by the coming of Jesus and therefore had to be interpreted differently. This also applies for the regulation concerning certain times such as the sabbath as a holy day of rest. The role of the sabbath in the old covenant must now be interpreted as a **spiritual sabbath rest** that we now find in Christ Jesus.

During the sermon of the Mount (Mat. 5 - 7) Jesus said „*You have heard that... But I say unto you...*“ (Mat. 5,21 - 48). Jesus proclaimed „**higher justice**“ (Mat. 5,21 - 26) and used statements from all the 5 books of Moses, mentioning the following matters:

- murder and wrath, based on commandment 6 (Mat. 5,21 - 26);
- adultery based on commandment 7 (Mat. 5,27 - 30);
- divorce referring to Deut. 24,1 (Mat. 5,31 - 32);
- swearing a concluded doctrine of texts such as Lev. 19,12/Numb. 30,2/ Mat.5,33- 37
- civil rights, quoted from Ex. 21,24-25; Lev.24,20 and Deut. 19,21/ Mat. 5,38 - 42 and the principle of loving your neighbor from Lev. 19,18 (Mat. 5,43 - 47).

In His proclamation Jesus clearly pointed to the principles that would apply for eternity, which purpose they have, how they must be interpreted and understood and how He fulfilled them as Christ Jesus (Mat. 5,17 - 19). Even the smallest letter of the law had to be fulfilled.

Jesus is the fulfiller of the law (Joh.1,17-18). Jesus created, or gave us a spiritual law which we can call the law of Christ (Joh. 13,33 - 35). While the Jews were very concerned about Moses and the law, Jesus' teachings went far beyond that (Mat. 5,22. 28. 32. 34. 39. 44).

In His teachings Jesus did not mention **ceremonial laws** such as the sabbath and the adherence of yearly feasts as a „holy season“ - sign of religious feasts that referred to OT commandments. At the end of His preachin on the Mount Jesus says that a wise person is „who will hear the words and also applies it“ (Mat. 7,24). The **new covenant** points to Christ and the cross, **not to Moses** and the **stone tablets**. By the way, the law had to be given to Moses **twice** because the first time he destroyed the original tablets willfully, the ones that God Himself wrote, because he was angry about the disobedience of the Israelites (Ex. 32,15 - 16; 34,1).

The great message of the new covenant was not given on the **Mount of Sinai**, but by Jesus Christ (Joh. 1,17). He explained all spiritual- moral principles of the new covenant that applied for all Christians. These are discussed in several texts of the New Testament (i.e. Gal. 5,22 - 25). Jesus had told His disciples: „...and teach them all things, **that I have commanded you**“ (Mt. 28,19 - 20 / Joh.15,12 - 13). For the apostles the ceremonial laws and laws concerning sacrifices were no longer necessary or binding. They were no longer subject to the „**law**“ that was given by Moses, but they were subject to the full „**grace**“ through Jesus. Under the law of grace Christians do not need a special „holy time“ they have to adhere or a „holy place“ such as the temple where they had to go nor the Levitical priesthood to connect with God (Joh. 4,21 - 24). These were ceremonial regulations that Christians would not have to adhere anymore. It even would have been a sin for them if they would still hold on to those old things.

Moses was faithful in **the building of the tabernacle** which was a very small version of the greater and better house that Jesus prepared for us. The tabernacle was only a shadow of the eternal house of God in heaven. Only a reflection of the future and eternal priestly order that reaches over the whole universe.

The **house that Jesus built** is His church. He said: I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it (comp.1. Tim. 3,15 - 16; 6,14 - 16 / 2. Tim. 2,11 - 13 / Phil. 2,6 - 11 / Eph. 1,3 - 14; 5,14 / Col. 1,15 - 20). The church of God is the house, the building and the work of Jesus, the divine tabernacle here on earth (comp.1. Petr. 2,5 - 10).

Jesus is the true apostle. As a messenger of God and **highpriest** God Himself came to this earth in the form of Jesus (Hebr. 3 – 4). Moses was only appointed a servant of God in the house of the Lord (Hebr. 3,2). Moses belonged to this house but God Jesus was the builder of the house. Of course the greater honor is not due to the house but due to the one who built it.

Hebr. 3,1 - 6 In Hebr. 2 we were shown that **the law was once given by the angels.** Jesus is superior to **the angels** who once mediated the law and so the **receiver of the law**, Moses. The believers of the new testament confess Jesus as the apostle, messenger and highpriest of God. **Moses was never a highpriest,** but his brother Aaron. Jesus Himself was the creator of the new covenant (1. Cor. 11,25 / Ex. 24,8 / Jer. 31,31 / Hebr. 8,6 – 13).

Christ, however is higher than Jesus. Moses was considered the mediator of the Sinaitic law as well as the founder and highest human authority of the Jewish religion (Hebr. 3,7 – 18). Even though it is said that Moses was the highest servant in the house of the Lord – He always remained a **servant in the house of the Lord**, while Jesus **is the Lord and Son of the house.** Therefore Moses represents Israel and Christ represents the church of the New Testament. Both Moses and Jesus proclaimed and **ethical system.** But there is a huge difference between the two. Moses could only say and repeat „**what the Lord said.**“. Jesus says, „**but I say unto you.**.“ Jesus speaks in authority and in His name, He also says „**I am**“, which refers to God in the here and now and all eternity. Only God alone may speak in such a manner. When God spoke to Moses on the mount Sinai it was related to thunder, lightning, earthquakes and terror.

God warned the people from afar to stay where they were and not even let the cattle come close to the mountain. But now, in the **age of grace** God did not speak in such away. He rather sat on a hill and spoke to all the people, which is called the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5,6,7) and on the hill that was called **Golgotha** there was a cross. On this cross there was a broken, beaten and dying man, who was much more than a man. **He was God Himself.** And through His painful death on the cross the overflowing **grace of God** came down to this world. Jesus brought the „**grace**“, the salvation, all that which was impossible according to the law (comp. Mat. 20,28 / Rom. 3,20ff.; 5,20ff.; 8,3 / Gal. 2,16; 3,11). Secondly Jesus brought the „**truth**“, which means the revelation of the will of God and He also took care that the will of God would be fulfilled in His life. Jesus was the incarnation of both: „**grace and truth**“.

The **commands and requirements of God** can only be adhered and fulfilled if you are truly redeemed and under the grace of God. Otherwise it is a hopeless attempt and an unreachable high system. This is why Jesus starts the sermon on the Mount (Mat. 5 – 7,29) with the beatitudes (Mat. 5,3 – 11). Jesus is laying the **foundation of the kingdom of God.** In the spirit of the prophets, Jesus promises a share in those blessings to all those who would heed His words.

The **message of Jesus** is full of beatitudes (Luk. 6,20 - 22 / Mat.11,16; 13,16; 16,17; 24,46 / Luk. 11,27-28 / Rev. 1,3; 14,13 etc.). Therefore the message of Jesus is better and greater than the message of Moses. The laws that God gave through Moses **only dealt with behaviour** and the people were scared by the threats of it (Ex.19,16 – 25).

The law was given by Moses, but **grace and truth** it were manifested by Jesus Christ (Joh. 1,17). The law did not bring the truth, but rather tempted to hypocrisy which lead to a life of pretense in false piety like the majority of the Pharisees, which finally lead to desparation (Mat. 6,1 -18 / Rom. 7). The New Testament calls the „**law of Christ**“ a „**new command**“ (Joh.13,34 / 1. Joh. 2,7) which is not hard to keep.

The author of the letter to the Hebrews states that the people's problem are not rooted in their **minds** but rather in their **sins**. The NT solution to this problem can be found in 2. Cor. 3,6: „...who also made us diligent servants of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the spirit. For the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.“ The **law** condemns us, but the **holy spirit** gives us life. **Moses covered His face** when he was called, during his first encounter with God (comp. Ex 3, 1 – 10) and also when he came down from the mountain and his face was shining. He did not cover his face to overshadow his face or to dim the glory, which is a common interpretation, **but the glory ceased** and he covered his face so that the people would not see that it disappeared. But with Jesus **it was very different** (2. Cor. 4, 3 – 6), and so it is also with us.

Therefore this letter also calls the believers „**partakers in the heavenly calling**“. Through Jesus we have direct access to God and heaven and may see the glory of the Lord. **Jesus is the last word of God.** After Him there will not be another Messiah (Hebr. 1). Jesus had to suffer to redeem us (Hebr. 2). And in Hebr. 3 it says: Jesus is higher than Moses who was called the founder of Jewish faith and highly honored in Judaism in general.

