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Hebrews Introduction (Part 2)



Hebrews - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg explores the concept of judgment and its application both in the context of temporal punishment and the notion of eternal hell. He also delves into the idea that the temple and the old covenant would eventually disappear, replaced by the new covenant established by Jesus Christ, who is considered a high priest and the ultimate revelation of God. Gregg also highlights the significance of the priesthood established by Jesus, which differs from its Jewish counterpart, and emphasizes the importance of not neglecting God's call or neglecting the magnitude of the privileges that come with salvation.

Transcript

We'll continue our introduction to Hebrews and finish it up here in this session. It's often helpful, in this case especially helpful, to know when the book of Hebrews was written. And I believe that the evidence is solid that it was written before the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

That is, before AD 70. I've mentioned the reasons are primarily that the readers appear to have been tempted to go back to observe the temple system and to look to the Aaronic priesthood for their atonement rituals and so forth. After 70 AD, when the temple was destroyed by the Romans, the Aaronic priesthood was nothing.

There was no altar, there was no temple, there were no sacrifices, and there haven't been in Israel since then. That whole sacrificial system came to an end and therefore the fact that it is a live issue in the minds of the readers would appear to make it obvious that the temple is still standing. However, that it would not be standing long seems to be affirmed by the author in a number of places.

Now, of course, we don't know how long long would be. If this was written as early as, say, 60 AD, it might still be that he could say this is soon going to disappear. After all, a decade is not long when you're talking about the ending of an institution that's been around for 1400 years.

So, we can say sometime before 70 AD. We can't really say how long before. The author felt like it was coming down pretty soon.

This being so, it means that when we look at some of the passages about judgment, fiery indignation, and so forth, that are coming on those readers, if they go back to the system, it may not be that we're talking about eschatological judgment here. Although, certainly, I believe the author would be fully a believer in eschatological judgment and the lake of fire and all that. Yet, it may not be what he has in mind when he's warning these people about the danger of going back to a system that's going to be burned down.

And, as we know from what Josephus tells us, not only was the temple burned down, but hundreds of thousands of Jewish people were burned down in the city, too, and in the temple. In other words, the city is coming under a fiery holocaust. The whole system is.

The whole nation is. Its temple is going down. The Jews, the priesthood, they're going to be slaughtered, and so forth.

And not long, perhaps, from the time that this was written. That being so, it's really a bad time to be going back to the temple observance. Because you're going to walk right in, jump out of the frying pan into the fire.

It's essentially, almost literally the case. If they're in the frying pan being persecuted for being Christians, jumping out into Jerusalem is jumping into the fire itself. We saw in Hebrews 10, although we didn't read all these words, but we did in verse 27.

The person who goes back to that system is not going to find a sacrifice that's valid there to help them out. But what they will find, it says in verse 27, is a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. This is what they will find if they go back to the temple worship system at this time.

Now, we might consider that to be a reference to hell, and maybe that's also what they're facing. After death, they would be facing the lake of fire as well. But a lot of times, the references to judgment that we apply to hell could, in some cases, depending on the context, be references to temporal judgment.

Not denying that there's a hell afterwards, but simply not referring to that specifically. But talking about the immediate danger of judgment. Because so much of the New Testament, especially of what Jesus said, I should say, and the parts that were written to Jewish people, I believe has these warnings about what's coming down soon.

I believe all the books of the New Testament, with the possible exception of John and the three epistles of John, were written before A.D. 70. Revelation is very much controversial in that respect, but I even put it before 70 A.D. But in other words, when you're reading the New Testament, you're mainly reading books written before Jerusalem was destroyed. And when you're reading teachings or warnings or preaching that's given to Jews during that period, many times it's that horrible calamity coming upon them.

It'd be like if you knew prophetically that Hitler was going to come to power and you're living in Germany, and you start preaching to the Jews about this horrible Holocaust that's coming. Now, someone reading your written sermons might say, oh, he's warning them about going to hell. Well, maybe that's not what the warnings are specifically about.

There may be a hell after that, but certainly you could describe the Holocaust in those terms. And if you read what Josephus said about the destruction of Jerusalem, it's kind of a hell itself, on this side of hell. And so I believe that if we're looking at warnings being given to Jews who are thinking about going back to the temple system, the warnings about the destruction of Jerusalem are particularly relevant.

