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Critical studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews

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Thesis

CRITICAL STUDIES IN THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

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PREFACE

"The Epistle to the Hebrews is in many respects the riddle of the New Testament." While a few passages of the Letter have been familiar to all faithful readers of the Bible, as a whole, until recently it has offered a complete argument and a unified teaching only to a few. This is due in large measure to the rather archaic form and style in which it is written. Mistaken notions about its relation to the Pauline writings have also tended to push it into the background.

Certain problems therefore present themselves to any one interested in the origin, the full meaning and purpose of the Epistle. The first to which we offer a brief consideration is the historical background of the writing. But here there is little to be discovered beyond the implications of the letter itself. The authorship of Hebrews is still undecided, as well as its date and destination. But certain lines of argument are generally agreed upon, and the possibilities are brought within a brief compass. In the light of these investigations, and in addition to them, a careful study of the author's argument is needed to lift it out of its peculiar form and give it clear style and full cogency. "The great paradox" invites a more detailed canvass of the writer's effort to reconcile the exalted and the humiliated Christ. And last of all, we ask this unknown author to reveal to us his conception of religion.

We have, therefore, divided this thesis into five separate "studies": The Historical Background; Authorship, Date and Destination; The Author's Argument; The Great Paradox; and The Conception of Religion.

E. A. Pollard Jones.

Waterville, Maine.
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OUTLINE

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I - The Historical Background of the Epistle.

1) Dangers of a transition period.
2) Situation for the Jewish Christians: no scriptures; no priesthood.
3) Results: discouragement; indolence; social evils.
4) Other possible features: difference of rulers; destruction of the temple.

II - Authorship, Date and Destination.

1) Authorship: first use of epistle; attitude of Western Church; earliest evidence of Pauline authorship; evaluation of evidence; internal evidence vs. Pauline authorship -- language, style, use of OT, doctrinal teachings; possible authors -- Luke, Barnabas, Silas, Apollos, Priscilla and Aquila, Peter, Philip.
2) Destination; internal evidence; nationality of readers; Jewish Christians vs. Gentiles; Gentile theory; Locality -- Jerusalem, Alexandria, Rome.
3) Date: various evidence -- first appearance, no reference to fall of Jerusalem, etc.

III - The Author's Argument.

1) Theme: superior qualities of the Son.
2) Comparisons: Jesus vs. angels as mediator; Jesus vs. Moses; Jesus vs. levitical priesthood.
3) Melchisedec priesthood: eternal, perfect; confirmed by God; complete salvation to all.
4) Ministry of Jesus in New Sanctuary; covenants contrasted; Mediator of new covenant.
5) Exhortations; apostasy; faith; example of Esau.
6) Various duties enjoined.
IV - The Great Paradox.

1) General problem; author's probable attitude.
2) The paradox; evidence of humility.
3) Pre-existent dignity; exalted to right hand of God.
4) What paradox means to author; his explanation of Christ's humiliation.
5) The reconciliation: humiliation is glorification; conclusion.

V - The Author's Conception of Religion.

1) Nature of Jewish religion: its inadequacy to human needs.
2) Double perplexity of readers of the epistle: Jesus not return; yet he not the Messiah.
3) How God has revealed himself to man: angels, levitical-ism.
4) God's last revelation: his Son; contrasted with other revelations.
5) How Jesus has made God accessible to man; shame of death removed.
6) Man's part in fellowship with God: faith; its nature; examples.
7) Some Practical aspects of this religion; break with Judaism.