Moses, similar to John the baptist, is only a witness of Jesus (Joh. 5,45 – 47). Moses himself announced that God would raise a prophet like himself (Deut. 18,15 – 16) and to Him you must listen.

Because Jesus is so great, important and unique, His rejection will not remain without punishment. „**Today, if you hear His voice ...**“ . If someone will not listen, his heart will be hardened and he will be just like old Israel (Numb. 14,22 - 23 / Deut. 1,34 – 36). **This is a serious matter and a serious warning.** Nobody entered the promised land but **Caleb and Joshua** (Numb. 14,30 / Deut. 1,36 – 38). Because of **disbelief many were excluded from the holy blessing**, even though they had heard the voice of God many times and had experienced numerous wonders of God. In addition a pillar of clouds shielded them by day and a pillar of fire protected them by night. They daily collected manna from heaven. But still they remained stubborn (Rom.11,32 / Numb. 14,34 - 38 / 1. Cor. 10,1 – 13).

The author of this letter uses many **priestly terminologies**. As long as the recipients of the letter remained in their Christian conviction **they also have a share in this priesthood**. Like a Levite could be excluded from the service in the sanctuary in the OT, a true born-again Christian can also be outside of his priestly function and the subsequent blessings.

This is **the danger** that the author is most concerned about, which he also mentions in his warning and the following exhortations in the later chapters.

Hebr. 3,7 – 11 Warning of bitterness and stubbornness. Thus his warnings concerning obedience by faith are very serious (**Hebr. 3,7 - 4,13** / comp. Ps. 95,7 - 11 / Hebr. 9,8; 10,15). „**Therefore**“, is a word that he often uses in this chapter (Hebr. 3,1,10 / Hebr. 4,1,11). “**Therefore**“ is relating to the statements mentioned before. Every word that **the prophets, the angels or Moses** spoke was serious and important. Now all of those statements are confronted with the words of Jesus. The reader is encouraged „**not to harden his heart...**“! The generation of Israelites who came out of Egypt doubted God. Because of their disbelief they were not allowed to enter the land of Canaan **nor to enter the promised „rest“**. **The word „rest“**, is mentioned several times in Hebr. 3 and 4. In the bible this word has several meanings (i.e. **Mat.11,29**) This rest is referring to the redemption where Jesus is releasing us of the burden of sin.

For the nomads and desert migrants the promised land was a place of rest (Deut.12,9).

The Israelites wandered in through the desert because they lacked faith to enter the promised land. Canaan is not a parable of heaven, but it is a parable of the place for spiritual blessings and victory.

Only when we are in Christ our heart and life will come to rest.

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. The rest of creation. | (2. Mose 31, 7) |
| 2. Entering into Canaan. | (5. Mose 12, 10) |
| 3. The rest of redemption. | (Hebr. 4, 9) |
| 4. The rest of devotion. | (Mat. 11, 25) |
| 5. The rest of heaven. | (Hebr. 4, 11) |

Hebr. 3,12 – 19 The warning example of the desert generation (also read 1.Cor.10 / and Ez.20,10 – 36). Because of their doubts and disobedience and even open rebellion against God the Israelites lost the favor of God in a very tragical way. That's why it says in Hebr. 3,12: „**be careful ...**“.

The Sin of Israel was not murder, theft, lying or adulatory. It was „**an evil, unfaithful heart**“, that lead to the turn away from God. Their minds / their hearts were hard and stubborn. We see that disbelief is not primarily a problem of the understanding but rather of the heart. If a heart is soft, submissive, gentle, big and willing to love then it is always easy to receive Jesus and the pure truth of 'God with thanksgiving. As soon as Israel turns back to God, the curtain that is dulling their understanding will be taken away.

Hebr. 3,14 „We are made partakers of Christ“. This means: „We have become partners of Christ.“

Hebr. 3,17 With whom was He grieved for fourty years? What was this great sin, that made God son angry? **It was their unbelief** (comp. Numb. 14,31 – 35). Also after the death of Jesus Israel had some more **fourty years of a grace season** before the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Hebr. 3,19 It is our unbelief that robs us of the blessings of God. After this remark the author starts his interpretation. He tells why the generation that came out of Egypt and experienced so many wonders of God, still had to die and were excluded from taking possession of the land of Canaan. Their exclusion from the promised blessings and the possession of Canaan **was their own fault because of the lack of faith in the power of God**. That was the reason why could not help them to triumph over their enemies; **a failure that is about to happen to the recipients of this letter**. They might make the same mistake if they lose sight of the victory that the Messiah had over their enemies. **The author of the letter wants the Hebrews to take it to**

heart that the people of God could not enter the promised land because of **unbelief, a lack of faith in God.**

Hebr. 4,1 – After the warning of **chapter three** not to harden their hearts but to trust the voice of God and hold on to their faith until the end with courage and gladness, chapter four encourages the Hebrews to be diligent to accept the offer of God and come before the throne of grace with boldness. The **first three chapters** of this letter are closing with the statement that after **forty years** of wandering through the deserts because of unbelief, the Israelites were not able to enter God's rest. Therefore he goes on by saying: **»Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to fall short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did...«** (Heb. 4:1-2)

All those great events, revelations and wonders that the Israelites experienced when they came out of Egypt and after that **were unfortunately of no value for them.** The author of the letter urges the readers to be different than the sad generation of the desert, and not to miss the grace of God.

The term „rest“ (4,1) is referring to the condition / situation hoped for in the promised land and at the same time the rest of God from His works (Hebr. 4,10), which is the ancient image and goal of human hope for salvation. In this letter we keep reading the request **“let us”** (Hebr. 4,1). A challenge to faithfulness and holding on to the revelations of God. This is the only way to enter the „rest of God“ we hope for.

Examples of the request "let us...":

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| - leave | (Hebr. 6, 1) |
| - draw near | (Hebr. 10,19 - 22) |
| - hold on | (Hebr. 10,23) |
| - consider each other | (Hebr. 10,24 – 25) |
| - stay in faith | (Hebr. 10,26 – 11,40) |
| - throw off sin | (Hebr. 12, 1) |
| - run with perseverance | (Hebr. 12, 1 – 2) |
| - endure hardship | (Hebr. 12, 3 – 29) |
| - stay in brotherly love | (Hebr. 13, 1 - 4) |
| - be free of the love of money | (Hebr. 13, 5) |
| - go to Him | (Hebr. 13,13) |
| - praise God at all times | (Hebr. 13,15) |

„Rest“ is referring to receiving our inheritance (also Deut. 3,18 – 20; 12,9 – 10). Also in the NT we have to wait for the portion of Christ (Hebr. 12,25 – 28; 6,12,17; 10,36 -37). This is also about the future rest and peace for the people of God (Hebr. 4,10). When the people of Israel entered Canaan they were still far from the rest they expected. The generation which was born in the desert also had to **prove their faith** and pass the test. They had to make their own God and faith experiences. Therefore the Israelites were still not able to rest (Hebr. 4,3 – 4). This happened only when Jesus had accomplished His work and the Father sent the Holy Spirit. This is when **„the Godhead truly rested“** (comp. Hebr. 4.8 – 10). The Godhead Himself only rested after the completion of the new creation, respectively the second creation, where God created a new heaven and a new earth. According to Hebr. 9,11 Jesus Christ is the king and highpriest of this other, future world of creation.

The failure of the Israelites still did not destroy the plans of God referring to the **„rest“**, because some will enter this promised rest. Some decades later, God renewed His offer (Ps. 95) **to David** (comp. Hebr.4,7) and a descendant of David, which is Jesus, finally fulfilled it.

The true image of **„rest“** is the completion of salvation and the passing away of the old world (comp. Hebr. 6,1 – 4; 9,26 – 28; 12,26 – 29). This is also expressed in the revelation of John, where the new heaven and the new earth came down to this world and the tabernacle of God is finally among the people. (Hebr. 4,11) **“Let us therefore make every effort to enter this rest.”** Only by the word of God we can enter eternal rest and inner peace. The words of God are life and spirit.