And so we find in chapter 8, verse 13, which I mentioned in our last session, after he quotes at length from Jeremiah 31 about the New Covenant, the author makes this comment, verse 13 of chapter 8, in that he says, a new covenant, he has made the first obsolete. Now the first, of course, is that which is made at Mount Sinai, which led to the institution of the sacrificial system and the tabernacle and all that, and the priesthood. That first covenant is obsolete, he says.

Why? Because God has made a new covenant. Well, when did he do that? I might just say this because there are Christians who disagree with me on this. I'm not sure why they do, because I think they're somewhat agenda-driven, but especially Messianics and some varieties of dispensation say the New Covenant has not been instituted yet.

Because Jeremiah said the New Covenant would be with the house of Israel. And they say the New Covenant was made with the church. What we call the New Covenant was made with the church, but there has to be a New Covenant with Israel, too.

And so there are some who argue that the New Covenant that Jeremiah spoke of has not happened yet, because Israel hasn't come into this New Covenant phenomenon. However, as I understand it, Jesus did make the New Covenant with Israel, with the remnant of Israel. They were in the upper room with him, the faithful remnant.

And Jesus said, this cup is the New Covenant, my blood. Just like Moses, when he scattered the blood of bulls and goats on the people's springs, he said, this is the covenant. This is the blood of the covenant, he said.

And so Jesus, in one of the Gospels, is reported handing out the cup and saying, this is the blood of the New Covenant. So I believe Jesus did establish the New Covenant with the remnant of Israel. They happen to be people that we now call disciples.

In his day, they were just Israelites who happened to be faithful to the Messiah, which is the definition of the faithful remnant. So God did make the New Covenant with the faithful in Israel, and that number grew to thousands, of course, shortly thereafter.

Faithful Jews coming to Christ on the day of Pentecost and later.

Now, it says here, in that he says a New Covenant, he has made the first obsolete. Then he says this, now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. Now, the Old Covenant was obsolete, but it had not yet vanished away.

There was still a temple standing. There were still priests offering sacrifices. But even that was going to disappear before long.

So we have this seemingly fairly clear allusion to the soon destruction of the temple system. And I personally think, as I mentioned earlier, that when he talks about us not having a continuing city, here we have no continuing city, he says, then I think in this case he's also alluding to the soon destruction of Jerusalem. That's in chapter 13, verse 14 especially.

Hebrews 13, 14, for here we have no continuing city. Now, Jerusalem would have been thought to be the eternal city, but it was not to be an eternal city. It was going to be torn down and burned down and dismantled.

Not one stone left standing or another, Jesus said. And so I think it is in the shadow of this impending Holocaust, essentially, that the author is particularly urgent. And that's why he has his five different times he breaks away from his main argument in order to warn them, don't go back there.

You're walking into a tree shredder, chipper. You're going to be torn to pieces and bloodied and burned. I mean, it's a horrible, awful situation to go back to.

Don't even think about it. And so this is why it was written. It was written to exhort them to persevere in the Christian faith rather than to go back.

Exhortation, in Chapter 13, as John mentioned during the break, the word exhort means encourage. And the Greek word exhort, I mean, it's an English word, but the Greek word behind the word exhort, it literally means to encourage. And in Chapter 13, verse 22, the author says, I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, that is of encouragement, that I've written to you in a few words.

This whole letter is seen as a somewhat brief encouragement to what? Well, to not fall away, to not go backward, to go forward with Christ and to persevere in the faith of Christ. I've already mentioned some of the things that are next in your notes, and that is the approach the author takes to making his case. One, he emphasizes the superiority and the finality of Christ and his work.

That is to say, there's no sense in going back to a system that's inferior when you've already found that which is so superior to it in Christ. He also explains the relationship between Old Testament and New Testament provisions of the Atonement, mainly a

contrast between the Day of Atonement in the Old Testament, Chapters 9 and 10, and that which is its fulfillment in Christ. The main difference being that the Old Testament Day of Atonement had to be repeated because it was never really finalized anything.

But Jesus died once and for all, that brought about a final solution, and he doesn't have to repeat it. He sat down. After he offered one sacrifice of himself, he sat down at the right hand of God, meaning there was nothing more to do.

His sacrifice is total and complete. Of course, they shouldn't back away from that and go back to the no sacrifices that God will honor back in the temple. Also, he issues quite a few severe warnings, as I mentioned, about the dangers of backsliding and not going forward.