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A detailed picture of the condition that obtained when our epistle was written is impossible. Outside the letter itself we have scarcely a particular hint. Even its own date and author and destination must be inferred from internal evidence. No secular record contemporaneous with this writing bearing directly on the issue has been left us. The epistle must reveal its own secrets. Yet from the general trend of events at the time when the author must have written -- in the latter half of the first century -- we know it was a transition period through which the growing church was passing. Such periods are always hazardous for believers. Men yield their old opinions and surrender their slowly developed allegiances and loyalties grudgingly and hesitatingly. This is preeminently true in the matter of religious belief. In no phase of their experience can men so easily and uncritically say, "The old is better." And just because of this inertia of the past those who venture beyond the old landmarks, do so with great risk. The danger that most readily assails them is, unresistingly to yield to the tug of all associations and old ideas and soon find themselves in the embrace of the old system. But perhaps a graver danger still finds them divorced from the old faith and not yet esposing a new and better. We see it enacted in the foul of the ball player who has ventured from his base and finds he can neither return to first nor make second. For the believer such vacillation eventuates in a spirit of agnosticism. The Frenchman became agnostic when his government shifted from Roman Catholicism to the Protestant faith, and the discovery of Romish insincerity has bred doubters in the South American republics.

It's the first evil of the transition period, however, that our author finds most in evidence. We understand that he is writing to Jewish Christians, or at any rate to Christians who are more or less familiar with, and dependent upon the teachings and rubrics of Judaism. And it is becoming more and more evident that they cannot hold to Jesus as the Christ and remain in the fold of the Mother Church. They must decide between the new and old. They are keenly embarrassed. If they break from Leviticalism how impoverished is the religion left them. They have no scriptures at this early date. Even the author is unfamiliar with the story of the Virgin Birth or else he is afraid to use it. The Old Testament belongs now exclusively to the Jews. And with the Old Testament goes the prophets. But the most vital lack was
their need of a priesthood, with a temple and a sanctuary and a sacrificial system. What worshipper had ever dared approach God without a priest and without an offering. Nothing was left the Christians but their own experience, which was dimming out, and their memory of Jesus and his mission as their teachers had offered it to them. And since he delayed his coming the disgrace of his ignoble death was making them a "gazingstock" before their fellows. Can we wonder that they should hesitate and doubt and waver? They had never seen Jesus in the flesh. His gospel was given to them by men of their own failings (2:3). But there was the Old Testament. There was all the ritual of the sanctuary. There were priests and a High Priest. Why not return to the Mother Church for peace of mind and quiet of soul. Though they had been enlightened in earlier days and their zeal had borne them through great afflictions (10:32), now their knees were trembling from fear and their hands hung limply at their sides (12:12,13). Their courage faltered. They were downhearted and discouraged. Insistently and repeatedly our author urges them to hold fast their former confidence and hope and profession without wavering (3:6, 3:14, 4:14, 10:23). He exhorts them to have patience with God in his promises toward them (10:36). If they endure to the end, and have faith in God's goodness some day they will enter into their Father's rest.

But in addition to this spirit of discouragement -- or possibly somewhat in result from it -- and its consequent tendency to apostasy from the faith, the author leads us to believe that some were guilty of sheer indolence. He invites them to diligence and cautions them against slothfulness in matters of faith and patience (6:12, 12:15). He further charges them with unsettledness in their devotion to the congregation and its responsibilities (10:25), and intellectually they have been so inactive and lazy that they have made no progress whatever in their understanding of God. They are still immature, undeveloped, mere babies in the faith, calling for the bottle (5:11,12). The truth is, they have never been in earnest about the whole matter (12:5). Further, this careless, unenergetic, lifeless attitude toward the new Faith had its natural outcome in insubordination to those in authority (12:7), a thoughtless adoption of strange doctrines (13:9), unchastity of life and covetousness of heart (12:4,5). -- But while this is the leading emphasis of the epistle it is only fair to the situation and the original readers of the letter to suggest that some bright spots appear on this dark background. Our faltering Christians are addressed as "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling" (3:1); they have endured afflictions, and joyfully accepted the spoiling of their goods (10:32,54); they have not drawn back as some "unto perdition" (10:39); the author expects better efforts from them, and commends them for their labors of love and their past and present charity towards the saints (6:9,10). He is
one of them, he calls himself their brother, and he hopes to see them soon (13:23).