Just like the **pillar of clouds** once lead Israel, the word of God is now leading us. **The pillar of clouds** separated the Egyptians from the Israelites when they persecuted them. At night it was a pillar of fire and gave them pleasing warmth. But during the day the clouds were protecting them from the sun and the heat of the desert. The word of God is also soothing in two ways. The word of God is **very sharp**. It has a strong effect. It always produces results. When we receive it, it produces blessing. When we reject it, it produces judgment and curse. It is two-edged. God's words want to work in us (Is. 55,11).

God's word always requires a decision. The word of God enters deep into our soul where our motives, desires and will are. The soul is the heart of man enveloping the inner „pure part of God“ within us. The pure

human emotions of the soul are turned towards the carnal part of a man, which is also called the natural man. The other part of the soul on the inside of man, is the part that is turned towards God the Father and Jesus, which is called the spiritual man. Therefore the word of God is a judge of our thoughts and emotions (marrow and bone). It goes deep and hits us where we need it the most. The word of God is the mirror of our sins, because otherwise we would not see the speck in our own eye. It separates. The word is our rebuker, judge, critic and helper. It criticises us, who misused the responsibility that came with free-will and became weaker and weaker in our willpower. No creature is hidden from the word of God (comp. Hebr. 4,13). The word of God is the speech of the Son of God, a place of encounter between God and man.

Hebr. 5,1 – 10 Jesus is the true highpriest. The ministry of the highpriest is **a ministry of a man on behalf of man**. A legitimate highpriest must be called by God like it was required in the Aaronic priesthood (Hebr. 5.1 – 4), and so it was with the priesthood of Christ (Hebr. 5, 5 – 10).

Hebr. 5,7 When He lived on earth.., is referring to Jesus **when He was still in the flesh**. It speaks about the humanity Jesus took on which was necessary to represent man before God (comp. Hebr. 2,17 – 18; 4,15). „**Flesh**“ is referring to all humanity (Rom. 7,5). It speaks about the substance, the material vessel and the perishable external body of flesh, blood and bones (1. Cor. 15,39 / Luk. 24,39 / Rev. 17,16; 19,18). The defiled „flesh“ is also the habitation of sensual desires and sin (comp. Rom. 7,5,14,18,25; 13,14 / 2. Cor. 7,1 / Gal. 5,13,19 / Eph. 2,3 / Col. 2,13,18,23). **Flesh** in the bible refers to everything that leads to death (comp. 1. Cor. 15,50 / Gal. 6,8 / Rom. 8,6,13 / 1. Cor. 5,5 / 2. Cor. 4,11). Flesh is also subject to the influence of the power of evil (Rom. 8,7) and is the enemy of the Spirit (Rom. 8,4 – 9,12 / Gal. 5,16). Jesus broke this power by putting on that sinful flesh (Rom. 8,3 / 1. Tim. 3,16 / Joh. 1,14 / 1. Joh. 4,2) and lead it to crucifixion (Rom. 8,3 / Eph. 2,14 - 16 / Col. 1,22).

United with Christ the Christians are no longer in the flesh (Rom. 7,5; 8,9). Through baptism they throw off the old natural man (Col. 2,11) and become a part of divine nature. In order to accomplish this and mediate between God and us, Jesus first had to take on human, sinful nature. He had to humble Himself in order to exalt us. He took the heavy consequences of sin upon Himself and suffered the fullness of it. HE was saved from death which He feared. What He asked His father He also received. Out of the pain of death He rose as the conqueror. The Almighty hand of God saved Him. In all He did He learned obedience. In all things He surrendered to God. The people for whom He was standing in the gap, had turned away from God and almost completely neglected Him. Jesus restored the relationship.

Jesus ministry as the highpriest is taking place in heaven, before the throne of God (Hebr. 1,3 / 8,1). Jesus is the highpriest according to the **order of Melchizedek**. Melchizedek was both, priest and king at the same time, which makes him a lot like Jesus. The main statements of the Epistle to the Hebrews are speaking of the doctrines of Christ – Christology. Jesus was already the Son of God before the beginning of time. At the cross and in resurrection He brought us salvation. Therefore God has made Him Lord over all. He is the highpriest (Hebr. 4,14 - 15,10; 7,1 – 10,18), not according to the Levitical order (Deut. 10,8), but in the sense of the action of the highpriest on the day of atonement (Lev. 16) and according to the order of Melchizedek (Hebr. 5,6 - 10 / Gen. 14,18 – 20). **Both was overthrown by Jesus**. His redemptive act as a highpriest does not have to be effected every year anew as opposed to Lev. 16. Jesus has rather entered the Holies of Holy once and for all, and ushered us into the direct presence of God (Hebr. 7,26 – 28).

He has opened a new way to life for us (Hebr. 7,25; 10,19ff.) and is the true highpriest who is bringing repentance and forgiveness for all. This important statement in this letter is supported by scriptures from the Old Testament.

Hebr. 6,1 – 8 describes the consequences of backsliding. If we do not go forward , we stay behind. When we stay behind, we might fall. God's plan for us is to mature. Maturity and perfection are the main topics of this letter. The author has a lot to say about it (Hebr. 5.11 – 14). He speaks about spiritual immaturity and he feared that it would be hard to impart this spiritual message to His readers, because they are still dealing with „**milk**“, the ABC of faith, and they cannot yet eat „**meat**“. They are like little children: underdeveloped and unexperienced. It is not because they did not receive enough teaching and information, but rather that they did not learn in the past, they did not apply their knowledge or use their abilities. In the past they knew how to deal with evil. But now the author fears that they made too many compromises and were no longer able to resist evil.

The author is not only exhorting the Hebrews (Hebr. 5,11- 12), but is also giving them **concrete instructions** what they were supposed to do (Hebr. 6,1 – 8) in order to grow spiritually. A mere repetition of foundational truths would not help them. Only spiritual growth based on the present foundation would help them. The rituals alone are dead deeds. Baptism, laying on of hands, religious doctrines and information were also available in Judaism. This would not change their lives. Those are only external works without major impact upon their daily life and their hearts. Those would only be mouth confessions without partaking

in salvation. They only tasted, only tried and then lost it because of external conditions. They were going through what Jesus mentioned in the „**parable of the sower**“ (Mat. 13,1 – 29).

The secret of spiritual growth is in perseverance / continuation⁴. If someone keeps turning away from God and turning back to God, is crucifying the Son of God anew and offending God, because such a behaviour denies the salvation of Christ and does not appreciate it.

If someone **once** turned to God, he should stay with God.

If someone **once** received blessing, he should continue in the blessing.

If someone **once** received forgiveness of sin should continue to live in and off forgiveness.

If someone **once** received grace should continue to live in / by grace. .

If someone **once** was saved, he should live in salvation.

If someone **once** repented, he should continue to live a lifestyle of repentance.

If someone **once** was delivered, he should continue in liberty.

If someone **once** received the Holy Spirit should also continue to live and walk by the Holy Spirit.

If someone **once** was called by God, he should live and work in his calling.

If someone **once** received his gifts, he should continue to use them and gain new gifts.

God's blessings are always unique and irrevocable (comp. Ez. 3,20). This is the next topic of the author. **What God did through Jesus once, is finished forever**. It is final. He was a sacrifice for eternity. It is irrevocable and eternal (Hebr. 7,25 ; 10,12,14 / compare more: Ps .9,7 / Luk.1,50 / Joh.14,16).

The **Hebrew Christians were illuminated**: „Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in the face of suffering“ (Hebr. 10,32). They had already tasted, experienced and enjoyed the grace and power of God.

The Hebrew Christians were „partakers in the heavenly calling“ (Hebr. 3,1) and „partakers of Christ“ (Hebr. 3,14 / 1. Cor. 9,10,12 -13; 10,17). This cannot be said about someone who has not been „born again“, for only those are partakers of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is working within someone, that person is still not a partaker of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is also working in unbelievers. But a partaker is someone who believes in Jesus Christ and received His salvation. If someone does not have the Holy Spirit and is not a partaker of Christ, he does not belong to Christ (comp. Rom. 8,9) . The term „**knowledge of the truth**“ seems to be equal to the term „**knowledge of the Lord**“ (Hebr. 8,11). Christians are people who know the Lord Christ in their hearts. Non-Christians do not know the truth nor the Lord.