The Book of Hebrews makes one distinctive contribution that's not found in any other book of the Bible, and that is the high priesthood of Jesus. That Jesus is a high priest. Now, there are allusions to this in the Old Testament, of course.

We've got the whole Aaronic priesthood and their garments and things like that, even their rituals we see as types and shadows of Jesus' function. But I don't know that the Jews would have understood it that way. That's something that we understand only in retrospect, after we're told that Jesus is our high priest, and it's Hebrews that tells us that.

Then we can see that in the Old Testament things. I don't know if we would have come up with it on our own. There is one reference in Romans 8 to the fact that Christ makes intercession for us.

He doesn't mention specifically priestly intercession, and priests were not the only people who made intercession. Prophets did, too, sometimes. But Paul does say in Romans 8 that Christ makes intercession for us, and that is also stated in Hebrews.

It's very probable that in Romans he's thinking of the priestly ministry of Christ, but he doesn't spell it out. In Hebrews, though, it's spelled out in great detail. Christ is our high priest is the main, the high point, really, of Hebrews and the distinctive contribution it makes to our theology.

Okay, let me just talk about some of the themes in the book as we move along here. The first theme we come across is the ultimacy of Christ. In the first verses, he points out that God spoke in a variety of ways to their ancestors, through the prophets, but in these last days he's spoken through Jesus.

And he makes it very clear Jesus is the ultimate word from God because he is the express image of his person and the bright shining of his glory. And he goes on to heap more accolades on Christ to point out that Christ is the ultimate. Isaiah was a great prophet.

He was not the ultimate. Elijah was prince of the prophets as far as the Jews were concerned, but he was not the ultimate nor the last. Moses was wonderful.

Joshua, admirable, but they were not the ultimate. The ultimate is Christ who is the express image of God and the bright shining of his glory, and that's the point he makes in the first three verses. So the ultimacy of Christ means not only that he's superior, but that he's the last.

He has made all others unnecessary. And he shows the superiority of Christ over a number of important beings, all of them significant to the Jewish law and its prestige. In chapter 1 verses 4 through 14 and chapter 2 verses 5 through 18, he talks about the angels and especially in chapter 1 about how Jesus is so superior to the angels.

He's a son, whereas they are ministering servants. They are servants in God's household. He's the son.

And just as a son has incredible rights compared to the servants in the household, so Christ is that much greater than the angels. Why does he bring this up? Because the Jews had a tradition, not really mentioned specifically in Exodus, but they had a tradition that the angels mediated at Mount Sinai. And this seems to be true.

Stephen made reference to it in his sermon in Acts 7. He mentioned that they had received the law at the hand of angels. In Galatians, Paul also mentions the angels as being instrumental in the giving of the law. And in Hebrews chapter 2, the writer of Hebrews seems to say so as well.

In Hebrews chapter 2, he says in verse 3 and following, How shall we escape? No, we need verse 2 as well. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect, of course, a much greater witness from Christ and his apostles? But notice the word spoken by angels. Now you might say, well, that just refers to times when angels came down and gave orders to Lot to get out of Sodom or something like that.

No, it's not that. He's referring to the fact that angels were believed to have been involved in the giving of the law. Notice, the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and everyone who disobeyed it had to suffer consequences prescribed in the law.

It's the legal consequences of violating the law that he's referring to. And he refers to it as the word spoken by angels. Like I said, Galatians in Acts 7 also mentioned angels in connection with that.

So that's why the angels received the attention they do at the beginning here. We might point out that in the first verse of chapter 1, Jesus is by implication much superior to the prophets because God spoke through the prophets to our fathers, but not now. He speaks through his son.

Now he's superior to the angels, who are also associated with the giving of the law. And then Moses is singled out, who is, of course, most directly involved in giving the law. In chapter 3, verses 2 through 6, he talks about the superiority of Christ over Moses.

In chapter 4, the superiority of Christ over Joshua. Primarily in that Joshua, though he gave Israel a rest, bringing them into Canaan, it wasn't as good a rest as what Jesus gives us. So he's superior to Joshua.

It's in chapter 4. Now, of course, he talks about the priesthood, the Old Testament priesthood from Aaron. And this gets a lot of attention. Chapters 4 and 5 talk about it.