Not satisfied with the foregoing occasion for the epistle, and the situation which it was to meet, some have made other suggestions. Some take their hint from 13:7-10 and advise that a certain tense relation might have existed between the Hebrews and their rulers. This may have been due to forces from without (13:9). But no acceptable reason can be offered for the author's silence on this point throughout the rest of the epistle. Others have sought a more specific occasion in the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. These Christians may have felt that the temple was the bond of their national unity, and a symbol of their covenant relation with God. With the overthrow of the temple this trust was broken and the bond shattered. The object of the epistle then was to meet this situation, to show that the destruction of the temple, and with it the temple worship was predicted in the Old Testament, and out of this despair to erect a better hope and a surer faith through the priesthood of Jesus. But this conclusion, while it has something in its favor, cannot be supported by the text, and hence must take its place with the second suggestion above, both to give way to the transition theory which is most generally accepted.
AUTHORSHIP, DATE AND DESTINATION

The earliest evidence which we have of the epistle is to be found in excerpts quoted from it in a letter written by Clement of Rome to the Corinthians about 96 A.D. But with the possible exception of Hermas and Justin Martyr the Western Church gives it no further recognition till the time of Augustine and Jerome, more than two centuries later. No trace of it is to be found in any other Apostolic Father or apologist. The Gnostics ignore it. Marcion omits it from his collection of Apostolic writings. It is lacking in the Muratorian Canon, and most striking of all, Irenaeus does not carry it in his grouping of Pauline Epistles. The first explicit reference both to the letter and its author is discovered in Tertullian's treatise "On Modesty". Here Barnabas is called the author, and Tertullian makes the reference in such a matter-of-fact way that he seems to be giving expression to a generally accepted tradition of the church of his region, that is, of North Africa. But no evidence for his claim is offered, and not all the subsequent leaders of his church were willing to subscribe to it.

At Alexandria we come upon the earliest and most explicit evidence for the Pauline authorship. Eusebius quotes Clement as claiming "that the epistle is Paul's, and that it was written to the Hebrews in the Hebrew language, and that Luke translated it with zealous care and published it to the Greeks." But there is nothing to indicate the source of Clement's opinion or to discover if it was the expression of the general attitude of the church. Origen is fuller in his judgment but in the end not unalterably committed to this interpretation. He was convinced that the thoughts were the thoughts of Paul, but the language obliged him to admit that someone else had written them from memory. In this light he adds, "It was not without reason that the men of old time have handed it down as Paul's (thoughts). But who wrote the epistle God only knows certainly." So far as concrete results are concerned, scholars subsequent to his day seem not to have added materially to the wisdom of his last appeal. But he himself was willing to defend the letter as Paul's against its enemies. His concern here, however, was to maintain the canonicity of the letter. Eusebius' interest lay in the same direction. And those who followed in the line of tradition merely acceded to the testimony of Clement and Origen.
From the fourth century the epistle became recognized as canonical in the Western Church, and with its canonicity went a tacit recognition of its Pauline authorship. Indeed both the Alexandrian and Western Church had not been so far apart in their fundamental contention. The East first declared for the apostolicity of the letter, and, assured of that, placed it in connection with Paul. The West reversing the process, emphasized the thought of authorship and, since they believed it was not Paul's, denied its apostolical authority. Though with one-sided emphasis from both quarters, the two streams of testimony merged together when the West accepted the Epistle into its canon. As Westcott has suggested, the spiritual insight of the East could be joined with the historical witness of the West. Jerome rather waveringly subscribes to the Eastern tradition, though he fully accepts the letter as canonical, and Augustine followed his lead. And this general attitude obtained till the revival of Greek learning in Europe. But in the light of his greater familiarity with the Scriptures Erasmus doubted the tradition of Pauline authorship and decided in favor of Clement of Rome. Luther unhesitatingly denied it, transferring the honor to Apollos. Calvin could not be brought to think that the letter was Paul's. But he agreed that it might be the work of Luke or of Clement.