The believer is „**sanctified by the blood**“ (Hebr. 10,29). And therefore it is impossible to renew their minds if they continue to crucify the Son of God anew ...“. If someone goes back or falls back **he defiles the blood of Jesus**. For he was already „**cleansed**“ and sanctified by the blood of Jesus. The believer is cleansed from bad conscience and has guaranteed access to God in the heavenly sanctuary. If someone once received all of that and turns away from it **he acts like a betrayer**.

The author of this letter claims that God cannot guide such people, because those people ignore and despise the redemption through Christ. If people keep resisting God it might happen **that God will harden his heart** like He did with Pharaoh.

After Pharaoh resisted God six times (Ex. 7,13,22; 8,11.15.28 and 9,7),the Lord hardened his heart (Ex. 9,12 –16; 9,34,35; 10,1; 10,20,27; 11,10; 14,4,8). Also read **Phil. 2,12,13** for comparison. If someone is truly willing to be obedient, he will not belong to the type of people as described in Hebr. 6. If someone is open and ready to let God work, God can renew his heart unto repentance. If someone is willing to give heed to the works of God, God will also make that person willing to do the right thing. The author also knows that God is righteous (Hebr. 6,10) and our faith and patience are sometimes required (Hebr. 6,12). Patience is an ability that God works in us, that enables us to control our emotions and wait for the intervention of God (comp. Col. 1,11; 3,12 / Jam. 5,7 – 8,10). This is a synonym for „steadfastness“ or firm standing even in bad or terrible conditions (Hebr.12,12,1 – 3,7). As a role model **Abraham** is quoted (Hebr. 6,16 – 18), when he waited for the heir, that was promised to him with a **vow** (Gen. 22,16). It is impossible for God to lie. In 1. Sam.15,29 and in Numb. 23,19 this is confirmed by two independent witnesses.

Hebr. 7,1 – 28 Jesus is the highpriest according to the order of Melchizedek. He was the king of Salem (Gen.. 14,18 – 20). In Gen. 14,18 he is also called priest of God most high.

This is the longest chapter of the letter and forms the center of the whole text.

The emphasis is on Jesus who is the true highpriest and our true refuge in the midst of all trials. The author is coming back to a topic that he already started in Hebr. 5,1 -10 and tries to illuminate his thoughts in more detail and intensity.

Melchizedek became famous because of the blessing of Abraham. To the author of this letter he represents a divine type of introduction of salvation, and a king-priest. The fact that the bible deliberately conceals any date of birth or death of Melchizedek makes this character appear without temporal beginning and end. Therefore he appears as some kind of Christ. As if Melchizedek and Jesus reflect the holy substance of God. In the priestly and divine being of God we find the following attributes of God: wisdom, sincerity, patience, love and mercy. The royal **priesthood of Melschizedeks** belonged to a different priestly order.

Pay attention to the genealogies. (Gen. 5) Since Adam the God-consciousness was inherited throughout the generations (Henoch in Gen. 5,21 - 22, Noah etc.). Also behold the genealogies (Gen. 10) after the flood. A mystical character from Mesopotamia, „**Nimrod**“ catches our attention (Gen. 10,9-10), of whom it says: He was a **mighty hunter** before the Lord, which means that he was after God, he was seeking God. The term „**Pontifex Maximus**“, is also referring to him. It means royal priest. Also the term: „**highpriest**“ is referring to it. **The ministry of the highpriest is the following:** Ex. 28,29 +38 / Lev. 9,7 / Numb. 6,23 – 27 / Deut. 17,8 – 11 / Deut. 31,11).

The royal priesthood of Melchizedek is the role model for Jesus' priesthood. Even though Abraham was called and chosen by God, he acknowledged Melchizedek as his priest and offered his tithes to him. This action of Abraham expresses that there is another higher and greater priesthood which is not determined by natural genealogy. The **priesthood according to Aaron** was given through Aaron to all of his descendants, his sons, sons of his sons, etc. From carnal to carnal. The mysterious priesthood of Melchizedek, however, was not passed on. This divine office belongs to the eternal order of heaven.

Melchizedek was priest until the „accomplishment“, which is the completion of his high, divine assignment. Thus also Christ is the highest highpriest until the „accomplishment“ (completion) of His divine mission in the age of grace. In the soon coming age, the epoch of **a new earth and new heaven** (Rev. 21,1) there will be no priest anymore because God himself will dwell among the people (Rev. 21,3 / Rev. 21,22).

The **true ministry of a priest** is not limited to internal ministry in the sanctuary, but also effective ministry of teaching, instructions, counseling, healing, etc. (also read Mal. 2, 7).

We are in the new covenant today. Jesus is the new highpriest for all eternity and all souls of His creation without exception. God Himself lifted Him up, which means that He made Him greater than everything that was before. He was greater than Solomon, mightier than the temple, more powerful than the altar and stronger than everything else in the universe (also Mat.12,42). Everything that was before were only vague shadows of the fulness of His divine being. The regular assignment of a temple priest was a five-fold ministry: **sacrifice offerer, intercessor, witness, counselor, blesor.**

The mighty work of Jesus was and is more! It is more than just a necessary, cleansing sanctification by man through the revelation of Moses and the prophets. It was the reviving fulfillment of the earthly shadows **with life** and the eternal completion thereof. Without this perfect fulfillment all works, all sacrifices, all services were only dead works that profited nothing for the soul. Jesus the new highpriest did not have to offer sacrifices for Himself and did not have to renew it. His onetime divine act of sacrificial devotion was final and sufficient. Verse 9 and 10 of the letter further explain it. Thus Jesus was and is eternal and perfect highpriest.

Hebr. 8,1 – 9,18 deals with the sovereignty of the highpriesthood of Jesus. In order to describe **the extent of Jesus' priesthood** the author starts with the renowned Jewish priesthood and proves the sovereignty and effectiveness of the highpriest Jesus Christ. The highpriest in Judaism is the highest priest (Hebr. 4,14 – 5,10). He was a descendant of Aaron of the tribe of Levi (Ex. 4,14). The highpriest of the tribe of Levi was the only one who was allowed to enter the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement (Lev.16).

The letter to the Hebrews develops a spiritual „highpriest theology“ which is unique in the NT. With Jesus something new had begun, something that was so much more effective than all the many, many sacrifices of the old covenant. In Psalm 110,4 God gives us the reason because the priesthood of Jesus is sealed with a vow (Hebr. 7,20 – 24). Jesus is therefore warrantor of a new, better and eternal covenant. His priesthood is eternal. Christ, the perfect priest (Hebr. 7,25 – 28). Christ alone is the mediator of the new covenant (Hebr. 8,1 – 13).

Hebr. 8,1 - 13 speaks of an old and a new covenant and how the last is far superior to the first. First of all it is a higher service. The author of this letter mainly wants to circle his argumentation around the greater glory of the person and the redemptive work of Christ (Hebr. 1,1 bis 10,18).

The **main topic of „Hebrews“ in a nutshell is: 'Jesus, the right highpriest'**, what is clearly expressed in Hebr. 4,14 - 16 and further explained in Hebr. 5,1 -10,18.

The development of the main idea can be **divided into the following chapters**:

- Hebr. 7, 1 bis 28 The sovereignty of Jesus as highpriest according to the order of Melchizedek
- Hebr. 8, 1 bis 5 The sovereignty of Jesus as highpriest of the heavenlies.
- Hebr. 8, 6 bis 13 The sovereignty of Jesus as the highpriest of the new covenant.
- Hebr. 9, 1 bis 7 The sanctuary of the old covenant in structure and function.
- Hebr. 9, 8 bis 14 The sanctuary of the old covenant as an image.
- Hebr. 9, 15 bis 28 The sovereignty of Jesus as the mediator of the new covenant.
- Hebr. 10, 1 bis 18 The sovereignty of Jesus as the true sacrifice.

In this sequence the middle part (Hebr. 9,1 – 14) stands out. It is generally about the depiction **of the sovereignty of Jesus as the highpriest** opposed to the Levitical priesthood which is of a lower order and can only offer imperfect sacrifices in the sanctuary according to the old covenant. This sequence (Hebr. 9,1 - 14) deals with the Jewish sanctuary and its symbolism. It seems as if the person Jesus is not in the picture for a moment in order to discuss this matter, but in truth this part of the letter reveals a basic opinion of the author about the **'doctrine of priesthood'** and the **'doctrine of the sanctuary'** which is of major importance for the content of this letter.