There's a parenthesis there. Then he comes back to it at the end of chapter 6 and all of chapter 7. And this is where the Melchizedek priesthood is expounded. And then there's a better tabernacle mentioned in chapters 8 and 9, which included a better Holy of Holies.

Jesus brought a sacrifice of his own blood into a better Holy of Holies in heaven, better than the one on earth. There's a better covenant. We just read about that in chapter 8. There's a better sacrifice, Christ himself, chapters 9 and 10, in the context of the Day of Atonement.

The sacrifices the priest offered there were inferior to the sacrifice that Christ offered of himself for the simple reason that Christ never had to do it again. His was good enough for all time. Not so the sacrifices of the Old Testament.

And then there's a better altar that's also mentioned at the very end. We have an altar that the priests don't have the right to eat from. No doubt he's referring that.

I would think perhaps in the mind of the early Christians he's referring to the communion table there because the early Christians were eating, of course, of Christ as they saw it there, whereas the priests ate the animal bodies at the altar. We eat of Christ, not of an animal carcass. So anyway, he argues for the ultimacy of Christ.

He also talks about things being shadows in the Old Testament versus substance. Now this is again a Pauline idea. In Colossians 2, Paul introduces this idea of shadows versus substance.

Colossians 2, 16 and 18. And it's making the same point that's made by the writer of Hebrews, that the law, especially the ceremonies of the law, were a shadow. It says that in Colossians 2, 16, it says that don't let anyone judge you concerning what you eat or drink or your observance of festivals or new moons or Saturdays.

These things were a shadow for the time being. But the substance or the body, it says in the Greek, is of Christ. Now the difference between a body and a shadow is remarkable.

A body is something. A shadow is nothing. If anything, a shadow is the absence of something.

It's the absence of light. If you're standing in the light and you have a shadow, the shadow is where the light isn't. The shadow, however, is something of a silhouette.

It resembles the body in some ways. It has the same general shape. But it's not anything.

It just depicts the body. It's a picture of the body. The body is the real thing.

And so the laws, the ceremonial laws, were a shadow. They're like a picture of Christ. He's the real thing.

And therefore, of course, you don't want to go back to have a relationship with the shadow, which is nothing. But you want to continue your relationship with Christ, who's the real thing. And so we see the Sabbath and Canaan, the rest of Sabbath and the rest of Canaan, are treated as if they are a shadow of the rest which Christ gives.

Are we resting in Christ? This is in Chapter 4, also in Chapter 11. Melchizedek is treated, at least many scholars feel, as a type or a shadow of Christ. Now I take a different view.

I take the view that Melchizedek is Christ. Now we'll talk about both views and the arguments about them when we get to Chapter 7. But many people think that the man Melchizedek in the Old Testament who met Abraham was simply a man, but that he was like a type and a shadow of Christ. I think he was somewhat more than that.

I think he is what we call a theophany. The tabernacle and the Day of Atonement are treated as shadows. The very word shadow is used by the writer of Hebrews in Chapters 8 and 9. They are a shadow of the heavenly things.

And Zion or Jerusalem, mentioned several times in the last chapters, seems to be a reference to the church, and therefore seen the city of Jerusalem and Mount Zion, the literal, as a shadow or a type of the spiritual. Particularly we see this in Hebrews 12, verses 22 through 24, where he says, but you have come, you Christians have come to Mount Zion. Now he's not talking about coming to the natural Mount Zion, because he's not even encouraging that.

He's saying, you have come to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. So he's not talking about the earthly Jerusalem here. He's talking about a spiritual Zion, a spiritual city of the living God, a heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels.

Look at verse 23, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven. The firstborn is Jesus. We've come to the church of Jesus.

This is what he calls the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem. He identifies as the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven. So it seems that the spiritual Jerusalem is the reality, and the physical Old Testament Jerusalem, just like the altar and the temple and the things there, were a type of something spiritual, something bigger, more permanent.

Now, he also talked about the finality of Christ's work, not just the finality of Christ's revelation. We mentioned at the beginning that Jesus is the final revelation from God, but his work is the final work of salvation, and that comes out in quite a few places, actually. Chapter 1, chapter 9, chapter 10.

Your notes have the verse numbers there. We won't look at them now. Now, about the high priesthood of Christ.

A couple of things are important here, since this is the main contribution the book makes, is about Christ our high priest. One, of course, focuses on Christ himself as a superior high priest. The other on the particular function of offering a sacrifice and the superiority of his sacrifice.