So much for the facts of tradition and external evidence. When we come to their evaluation we discover they lack cogency. Luke was a Gentile and therefore unfitted for such a ritualistic effort. Clement of Rome in point of ability and insight and general grasp of such a subject was inadequate to the task. The Alexandrian evidence for Paul came so late that it is almost neutralized by its long-delayed and half-hearted acceptance in the rest of the Church. And this seems particularly telling against the tradition when we realize that the epistle was first known in Rome. If there was no doubt of its authorship, why the reticence? Why should Clement of Rome quote from the letter without even mentioning his source, or its author? Again, if there is any real basis for the Pauline tradition, Tertullian's ignorance of it and at least his actual attitude is difficult to explain. In behalf of Barnabas and Apollos the external evidence is stronger than for Paul, but it is not convincing in any case.

When we turn to the internal evidence of the epistle nothing is more certain than that it was not written by Paul. According to 2:3 the author identifies himself with those who received the gospel second-hand. This cannot easily be made to accord with the Apostle's prided boast that his commission came directly from the Risen Lord (Gal.1:1,11f). Paul's characteristic autograph salutation is missing from this letter. Various explanations for its absence have been advanced, but the explanation most plausible is the one most evident. The language of the epistle points in the same direction.
Thayer has discovered one hundred sixty-nine words not found in other New Testament writings. While many distinctly Pauline words and phrases are wanting, e.g. "Christ Jesus", "in Christ", "mystery", "to fulfill", and "to justify". The style is wholly un-Pauline. There is a purity of Greek, a literary finish, a rhetorical skill that Paul could not imitate. His manner was more impetuous, unrestrained, emotional. In this letter every sentence is carefully finished, every period properly balanced. Further, twenty-one of the Old Testament quotations are peculiar to this New Testament writing, and all seem based on the Septuagint. In some instances, notably in 10:5-7, the author bases his argument on the variant reading in his text. And while Paul usually introduces his Old Testament quotations with "it is written" or "Moses saith", "David saith", etc., in this epistle quotations are always made anonymously. Usually the words are ascribed to God as the speaker. And still more telling is the great doctrinal differences, which alone would stamp it as non-Pauline. There is no reference in this letter to the Gentiles. And the Pauline distinction between "letter" and "spirit", "the spirit of bondage" and "the spirit of adoption" is replaced by "shadow" and "substance", "antitype" and "type". The Risen Christ of Paul becomes the Ascended Christ for the epistle. Resurrection is mentioned only twice, and only once in connection with Jesus (13:20). Not "justification" but "cleansing", "consecration" and "bringing to perfection". Hence it is not only evident that Paul could not have written the letter to the Hebrews, but it is extremely unlikely that any one in his immediate circle of friends could have written it. Otherwise there would have been more trace of their master's teachings.

We have already ruled against Luke on the score of his Gentile origin, but another objection is to be offered, namely, his use of the Old Testament. If he should have translated the letter from the original Hebrew, how account for the fact that all the Old Testament quotations are from the Septuagint rather than from the original Hebrew? What purpose could he serve in such an unreasonable procedure? -- A somewhat better case can be made for Barnabas. If the epistle was sent to Jerusalem, which is quite improbable, then, with the exception of Silas, he is the only one of the Pauline circle with adequate authority to make such an appeal. But we could not take care of 13:19 which implies that the author belonged to the community he is addressing. And his mission was to the Gentiles, and away from Jerusalem. But, being a Levite, if he had lived in Jerusalem any considerable time we wonder why he should ignore the temple so completely. If the letter went to Rome, it is unlikely that it came from Barnabas, for we have no evidence of his ever having been there. The original tradition itself in all probability grew out of a confusion of this epistle with the so-called Epistle of Barnabas. This might be encouraged by a comparison of the "word of exhorta-
tion" of the letter with the "son of exhortation" of Acts 4:36.