When we **compare this Epistle with other NT texts**, we find great amendments and a determined focus on the Lord Jesus. In **the Gospel of John** the glory of Christ is described from above. He is the Son who came from heaven to earth. He is He, whom the Father sent. In the Epistle to the Colossians we see the glory of Christ from the inside. From the Jesus perspective, the living and effective healer and saviour of the world. We see the greatness of His character (Col.1 and 2). But the **Epistle to the Hebrews describes Jesus glory from the „ancient of days“**, which means **the preparation of salvation** from the beginning of OT history. Jesus exceeds all of the characters of the OT and he did not only fulfill the prophecies of God but surpasses all expectation (comp. Hebr. 1 -10). It shows us how the shadows of the OT are illuminated with life and manifested into the reality through Jesus Christ.

The **Epistle to the Galatians** uses more parables from the **legal system**, such as legal rights to change an officially approved certificates / testaments (Gal. 3,15 – 20), legal structures, ancient educational system (Gal. 3, 23 – 29), legal positions of slaves, sons and their maturity / authority (Gal. 4,1 – 7).

The **Epistle to the Hebrews** rather points to the **„role models“** of the OT service inclusive priesthood, sacrifices and tabernacles (Hebr. 5 – 10). **„Galatians“** puts us in court, **„Hebrews“** puts us in the **temple**. One letter deals more with the „law“, and the other is concentrating on „grace“.

In **„Galatians“** it deals with „the moral law“ and in **„Hebrew“** with „the ceremonial law“ of the Mosaic culture. The Epistle to the Galatians is juristic, the Epistle to the Hebrews is cultic, since it deals more with the cult – the formal church service.

This connects the **Epistle to the Hebrews with the Epistle to the Galatians**. („sibling letters“) Both actually have the same concern. Both „siblings“ are about reformational letters of the New Testament. Both letters adress people who are about to fall from salvation into the law of the Old Testament / old covenant. The difference is that **„Galatians“** addressed Gentile Christians that had come under false, Jewish Christian influence. **„Hebrews“** addressed converted Israelites, maybe even priests and Levites (Acts 6,7).

In **„Romans“** we see the necessity of Christian faith, in **„Hebrews“** we see the sovereignty of the same. The **1st Epistle to John** shows God in Jesus Christ on earth while the **Epistle to the Hebrews shows us Jesus Christ in heaven**. Everything perfectly blends into a wonderful unity.

Hebr. 8,7- 13 **If the first covenant would have been perfect, then we would not have needed another covenant**. Since this was not the case, God Himself already announced and enforced a change of the old covenant from the beginning (comp. Ex. 33,7- 10).

Here the late terminology **„new covenant“** appears for the first time (comp. Hebr. 8,8,13; 9,15) and later turned into „New Testament (NT)“. **The old covenant had already failed**. The many attempts of restoration, especially under Joshua, did not bring the wanted results. After the announced catastrophe only a very small **„remainder“** of the people of Israel was left (Is. 4,3). With this **„remainder“** God closed a new covenant as in the days of Noah (Is. 54,9 -10). Whereas the general **foundational attitude and statements** will still remain (Ez. 36,29 – 30 / also Jer. 7,23; 11,4; 30,22; 31,1; 32,28 / Ez.11,20; 36,28; 37,27). The **Noah covenant** was also the theme of the Apostolic Council (Apg.15,19 - 20 / vgl. 1. Mos. 9,1 -17 / **Noah found grace before God** Gen. 6,8,18). The apostels relied on this covenant of God when they decided to go out as missionaries.

The **covenant with God** on Mount Sinai failed because of the sinfulness of the Israelites that could not be cured (Jer. 31,31 - 34 – especially V.36,37). The new covenant enables us to escape this sad condition in the end. The new covenant brought also a new law and a new order (Hebr. 7,12; 8,13).

Therefore **this letter is a beautiful connection** between the old and the new covenant. Even **13 times** the word „**better**“ is used. This letter was written in a very difficult time, when there were massive persecutions of the Jewish Christians and they therefore almost gave up their precious faith in order to go back to their old forms, rituals, feasts, sacrifices, etc.

They were finally supposed to know, that through Jesus „**they would receive something better**“ than they ever had in Judaism. Through Jesus they had direct access to Father God and did not have to go through endless sacrifices, regulations, rituals, commandments, etc. (comp. Hebr. 9,6 -10). Jesus finally brought them a better covenant, a better redemption and a better (eternal) representation before God.

It was God Himself who explained that the first and old covenant and the old law were carnal, weak and in vain because it could not make anybody perfect before God (Hebr. 7,15 – 19). Through Jesus all men alike (Jews, Christians, men from all nations) are delivered from the slavery of the law and carnal / spiritually dead works. Also the Gentiles had their Gentile laws, served idols and followed difficult temple cults, and many more. But through Jesus they are also included in the new possibility to have a relationship with God. Thus they can now follow the spiritual commands of the new covenant without carnal burdens or too much pressure (auch Mat.11,28,29). This is referring to the burden of the law and the many instructions of the Pharisees, of course also including the burdens of the Gentiles and the other nations.

Hebr. 9,1 – 28 The new heavenly cult. The sovereignty of the priestly service opposed to the service of the old covenant is based on:

- a) the fact that Christ only had to be offered once and not continuously,
- b) the fact that He sacrificed His own life and not the blood of strange animals.

Hebr. 9,1 -10 describes the imperfection of the old cult service. The Solomonic and later Herodian temple were no longer what the tabernacle was supposed to be (Ex. 25 - 27/ 36 – 39). On the external it was a dispersable and portable holy tent, a „meeting tent“ (Ex. 27,21). God wanted to live in a tent among His people – an external tent for internal encounter (Ex. 25,1 – 9). The **temple of Solomon** was established by the **king of Tyre** (Hiram 1. Kin. 5,15 - 32). According to his plans, of his workers and partly with the material of his country (comp. 1. Kin. 5,15 to 6,38; 7,13 - 51 / 1. Kin. 10,28ff. / 2. Chron. 2,13 - 17,12 / 1. Kin. 5,32). We can read more about the king of Tyre in **Ez. 28** . There **the king of Tyre** is used as an image of **lucifer**. This **Solomonic temple** was destroyed by king Nebukadnezar (587 b. C.) and later rebuilt by those who returned from exile. The temple was later **totally reconstructed by Herod**. Thus the author of „Hebrews“ emphasises (Hebr. 9,1) again the shortcoming of the church service of the old covenant. Because nothing was original anymore. Solomon, for example, had also replaced the high priesthood by his own system and therefore destroyed its divine originality (1.Kin.2,35). The tabernacle of David was also destroyed (Am. 9,11 / Acts15,16 – 20).

In His purity and **sinlessness** (Hebr. 4,15) Jesus had offered up the eternal sacrifice for the cancellation of all guilt once and for all (Hebr. 7,27; 9,27ff.). This **fully replaced the old sacrifices**, the old law and the old covenant. It was the overcoming of the old covenant which redeemed us from it. Jesus Christ is witness and warrantor of a better covenant (Hebr. 7,22; comp. also 8,6). This new covenant / New Testament was sealed by His sacrifice (Hebr. 9,15; also comp.12,24). That also implied the greater and better promises of the new „better covenant“ (Hebr. 8,6).

Hebr. 9,1- 14 has a great importance for the right understanding of this letter. After verses 1 to 7 formed the foundation to explain the function of the Israelite tabernacle, the author explains in verses 8 to 10 the deeper, salvation historical meaning of the spacial and functional **distinction of the two areas of the tabernacle:**

1. The '**sanctuary**' symbolized the time of the old covenant with its earthly sanctuary and its imperfect sacrifices.
2. The '**Holy of Holies**' is a parable for the time of the new covenant, while Jesus Christ represents the entrance /door into the heavenly sanctuary, an eternal and perfect redemption – comparable with the service of the Jewish highpriest on the great Day of Atonement.

Hebr. 9,11 – 28 Jesus by His perfect ministry became the divine „restorer“(comp Jer. 30,17/Joel. 2,25). By His sacrifice Jesus stopped all the animal sacrifices.