Now, we know the sacrificial system had sacrifices being offered every day of the week. The priests offered every morning what they called the continual burnt offering and every evening the continual burnt offering. There wasn't a day that went by that they didn't have this when the temple was standing.

On the Sabbath, they doubled it. On the weekdays, it was one lamb in the morning and one lamb in the evening. On the Sabbath, it was two lambs in the morning and two lambs in the evening, but it was every day a continual burnt offering.

There were also occasional offerings during the festivals, and whenever a Jew wanted to, he could bring an offering to the temple if he felt the need, either to be grateful to God or to atone for a sin or whatever. But the writer of Hebrews does not talk about any of those sacrifices really too much. He focuses on the one occasion per year, the Day of Atonement, when certain sacrifices were offered and their blood was taken by the high priest into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled on the mercy seat.

This is when the author is talking about the sacrifices, he's usually talking about that. And so Jesus then is depicted as the high priest, and what a high priest does on the Day of Atonement, he goes into the Holy of Holies behind the veil. He sprinkles blood on the mercy seat, and then he comes out again.

The writer of Hebrews treats Christ and his work, his function as high priest, as the antitype or the fulfillment of the shadow, of the Day of Atonement. Again, the high priest on the Day of Atonement goes in behind the veil, and then he comes out again. The writer of Hebrews in chapter 9 talks as if Jesus went into the Holy of Holies in heaven

when he ascended through the clouds.

As we shall see when we study that chapter. Jesus went into the Holy of Holies, not made by hands, but into heaven itself. And then at the end of chapter 9 it says, and we're waiting for him to come back out again.

We look for him to come a second time, he says at the end of chapter 9. So it would appear that the writer sees the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, in the Jewish ritual, described in Leviticus 16, as picturing the whole age of the church. Jesus went into the Holy of Holies when he ascended, he'll come out of the Holy of Holies at his second coming. So he is, in the meantime, in the Holy of Holies, interceding for us, as the high priest did between the time he went in and the time he came out.

And so both Paul in Romans and this author depict Christ as having entered heaven and now making intercession for us and eventually coming out again, coming back. And so the whole age of the church from the ascension of Christ to the return of Christ is the fulfillment, the body, the substance of that shadow, of that ritual that that priest did once a year. And so that's how the Day of Atonement connects.

Now Jesus' high priesthood, of course, the writer is very ingenious. And he knows that if he's going to talk about Jesus as high priest to a bunch of Jews, it's going to be a bit of a challenge. One obstacle he has to get over is that Jesus was not a Levite.

The Jews never accepted any priests who weren't Levites. You had to be a Levite. Not only of the tribe of Levi, you had to be specifically descended from Aaron as one of his sons.

And Jesus was not descended from Aaron or from the Levites at all. He's of the tribe of Judah, wrong tribe. In fact, the author even mentions that in chapter 7. We know that our Lord was of the tribe of Judah, a tribe of which Moses said nothing about priesthood, he says.

So mindful of the fact that he wants to establish with his readers that Jesus is the final and continuous and ultimate high priest for us, he has to overcome at least one hurdle, and that is that Jesus couldn't have been a priest. He was disqualified by his birth. And I said, well, then why didn't God have Jesus be born a Levite then? Two reasons.

One, he wouldn't be descended from David then. His Messiahship is even more fundamental than his priesthood. But he had to be descended from Judah, from David.

But more than that, it was unnecessary for him to be born of the Levite line in order to be a priest because he wasn't coming as just the next Levitical priest. He was coming to change the priesthood to something else. And it says that in Hebrews 7, I think it's in verse 12.

He says, the priesthood being changed, there's of necessity also a change of the law. The whole legal system is changing, as is necessary if you're going to have a priest who's not a Levite. And Jesus is not a Levite.

However, he's not establishing a new priesthood of the order of Judah, which was his tribe. He's starting something entirely different. And it's of the order of Melchizedek.

Now that Jesus would qualify for this priesthood, and that it would be a superior priesthood to that of Aaron, is what he needs to establish to a skeptical Jewish audience who's thinking about backsliding from Christ. And so he makes a very strong case from the Old Testament, from the very few things we know about Melchizedek. We only have like three or four verses about Melchizedek in Genesis 14.