Silas is a poor candidate for the honor except on the hypothesis of the Jerusalem destination. He was a Jewish Christian, however, and a friend of Timothy. His authorship might also explain the coincidence between I Peter and Hebrews. But the epistle shows too little Pauline influence to come from a missionary companion of his. Besides tradition has not a word for Silas. — Luther is credited with offering the name of Apollos. He qualifies at many points. He was a Jew, an Alexandrian by race, an eloquent man and acquainted with the Scriptures (Acts 16:24). He was a friend of Paul and Timothy, and yet was independent in his gospel (I Cor. 16:10-12; 3:4). His theme recorded in Acts 28:28, "showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ", may afterwards have become the basis of the teaching in the epistle. On the other hand, it is hardly to be expected that Apollos would have received the gospel from an ear-witness of the Lord. Furthermore, in his letter to the Corinthians, Clement mentions Apollos together with Paul and Cephas, and if he had written Hebrews would Clement have failed to mention this fact? If the letter was sent to Rome it is not likely that Apollos was the author.

Harnack has come forward with a new theory, first recognized by Bleek. He believes that the epistle was addressed to an individual congregation in Rome, and that the author's name was intentionally suppressed. Furthermore, he is of the opinion that the "we" of the epistle is not editorial but that it implies a joint responsibility in the authorship of the letter. On the basis of these observations and inferences Harnack suggests that the letter may have come from Priscilla and Aquila, the former being the actual writer. Aquila could not have written it because he was the less important of the two. Paul, who was no friend of women, accredited Priscilla with wide influence among the Gentile churches, and we know they labored in Corinth, Ephesus and Rome. They were closely connected with Timothy, who was with them in Corinth, and a congregation met in their house in Rome (Rom. 16:5). But the strongest evidence is the suppression of the name of the author. If Priscilla wrote the letter, that might account for Clement's silence in his epistle to the Corinthians where Paul was obliged to advise the women to be less active in the Church. The evidence of Alexandrian culture may have come from contact with Apollos, and they may well have received the gospel from ear-witnesses of the Lord. Against this view is the presence of masculine participles in the text where they should be feminine, but this may have been due to a general disapproval of such prominence for a woman. The omission of Deborah in the eleventh chapter is thought to be a serious objection. And on the whole it seems too novel and ingenious to
invite immediate acceptance, at least. And yet Pexke admits that "while it cannot be said that Harnack has proved his point, his identification seems to be the most probable that has yet been proposed".

On the similarity of 2:3 with John 1:35-42 Mr. Welch has recently suggested the name of Peter. But it is difficult to care for Peter's lack of Alexandrian culture. Besides his fellowship with the Lord would disqualify him according to 2:3. -- Ramsey has suggested that the letter was written by Philip from Caesarea to the Judaizing section of the church at Jerusalem. It was the result of Paul's discussion with the Christians while he was a prisoner at Caesarea. The concluding words of the letter were written by Paul, he believes. But against this strange theory is the improbability of Jerusalem as the destination of the letter, and its un-Pauline theology. -- Bruce agrees with Origen's sage conclusion, that only God knows exactly who wrote the Epistle, but, practically he wonders if it was not fitting "that he who tells us at the outset that God's last great word to men was spoken by his Son, should disappear like a star in the presence of the great Luminary of day? Was it not seemly that he who wrote this book in praise of Christ, the Great High Priest, should be but a voice saying to all after-time, 'This is God's beloved Son, Hear ye Him', and then when the voice was spoken he should disappear with Moses, Aaron and all the worthies of the Old Covenant, and allow Christ himself to speak without any medium between him and us?"