Flavius reported that at the time of Jesus about **52.000 lambs were slaughtered during the Passover celebration** in the temple. The Levites killed animals in three shifts – 9hrs a day. The blood of those poor

creatures was flowing like river streams. **The holy blood of Jesus is far superior to** the carnal blood of all sacrificed animals together. The worth of His sacrifice is immeasurable and greater than all sacrifices of the Levitical order (Hebr. 7,27 / Hebr. 10,10). Jesus – with His sacrifice He brought „**eternal redemption**“ for us. The old ritual of atonement (Lev. 16) was replaced by the special sacrifice of atonement: **the blood of Jesus** (comp. Hebr. 10,1,19). To us all, who follow Him, the forgiveness of sin is promised in Jesus Christ. For all trespasses concerning the old covenant / the strict law of Moses (Hebr. 9,15) Jesus has justified and sanctified with His blood before God forever (Hebr. 9,12). Through the **death of Jesus on the cross** the whole inheritance that was promised in the OT is manifested and available for us. At the same time all the blessings of the „**old covenant**“ are adopted to the new one. This means that the old covenant and its laws were not **simply abolished** but rather filled with spirit, truth, life, love, light and grace (Luk. 24,44).

Hebr. 10,19 - 13,25 is a practical part which exhorts the readers to steadfastness in faith, respectively encourages them and is referring to the thoughts of Hebr. 4,14 – 16: Because the **reconciliation** with God and the forgiveness of sins **was onetime and complex** we must no longer sin.

Thoughts concerning the topic: „SIN“.

The words in Hebr.10,26 – 31 **warn of „wilfull“**, which means deliberate and conscious **sin**. It is about **committing a sin intentionally / purposefully** (comp. Numb.15,30 – 31). It is not primarily about becoming weak, falling down or failure. Because this is human. The bible makes a big difference between **falling or committing a sin** (comp. Prov 24,16 / Mat.18,21 - 22 / Luk.17,4).

Peter fell, when he denied the Lord three times (Mat. 26,34,75 / Mark.14,30,72 / Luk. 22,61 / Joh.13,38). **Judas Ischariot** made a plan to betray Jesus. Jesus had warned him. He even took the money and kissed Jesus as a sign of recognition (comp Mat. 26,15 – 16,25; 27,3 / Joh.13,21 / Luk. 22,48 / Joh.13,2). **Satan** rebelled directly against God and acted evil on purpose (Rev.12,8 – 9). The fall of lucifer happened long before the creation of man. (Gen.1,1 – 2). **Is. 14,13** and **Ez. 28,12 - 15** describe the fall of the first angel of light who thought: „**I want to go up and be equal to God the Most High**“. He fell because of his disobedience, stubbornness and pride. The apostate exalted himself illegally and took 1/3 of all the angels down with him. This sin will not be forgiven.

Adam and Eve were tempted, therefore their sin can be forgiven. David was not punished so much for the **adultery** he committed but because of the **murder of Uriah** (comp.. 2. Sam.11; **12,9 - 14 / 1. Kin. 15,5**). The **adultery was a mistake**. But the murder of Uriah was willfully determined. When the prophet Nathan confronted him with it he admitted it right away. The judgment was „...the man is guilty of murder... he must pay four times for it“. Four sons of David had to die because of that (also 2. Sam. 12,1 -15a).

Ananias and Saphira also made a plan to lie. They knew they were not saying the truth and claimed that it was all the money they received for the ground they sold (Acts 5,1 – 11). There is a huge difference between **falling because of weakness or conscious sin** (comp. Rom. 11,11 / 2. Cor. 11,29). Peter asked how many times he had to forgive someone who sinned against him (Mat.18,21; 5,39; 6,12 / 2. Cor. 2,7 / Eph. 4,32 / Col. 3,13).

According to the bible and Hebrew thinking **SIN is rebellion against God** (Job 1,22). In all of this Job did not sin (read Ps. 39,2 / Pro. 18,7 / Jud.16). **Who ever is born of God, does not sin** (1. Joh.3,9 / 5,18). That means **divine-spiritual part in him**, that which is of God, does not sin. And who remains in Him, will not sin (comp.1. Joh.3,6 / Hebr. 7,26). All who saw, experienced or knew Him cannot deny Him anymore (1. Joh. 1,3). We have fellowship with Him. This fellowship is always restored by God through His Holy Spirit, for example with Peter. The unity and relationship with Jesus cannot be destroyed, even though it might be interrupted for a time (Joh. 14,20; 15,1 – 6; 17,11,20 – 26). The Christian remains in God and then God remains in him (1. Joh. 2,5,6,24,27/ 3,6,24/ 4,12,1,15,16). The believer is born of God (1. Joh. 2,29; 3,9; 4,7; 5,1,18; 2,16) and accepted from God (1. Joh. 2,3,13,14/ 3,6 / 4,7,8). God Himself cares for him, protects and sustains him (1. Joh. 5,18 / 1. Thes. 5,5,23).

Hebr. 11,1 – 3 What is faith. Faith is assurance and a glad expectation of the future. Faith is orientation in the spiritual world of the invisible. This definition fits the concern of the whole letter. The foundation of faith is the knowledge that the external visible world was created by the word of God out of the invisible, spiritual substance. For a believer the so-called „reality“ is only an appearance. A redeemed person always looks at **two sides: nature and faith**.

- Nature sees loss, faith sees growth and gain.
- Nature sees final death, faith hopes in life.
- Nature sees the grave, faith sees resurrection.
- Nature looks back with yearning to the treasures of memories, faith looks toward glory.

True faith is therefore focused on the invisible things of the future. It does not look at the present condition of

the world or the flesh. The thoughts of a believer are always focused on the things above (Is. 55,9).

Real faith...

1. looks upon Father God while facing the problems of life and pain (Hebr. 12,5a; 6b; 3b; 8);
2. considers God's guidance and love in times of tribulation (Hebr.12, 6a);
3. trusts God and His wise counsel in the midst of suffering (Hebr. 12,10a);
4. is counting on God in the troublesome times in life to bring order into the chaos (Hebr. 12,7a);
5. submits to God and His authority even if he does not understand (Hebr. 12, 9);
6. considers the present suffering a necessary in order to grow mature in faith (Hebr. 12, 10);
7. understands that God can turn the darkness of this world into light (Hebr.12,11b).

Hebr. 11,1- 40 The role models of faith witnesses. And then Hebr.11 depicts a long "list of fathers of faith" which is the historical evidence that there were always strong „revivals of faith“ and „faithful people“ for a certain time, and all of them have some kind of great testimony. They trusted God in their daily life and proved in times of testing. The list of so many comrades in arms is supposed to encourage the reader to stay steadfast in faith. These witnesses are the „divine cloud“, that surrounds us. The author says that wherever we look, we see witnesses of faith. They are almost encamping around us and encouraging us. **For the early church witnesses and martyrs were very important** (also Rev. 6,9 ; 20,4 / Phil. 2,17 / Is. 26,19 / Ez.37).

All those who confessed their faith in the OT are honored and given a name in the army of the great heroes of God, a group of honourable men who were confirmed by the Lord God Himself (Hebr. 11,16). People who had to endure despise and shame but were in truth so valuable that the world was not worthy of them (Hebr. 11,38). They are introduced to the NT as saints of God and placed in the eternal light of God.

Hebr. 11,4 – 7 Abel, Henoah, Noah. The reference of faith in the future is easy to see in the life of Henoah and Noah, but also about Abel: The crying of the blood means that he can speak even beyond death and is therefore the offerer and offering himself, just like Jesus also was.

Hebr. 11,8 – 19 Abraham. Crucial for the reflection of Gen.12 – 23 is the exodus into the unknown (Vers 8), living in a foreign country (Vers 9) and in tents (Vers10). Furthermore Sarah's faith in the promise of an heir (Vers 11ff.), death in a foreign country without seeing the divine promises fulfilled in all areas (Vers 13-16) and finally the offering of Isaac.

Continuously **faith stands against what we see with our eyes**, there is no assurance that we can see with our human senses. This suggests a certain understanding of faith and a subsequent interpretation of the situation. This is especially emphasised in Hebrews 11,13 - 16. When Abraham was willing to offer up Isaac (Gen. 22) **his unshakeable faith was accounted to him as righteousness.**

Hebr. 11,20 – 22 Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Isaac gave his blessing, believing that God would fulfil it. He was convinced that according to God's standards the blessing could not be taken back (Gen. 27,33). He blessed Jacob with regard to his future and his descendants (Gen. 27 – 29). He also **blessed Esau**, whose highest blessing was to serve his brother and then shake off this yoke later (Gen. 27,39,40). The latter happened when the Edomites (descendants of Esau) departed from Judah at the time of king Joram (ca. 866 - 858 b.C.) and crowned their own king (2. Kin. 8,20 – 22).