We have one verse about him in Psalm 110, verse 4. And in the entirety of the Old Testament, we have nothing else. Melchizedek's not mentioned, not alluded to. I mean, it's like he's one of the most obscure names in any of the narrative of the Old Testament.

And yet the author finds in the statement of Psalm 110, 4, the Messiah will be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. The light goes on. He says, this is not the order of Aaron.

The Messiah is after another order of Melchizedek. Well, who is he? Who's Melchizedek? We better look into this, the author says. We have some things to say about this.

And he does. He has a great deal to say about it. And he takes every little datum we have about Melchizedek from Hebrews, basically.

I mean, excuse me, from Genesis 14. And he imbues it with meaning that points in the direction of what he wants to say about Jesus. And so the priesthood of Jesus is established on a different order than the Jewish priesthood.

Melchizedek, not Aaron. Christ is a priest after the order of Melchizedek. The sacrifice that is offered in the Yom Kippur ritual by Christ is a better sacrifice.

Not blood of bulls and goats, but his own blood he goes in. And he makes better intercession for us than the high priest can. So this is how all that priestly ritual and stuff comes into play in several chapters.

I would say from chapter 7, actually he tries to introduce it at the end of chapter 5. Like around verse 11. He says, Jesus is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. But that's where he begins to break off into one of his parentheses, which goes through chapter 6. He basically says, I'd like to tell you more about Melchizedek, but I don't think you guys can handle it.

Then he changes his mind and decides to try it anyway. And so by the time he gets to

chapter 7, he's ready to really go into this. In chapters 7, 8, 9, and 10, four chapters are basically his treatment of Christ's high priesthood.

Now he mentions the high priesthood in chapter 2 and in chapter 4 and in chapter 5, but he doesn't really discuss it or unpack it until chapters 7, 8, 9, and 10. Okay, so he's getting there in the earlier chapters, but he doesn't really delve into it until halfway through the book, basically. Now, I'm not going to go over all these things, partly because we don't have the time, but there's a couple of concepts in Hebrews that are used a little differently than we might think, usually.

One is the concept of perfection, and the other is the concept of sanctification. Now, perfection is a word which in the Greek can mean maturity or completeness, or perfection the way we think of perfection. But in some parts of the Bible, some uses that Paul uses, for example, and even some in Hebrews, it seems to mean maturity.

For example, in chapter 6 of Hebrews, let us go on to perfection, the King James says. A better translation would be to maturity. He's talking about there being babes, and they can't drink milk.

I mean, they can't eat salt food, they only drink milk, he says. So, he says in Hebrews 6, 1, therefore leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let's go on to perfection or maturity is how it should be translated here. But other times in Hebrews, the word perfection, which appears quite a few times, seems to speak of something else.

It's not about the perfection of the conscience, or the completeness of something. And in most cases in Hebrews, he's going to be contrasting the fact that Christ's work of atonement is complete, and has brought perfection of the conscience to the believer, as opposed to the annual Yom Kippur observances in Israel, could never make the conscience of those people perfect, he says. Now, what does he mean by that? What he means is, it can be actually put pretty simply, and that is that the conscience was never completely satisfied under the Jewish order.

Because even though the high priest came out of the temple at the end of the day of atonement, and everyone rejoiced to see he was still alive, and that God had accepted his service there in the Holy of Holies, and that God had again forgiven them of their sins, all is good for another year. But we're going to need to do this again. Because what he did today isn't going to be, it's not permanent.

We're going to keep sinning, and we're going to need to have him going again next year for us. And the year after, and the year after that. And forever.

In other words, no one could ever rest in the idea that there was a finished work. That my conscience has been cleansed once and for all. No, my conscience has been cleansed for the moment, but next year I'm going to have to deal with some more guilt

that's on my conscience.

And the high priest is going to have to do this for me again. And that's how the writer means that those sacrifices offered year by year could never make the conscience of the worshiper perfect. That is, he'd never feel complete, like this is done.

My conscience is cleansed once and for all. Never have to worry about this again. And that is where Christ's sacrifice is said to be different.

Because when Christ died for us, he died for all of our sins, and our conscience can, in a sense, be clean before God at all times. Now, he is not denying some other things the Bible says about the conscience, or denying other ways the word perfection might be used. But this is his particular concern when he uses the word perfection.