In discussing the destination of the epistle we are confronted with a goodly share of conflicting theories. The text itself will guide us in our investigation. Indeed, we have only the text as a fundamental source of evidence. But with it we have many interpretations. The title "To the Hebrews" gives us no clue since it formed no part of the original letter. And besides "Hebrews" is such a general, all-inclusive term that it is too indefinite to be meaningful. The author gives the impression that his readers were of a definite community, small and homogeneous, and of some years duration (5:2). Close personal relations must have obtained between them at one time and the author, and still obtained (13:7,17-19,23-24) when the letter was sent. They seemed to be addressed apart from their leaders (13:11,24). They are a generation removed from the time of Jesus, or at least they have received the Gospel only from ear-witnesses of their Master (2:3-4). There are indications of past sufferings and loss of property, presumably at the hands of the ruling authority (10:22-24), and signs of another persecution approaching (13:5,15). This might more properly apply to a larger group, but the general emphasis of the letter leads us to believe that the addresses of the letter formed a small group of Christians. Hence it may have been a church in a city where
there were few Christians, or a single congregation in a city where there were several congregations. The latter is more probable. Some one has made the supposed contrast between the injunction in 13:17, "Obey them that have the rule over you", and the one in 13:24, "Salute all them that have the rule over you", in favor of this argument. The first charge had to do with the local rulers, the second with the rulers of the larger group, or the whole church. This evidence is not convincing, but the small congregation theory would account for the loss of the address and the intimate relations of the author and readers. He might have been a leader there once upon a time. Nairne qualifies this theory by suggesting that the company was a small circle of scholars like the author himself.

What was the rationality of this small company? Was it made up of Gentiles, Jewish Christians or a mixture of the two? And here again we have a wide difference of opinion. Till recently it was generally held that the purpose of the letter was to forestall a relapse into Judaism, hence the readers must have been Jewish Christians, or at least Jewish proselytes before conversion to Christianity. This might be called the traditional view. It has been suggested that the title is of no worth in establishing this theory. But the whole tone and tenor of the letter is in its favor. The author speaks of "the Fathers", and "the seed of Abraham" (2:16), and this in such a way as to imply physical descendants. Such phrases as "the people" (2:17; 13:12), "the people of God" (4:9), "the rest of God", "go forth...without the camp", "the redemptions of the transgressions that were under the first Covenant" (9:15) all point toward a people familiar with the Jewish life and belief. But more convincing than these special indications is the general impression of the letter. Only to Jews would an argument based on a comparison of the Old and New Covenant have any weight. If not Jews why establish the superiority of Christianity over Judaism, rather than over heathenism? We should expect a wholesale exposition of the weaknesses and inadequacies of paganism if the readers were Gentiles. Instead we find only a few references here and there which are possible of that construction. If the author holds a brief for Christianity as against irreligion and heathenism, why not more about it? Taken as a whole the place and use of the Old Testament, and attitude assumed toward it throughout the letter, proves most conclusively the Jewish Christian character of the readers. Gentile Christians may have considered the Old Testament authoritative, but only as a part of their Christianity. It was an integral part of the new religion for them. It was not considered independently by them. Hence there would be no force for them in any argument based upon the relative merits of the Old and New Dispensations. As Peake has so conclusively put it, "The author's argument has force only if his readers accepted the Old Testament independently of their acceptance of the Gospel, and this suits Jewish
Christians but not Gentiles". Hence, in spite of the bias that holds often times against the traditional view, just because it is traditional and old, we are freer to accept this solution of the problem than any other.

The exponents of the Gentile theory, on the other hand, contend that certain Old Testament phrases in our epistle prove nothing. They cite Paul and Clement of Rome in their letters to Gentile readers as making Abraham father of all Christians, Gentiles included. It is also urged that Clement makes even larger use of the Old Testament thought than our epistle. Furthermore, they find no explicit reference to apostasy to Judaism in the exhortations, and they believe that the message of the letter is applicable to Christians, whatever their earlier faith, who are weak and discouraged. Certain isolated passages are also woven into their argumentation. For example, in 6:1,2 "the first principles" are considered to be elementary doctrines of Christianity which Gentiles would need to be taught before accepting the new faith. But we are not convinced that these fundamental doctrines could not apply to Jewish Christians. Again in 9:14 they fasten upon the term, "the living God" as meaning the true God in contrast with heathen idols. But the same expression is used in three other instances in the letter (3:12;10:31;12:22), all with the evident meaning so familiar to Jews of the Old Testament. The exhortation to chastity in family relations (13:4) is interpreted as against certain ascetic tendencies. But why a meaning so foreign to the whole tenor of the book? Even if the readers were in Rome, as is probably the case, it does not follow that they could not have been Jewish Christians. Indeed, the total strength of the arguments for the Gentile nationality of the readers of the epistle are far from convincing.