Jacob blessed both sons of Joseph before he died (Hebr. 11,1 / Gen. 47,31) and blessed the younger Ephraim before Manasse, the firstborn of Joseph (Gen. 48). He took them into the line of his own sons, after whom the tribes were called (Gen. 48,5).

Joseph gave concrete instructions concerning his bones. He believed what God had promised to the fathers. He was therefore convinced of Israel's exodus out of Egypt and thus commanded that his bones would be buried in the promised land (Gen. 50,24,25 / Ex. 13,19).

Hebr. 11,23 – 29 Moses. Especially in Hebr. 11,26 the reference to the recipients of the letter seems to be clear: Christians who have to endure social isolation. The focus on the invisible (Vers 27b) leads us back to Hebrews 11,1 and confirms it. The focus on the visible things such as the treasures of Egypt is degraded to perishable goods. Faith looks upon the invisible and eternal things.

Hebr. 11,30ff. The conquest of Jericho and Rahab. The witnesses of faith are the Israelites who walked around the city of Jericho 7 times and conquered it because of their patient obedience. Another witness of faith is also the prostitute **Rahab** – as a role model of confession of the God of Israel (Jos. 2,11). By faith in the power and faithfulness of God she was saved. Her faith is a hidden inner conviction and assurance.

Hebr. 11,32 - 38 faith witnesses of the late history of Israel. Vers 32a shows us again the rhetoric education and bible knowledge of the author. The following examples united in one text are very unique in the NT. They are a transfer of the old stories of the people of God into the new covenant. **The Epistle to the Hebrews is the bridge between the OT and the NT.** It is also called the 5th gospel. The old heroes of faith and martyrs / saints of the NT **are named as equal witnesses together.** The verses 35 to 38 lead the OT believers to the present life situation of the readers of this letter.

Hebr. 11,39 – 40 There were also other witnesses who had not yet received the promise. In strong contrast to the believers mentioned above other believers suffered in weakness and never experienced salvation or divine miracles. Their hope was in resurrection. They were not about earthly or temporary gain, but only about the eternal and heavenly (Hebr. 11,16,35 – 38). Who those believers were is not mentioned by name. It should also refer to other believing Israelites (Hebr 10,33 – 34) who did not experience the manifestation of the promise because they belonged to the seed of Abraham (Heb. 11,12) and their treasure was in heaven - i.e. Nabot (1. Kin. 21,13), Zacharia (2. Chr. 24,21), Jeremiah (Jer. 20,2,8; 37,15; 38,6), Prophet Uriah (Jer. 26,23), etc. (also Rom. 8,35,36 / Ps. 44,12,23). It depicts all the believers of that time as warriors in the „**fight of faith**“. Christ gave the victory to those who fought. Therefore Hebr.12.1 states : „Let us look upon Jesus.“ This is the attitude of the whole NT, spiritual life.

oLet us look upon Jesus (Hebr. 12):

- He is our role model in battle. Vers 1 to 3.
- This is how we practically win. Vers 1 to 3.
- This is how we prove in suffering. Vers 4 to 11.
- This is how we avoid weariness. Vers 12 to 15.
- This is how we achieve the dignity of our birthright. Vers 16 to 17.
- This is how we get to the heavenly city. Vers 18 to 29.

We do not win by earthly means but by the power of grace and trust in Jesus. We are powerless and nothing without Him. Even our best intentions and all diligence cannot take us there. It is by Christ alone. Therefore the runner in his race looks upon Him alone, from whom all power and strength come. Only the one who lives by the gift of God's grace, Jesus Christ, will reach perfection in the end.

Jesus is the „firstborn of the dead“, the great conqueror over death and the grave, the great triumph who can handle every situation. He who has won the fight of perfection, shares His crown with every successful warriors and overcomers. All blessings of God have the purpose to increase.

In the end of the letter we find some more practical advice (Ch.12 -13). Especially the collected **exhortations of Ch. 13** (comp. also Hebr. 6,10; 10,24; 12,1,4 – 17) are traditional and according to the requirements of early Christianity.

Hebr. 12,1 – 3 promotes faith as patience. Faith is patience, is perseverance in suffering and is focused on Jesus who suffered the cross patiently and despised the shame thereof (comp Hebr. 11,26). In the ancient times the death on the cross was the punishment for criminals and slaves who tried to escape. Someone with Roman citizenship was usually not punished this way.

Hebr. 12,4 – 11 Suffering is part of our education. We, as sons and daughters of a loving and mighty Father full of love are raised in a good but strict manner. We go through the school of life and face growing obstacles and tests. We face obstacles that are supposed to help us grow and mature. Suffering is a part of our training and qualification (comp. Hebr. 2,10 - 18 / Spr. 3,11). **The suffering and battles of our faith heroes** are supposed to encourage us to also prove our faith and pass the test. Suffering must always be considered from the aspect of eternity (comp.Rom. 8,18; 5,2 - 5 / 2. Cor. 4,17). If someone does not judge **suffering** according to God's standards he will feel handicapped by his need and it will become a burden.

Hebr. 12,12 – 17 Warning of falling back behind grace. The believers of all ages are trapped in the battle of life full of contradictions. In the midst of apparently important, but actually minor things it is about eternal and timeless values. It is about eternal divine life and the eternal divine love that finds its highest fulfillment in mercy. The author **especially warns the Jews**, not to give up their God-given gifts or to waste / ignore them like **Esau**. He shows us how fast we can fall from our position and lose the blessing.

Therefore we find so many warnings in this letter. One of those warnings refers to Esau, the twin brother of the patriarch Jacob (Hebr. 12,16,17). For a regular dish he sold his birthright. When he did that, he chose temporary satisfaction of a need over his future / destiny. **The dish** was a temporary pleasure, which was followed by great disappointment. And when he tried to get back his blessings he found no place of

repentance in the sense of turning back time or make his mistake undone. He sought the blessing and repentance with tears. Based on his birthright, attitude and destiny the author gives the readers an educational instruction concerning their own position and responsibility to protect themselves of such a mistake that they could also make.

Jacob's tears, his crying, mourning and asking could not reverse the decision of the father (Gen. 27,34). There was no room to „**reverse**“ the blessing of Isaac under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The apostate is always the big loser. The diligent tears of Esau would prove that he repented and was willing to change his ways. But his father Isaac could not change his decision or restore his birthright to him. **The warning is in the center of attention**. It is very powerful to understand the position that Esau originally had but gave up so easily.

The „**birthright of the firstborn**“ according to the OT gave him a very high position of honor. His **ominous error was** (Gen. 25,30 – 32) that he sold his birthright for a cheap dish. He was hotheaded, materialistic and egoistic. He only lived for the visible and wasted the spiritual. The temporary, sensual pleasure was more important to him than the God-given goods of blessing. **His behaviour revealed that he despised God's gift of honor** (Gen. 25,34) and **brought despoise upon himself** (Gen. 27,37). The wild Esau was not careful and wasted the calling of his family and his divine appointment in the future. With his casual attitude he revealed his heart. It showed that on the inside he did not fear God, he was a secular son of a patriarch, which means a worldly offspring of a carrier of God's highest promise. .

At the same time the word „firstborn“ is used to highlight the **position of grace** of the church. The Epistle to the Hebrews that speaks of the right of the firstborn Esau continues and tells the readers of the New Testament: „You have come. . . **to the assembly of the firstborn**, whose names are written in heaven“ (Hebr. 12,23). Jesus is the first, the one who deserves the highest honor of all divine works of revelation. He is the firstborn of creation in redemption and perfection.

The word „**right of the firstborn**“ must be understood with regard to the Old Testament. The emphasis is not so much on the temporary order of birth, but rather an order of honor and authority. Other wise we could not speak about someone who was not born the first, who then becomes the carrier of the honor of the firstborn – which the OT testifies for example in the life of David. Someone who was born the last, receives the treatment of a firstborn, anointed king, leader and carrier of the blessing (also read Ps. 89,26 – 29 / 1. Chr. 5,1, 2 / 1. Sam. 16,3 -1 3).