He usually means perfection of the conscience. Although he uses it other ways too, like of maturity, in chapter 6, verse 1. He uses it of Christ, that Christ was made perfect through suffering. What's that mean? I think that means complete also there, that it's not like Christ was an imperfect person morally and had to be perfected through suffering.

But that although Christ was all that he could be, he was not yet completely qualified to be a priest, because he had nothing to offer until he died. Once he died, he had his blood to offer in the Holy of Holies in heaven. Before he died, he didn't have that to offer yet.

He was a perfect man, but he wasn't a perfect priest. He was the son of God, he was sinless, he was as good as a man can be, but he wasn't as good as a priest can be, because he had nothing to offer until he died. Through suffering, he completed his qualifications.

He was made complete through the things he suffered. That is completely priestly. He became a complete priest by offering a sacrifice.

So the word perfect or complete or mature has different uses in different contexts in Hebrews. But the main way that he wants to talk about it is the perfection of the conscience in most cases. Now there's also the word sanctification.

I bring this up because it appears to me that the writer of Hebrews uses the word sanctification differently than we are accustomed to using it. We talk about our salvation as having maybe three aspects, justification, sanctification, and glorification. That's how we're usually taught theology, and it's not wrong.

There are three aspects of salvation. Justification is the expunging of our record of guilt. God forgives us of our sins.

We're justified. We're treated as we're innocent. It's a legal term.

It's like acquitted, acquitted of crimes. Justification, that's already taking care of the guilt of our past sins. There's also sanctification, which means to be made holy.

The word sanctified means to be made holy. Christian theologians usually use the term to mean the process by which God is making us into holier people in our behavior. We're overcoming the power of sin in our life.

We're growing in Christ, becoming more Christ-like, more holy. Sanctification is usually treated among evangelicals as a process. There are some, like the Wesleyans, which would include Nazarene, Salvation Army, Methodists, and Wesleyan denominations.

They believe sanctification is not a process so much as a crisis, sort of a second work of grace. Pretty much the way that Pentecostals understand the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a second work of grace, a step beyond just conversion, where it improves you spiritually. The Wesleyan theology of John Wesley taught that you can have a second work of grace after you're a Christian, which is called entire sanctification.

Sanctification is treated as if it's a once-for-all deal that you just get on a weekend when you spend some time praying and fasting, and you get it. When you get it, it actually extracts your sin nature, and you don't sin anymore. Now, I'm not misrepresenting this.

To those of you who are not Wesleyans, like me, I'm not, that might sound strange. It might even sound like, oh, do those Methodists really believe that? I thought they were more normal than that. Well, they are pretty normal, and most of them don't really believe it that much anyway.

Wesley himself was not 100% sure about it. He said he'd never met anyone who'd experienced it, and he hadn't experienced it, but he thought it was taught in Scripture. I've known some.

I've known some Nazarenes and such that say they've had entire sanctification. Once in a while, you meet someone who says he hasn't sinned for years since he was sanctified. In most cases, to uphold this claim requires a radical redefinition of sin, because the people who say it often are sinning just as much as you or I are, but they're not calling it that.

The truth is that there's nothing in the Bible that specifically promises a crisis of sanctification where you lose your sin nature. I don't know why the Wesleyans came up with that, because otherwise, I'm pretty good with their theology on other things. It's a kind of strange view they came up with, and it's still with the denominations that follow him.

But certainly the writer of Hebrews doesn't use it that way, and yet the writer of Hebrews doesn't seem to use the word sanctified the way we do either. If we are those, as most of us probably are, who use the word sanctification to refer to the process of becoming

more holy, it is certainly the case that the Bible speaks of such a process. Of being changed from glory to glory into the image of Christ, or to grow up into Christ, or increase in knowledge and grace, and things like that.

Growing is a phenomenon the Bible does talk about as a process. It's just that I'm not really sure the Bible uses the term sanctified to speak of that process. It's a reality, but I'm not sure that's the label the Bible gives it.

Certainly not in Hebrews. If Paul uses the word sanctified the way that we do, the writer of Hebrews doesn't. The writer of Hebrews uses the word sanctified more the way we use the word justified.

To be sanctified means to be set apart for God, and the writer uses the word to speak of it of those who have been saved. They've been set apart for God. When he talks about being sanctified in Hebrews, he's not necessarily talking about your behavior as much as your position.