Hebr. 12,16 See that no one is godless like Esau. Esau traded his birthright irresponsibly and carelessly. Therefore he was rejected (comp. Mal. 1,2,3 / Rom. 9,13). If Esau would not have traded his birthright himself, he would have kept it. Then all the salvation historical events until Jesus would have happened in his ancestral line of him and his ancestors and not his brother Jacob. At the same time we find out something about the tragedy of sin. Sin likes to use the weak moments in the life of a man to make him fall. Esau was hungry and „**tired**“ when he made a very wrong decision (Gen. 25, 29). But especially those „**weak hours**“ are usually the most important hours of decision. During the time of testing, in our weakest moments the reality or the truth of our character will be revealed. It will show who we really are on the inside. The whole strength of a team is determined by its **weakest member**. A battle front is broken as soon as the **weakest go down**. Therefore personal failures in weak hours cannot be excused by the difficult conditions.

We all have to fight. **Suffering** must always be considered with regard to eternity. Only this way we can understand the value of the One who suffered for our Redemption, cleansing of our souls and spiritual perfection. Suffering as we fight our fights in life is not unnecessary or disturbing if we look at it from the perspective of eternity (Hebr. 12,5). **Therefore a child of the heavenly Father can also feel safe and secure in times of tribulations** (also Rom. 8, 38; 39 / Hebr. 13,5 / Gen 50, 20; 45,8 / Amos 3,6 / Rom. 8,28). God's actions while we suffer are always to strengthen us in our spiritual maturity. Faith considers all **suffering necessary** in order to chastise us and change our lives/hearts into the likeness of our holy God. God is helping us so that we can become partakers of his holiness (Hebr. 12, 10). A bitter need is sometimes a necessity because some things only flourish when we have gone through a need and we face our obstacles without fear (comp. Jer. 38,17 – 21). This is how we surrender to God's holy will and we agree to the way that God is accomplishing His goals with us. Thus we are submitting to the love of God and His wise management of our life.

Every victory over suffering makes us stronger on the inside. After every victory the angels of God serve us (comp. Math. 4, 11). Growth in holiness is also a growth of our joy. On the apparently wild and tiresome tree of trials and tribulations grows the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Job knew: **In the midst of all loss, God still gives**(Job 1,21). When we know that , we should **not grow weary**“ (Hebr. 12.12 – 15).

The Hebrew Christians had become tired. After a blessed beginning (Hebr. 10, 32 – 34) they grew weary in their soul. Their hands became „weak“, their knees lame (comp. Hebr. 12,12) and they did not visit the assembly of the saints as often as in the beginning (Hebr. 10,25). Their faith no longer was comparable to a runner in a race, but rather a slowly walking sick, or lame person. The glory of the grace was overshadowed. The return to Judaism seemed to be tempting. The danger of „**hardening**“ was threatening them (Hebr. 3,13,12). They lost their spiritual freshness and spontaneity. Actually we cannot grow old in our spirit (comp. 2. Cor. 4,16 / Is. 40,31).

Jesus is the leader and original image of salvation (Hebr. 12,2). His exemplary behaviour was supposed to motivate us. We are supposed to look upon the victor only. In His battle on Golgotha He is our example for our own trials. His victory is the foundation of all our victories. True faith is to become more and more like our holy role model Jesus Christ. To grow in His likeness (Rom. 8,29; 6,5). **The closer a man comes to God**, the closer he gets to the great mystery. God is the eternal One, the One who is totally different and always sovereign in all things. All eternity rests in Him. Our human mind can but grasp the mysterious depths, His eternal source of life, love and light.

Jesus Christ is always the same. Hebrews 13 can be understood as an **Epilogue**, which is an important afterword and summary that should be adhered for our God-pleasing service in every day life.

Hebr. 13,8 Jesus is still the same. This renowned Hebrew text must be regarded in context with Hebr. 12,7. That means: people go there dying. Generations are going to the grave. Also the great leaders of the former generations of faith have passed away.

But **Father God Jesus Christ remains!** He is **the rock of His church** in the midst of coming and going generations. He is sovereign over every change of situations and persons. He is the connecting member between the generations, between yesterday and today in the history of His people. He is the author and finisher of our faith. **This also means: even though many things might change in the course of time, In Christ the same purpose for life will stay the same throughout the decades.** The teachers and leaders of the churches may come and go, the essential teaching and divine foundation of spiritual faith remains the same.

We should not forget „today“. The past only exists in our memory. Our future is in our expectation and that what we really have: the precious here and now in every new moment of our being.

Hebr. 13,1 – 6 Exhortation to brotherly love and holiness. There are some awkward thoughts that come up in this chapter, such as loyalty and hospitality also towards unknown Christians. This was not only a theological command for early Christianity but also an important organizational matter of survival. Furthermore such thoughts like **service for the captives**, the sick, etc. (comp. Mat. 25,36 / 1. Cor. 5,10 / Col. 3,5 / Eph. 5,3,5).

Hebr. 13,7 - 9 A warning of curiosity towards strange doctrines. This is pointing to the Jewish day of Atonement (Hebr. 13,11), the burning of the flesh of both sacrificial animals (Lev.16,27; 16). They are urged to come out of Judaism, **the pious camp of Jerusalem**, to follow Jesus willingly (Hebr. 13,13).

Hebr. 13,17 Exhortation to obedience to the church leaders. Also the exhortation to obedience towards the church leaders is kept general. There are no concrete issues addressed. The responsibility of the church leaders is automatically assumed (comp. 1 Cor. 3,13 – 15) such as in the text of Paul.

Hebr. 13,18 – 25 The letter ending. The allocation of Hebr. 13,18ff. is very controversial. We can just see it as the continuation of verse 17 or as a part of the letter ending. The latter is supported by the fact that from verse 18 on the „**I**“ of the author is given priority. We still do not find out much about the author, even though the recipients seemed to know exactly who he was and what he was referring to in verse 19. Such intercession prayers can also be found in other letters (comp. 1. Thes. 5,25).

The true reason why the Hebrew Christians **grew weary** was actually not their external situation, but rather their own mindset and viewpoint. They had let it slide. This was the root of the danger of failure, which showed in the decrease of their attendance in the services (Hebr.10,25). Based on that they were not as motivated anymore. **They needed a strongly motivating message.** Living faith still comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10,17).

There was perhaps an argument between the Jewish Christians because the author is rebuking them to hold their peace (Hebr. 12,14 / also Acts 6,1). **Peace and holiness** are mentioned together and are regarded as a unity. If someone is able to deny himself, he will also be able to hold his peace at all times. He can be silent and still, and he does not have to have the last word to be right. He says about peace and holiness: „**Chase after it!**“. In other terms he could have said strife for it or be diligent, etc. But if someone is

chasing holiness and lives in peace and harmony with all others, that person also has the ability and authority to serve every soul everywhere and anytime.

The ceaseless gaze upon Christ also sharpens our loving and merciful view for the needs of our brethren, the people, the animals and the whole creation including plants and trees. Spiritual awakening and that we stay fresh in the spirit does not happen automatically. Especially this precious good must be acquired and fought for and results from practical application in perfection.

The blessings (Hebr. 13,20ff.) are again touching theological motives that are in the heart of the author (comp. Hebr. 2,10; 4,14; 5,9; 7, 9,12). With the mention of „**our brother Timothy**“ the author willfully uses the tradition of Pauline mission work. It is interesting that the letter of Hebrews was classed among the old collections between 2nd Thessalonians and the 1st Epistle to Timothy.

Test-Questions

- 1 What is the exhortation of the letter to the Hebrews?
1. Who could have written this letter?
2. What is the Epistle to the Hebrews?
3. Why couldn't Esau get back his birth right?
4. Compared to whom is Jesus greater?
5. Why is Jesus greater than the angels?
6. Why is the priestly order of Melchizedek sovereign to the Levitical priestly order?
7. Why is the revelation in Jesus so unique?
8. What is the theme and the essential thought of the letter to the Hebrews?
9. What kind of purpose does suffering fulfill?
10. Why does the author use images (symbols, comparisons) from the O.T.?
11. What happens to someone who is going back to „Judaism“ and again sacrifices animals?
12. What should the believers be eager to do?
13. Why or by what cause did the Hebrews grow weary?
14. What is true faith?
15. Why is Jesus the true High Priest for us?
16. When do we fall and when do we sin?
17. What is it you find important about the letter to the Hebrews?

Please send the answers to pastor@matutis.de

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Nest lesson – 1. Peter

And now may the Lord bless you richly with your bible studies.

May prayers are with you.
Pastor Joh.W.Matutis