God has set you apart into a different category from other people. Now your behavior should conform to that, but that's not what he's talking about there. There are other places that do.

In 1 Peter 1.14 he says, As he who has called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conduct. So he's talking about behavior there. But the word holy itself doesn't necessarily, in its primary meaning, speak of behavior so much as being set apart, belonging to God in a special way that others don't.

Just like the temple was this holy building. It had nothing to do with the way it was behaving. It had to do with what it was for.

It was set apart for God and couldn't be used for ordinary purposes. So are we. And the writer of Hebrews uses the word sanctified, it seems to me, that way.

And I have to say that I wrestled with that in my earlier Christian life because I was always accustomed to using the word sanctified to speak of the process of becoming more holy, becoming more Christ-like. And while I do believe in such a process, that's not what the word sanctified is used for in the book of Hebrews, as I think you'll see. So he used the word perfection and he used the word sanctified.

But when he talks about perfection, he's either talking about being just mature spiritually, as in chapter 6, verse 1, or having a perfect heart before God, having a perfectly clean conscience before God because you're counting on the final efficacy of Christ's sacrifice. Whereas if we talk about being perfect in other contexts, we're probably talking about being sinless or something like that. I'm a perfect Christian.

That would mean I don't have any flaws. That's not how the word perfect or the word

sanctified are being used in Hebrews. So we do find some special usage of familiar words in Hebrews used not in a familiar way.

Now, finally, we have these warnings about falling away. We will, of course, look at each of them in some detail as we go through. But we might just, without looking at the sections, talk about what they contain.

Just an overview of all five of the warnings. We'll talk about the kind of way that they, the contents of those warnings and what they pretty much, how they argue their warning. One is to give us an example of Israel's failure so that we don't fall into the same trap.

Particularly in chapters three and four, talking about the generation that came out of Egypt that failed to go into the promised land. They went out of Israel with a mind to go into the promised land. They were all hopeful when the Red Sea parted and the Egyptians were destroyed.

Everyone was rejoicing and singing about God, giving them, you know, their salvation and their land was coming. They're going to have their own nation, going to be free people in a free land again. And it just didn't happen for them because they didn't have faith.

The writer says they had a promise from God, but it didn't profit them because it wasn't mixed with faith in them. So the implication is you have a promise from God, too. But if it's going to benefit you, you're going to mix it with faith.

You're going to have to keep the faith. And he talks about he blends that into discussion of entering into God's rest, which is a rest of faith. Where you're not trusting in your own works as a person would be doing if they went back to the Jewish system.

You don't want to go back to trusting your own works. You need to rest in the finished work of Christ. And it's like Israel failed to enter into God's rest because of their unbelief.

These readers might make that same mistake. They might go back into a system that has no rest, only works. So don't follow Israel's bad example.

He points out there's nothing really to go back to. He pointed that out, that the system is going down. The verses in your notes are pretty much those verses that talk about that.

The system is going, we don't have a continuing system here, a continuing city. Third warning, third feature of his warnings is he wants them to know the magnitude of the privileges that they're neglecting. If they depart from Christ, and you can see in your notes there's a lot of references there, where he points out the great privileges you have in Christ.

These privileges are enumerated within these warning sections. And he brings them up

to point out that this is what you're leaving behind? I don't think so. You don't want to do that.

These are the things that you have in Christ that you won't have if you depart from Christ. And then in addition to the magnitude of the privileges neglected, he speaks of the magnitude of the offense of neglect. There's quite a few references to this.

How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? Don't want to neglect God's call. It's a huge offense, a slap in God's face if he offers you something so great and you neglect it. Then, those warning sections often have reference to the coming judgment.

And the fact that it is very much deserved on those who reject Christ. So they don't want to become part of that. They don't want to deserve that.

That coming judgment again, as I would say in most of the passages where it's mentioned, I think traditionally we would just see them as references to hell or the final judgment. Though as we take into consideration the context and the situation that we're in, it may be that he's not particularly referring to hell, but to the coming judgment on the system that they are wanting to go back to. That system is going down and it's going down in a big bloody fiery ball.

And that's something that's an awful thing that you'd like to avoid if you can. And then of course in those warnings there's quite a few exhortations to continue. And in the notes you can see quite a few references there.

We would look at all those if we had more time, but we don't. And so I want with these introductory remarks to be able to launch into Chapter 1 when we come back. But we're going to take a break now.