Where are we most likely to find such readers? What is their locality? Again different views. What might be called the traditional view is to look for them at Jerusalem. It is argued in favor of this locality that there the least opportunity for a Gentile admixture would obtain, and the strongest pressure toward a relapse into Judaism would be made by their Jewish fellow countrymen. But the strongest evidence is the large use made of the strictly Jewish rites and customs in the letter; it is thought they would be most applicable in Jerusalem. But there were many places at that time throughout the Roman Empire that could qualify with those conditions. As for the Jewish rites and customs, it is to be remembered that it is the ritual of the tabernacle and not of the temple that finds such large place in the letter. Indeed no allusion is made to the temple. No interpretation of 13:7-13 favors Jerusalem. Furthermore, if the original language of the epistle was Greek, as in all probability it was, and the Old Testament references were to the Septuagint, it seems wholly out
of the question that the readers were in Jerusalem. For here Aramaic was the language, and the Old Testament in the original was the source book of truth. And the financial outlook, as we gather it from other sources, fits ill with the author’s commendation of their past and present charity towards the “saints”. And it is altogether unlikely that all the Christians at Jerusalem who had seen Jesus were gone. Since the temple at the Mother City can in no way fix the destination of the letter at Jerusalem, still less is the temple of Onias, at Leontopolis, able to determine the location at Alexandria. Stronger support for the Alexandrian address is to be found in the use of the Septuagint, and the wide evidence of Alexandrian culture throughout the letter. But other cities afforded this milieu. And while there is early evidence of the epistle there, the church had a consistent tradition that it was addressed to the Hebrews in Palestine.

Rome meets the fullest qualification for the honor of the address of the epistle. And this view has probably the most support among scholars of any of the contested points relating to this anonymous writing. The letter first came to light in Rome in Clement’s letter, and it was well known to Hermas. The interest of the church in Timothy would be readily understood. This would well suit the author’s imputation of generous-heartedness to the readers. Some think the allusion to meats (13:7) points toward ascetic tendencies, such as are mentioned in Rom. 15. The phrase, “They of Italy” (13:24) best suits Rome. According to Romans 16:5,14,15 there were three small groups of Christians in Rome, which apparently met in private homes. This fits admirably into Harnack’s theory of authorship. The house then would belong to Priscilla and her husband. And it is altogether possible that some ear-witness of Jesus had led them into the faith. Why not Paul himself? Some think their earlier persecution (10:32-34) was that under Nero, while the one impending, or already upon them, is the one under Domitian. This might agree with the history of a special congregation. But if an earlier date is argued for them the disturbance might refer to the Claudian interference which resulted in his edict of banishment. In that case Priscilla and Aquila would be among those expelled (Acts 18:2). On the other hand the degree of learning (5:11) agrees ill with Paul’s approval of their faith in Romans 1:8, “Your faith is spoken of throughout the world”. And yet the condition of a small congregation might obviate that discrepancy. This theory is not without its difficulties, but in spite of that it is the most acceptable of all.

The date of the epistle is determined by various factors. The terminus ad quem must be about 95 A.D., when the first appearance of it was discovered in the epistle of Clement of Rome. The terminus ad quo is uncertain. The absence of any
reference to the fall of Jerusalem is evidence for some to place it before that event. If the temple had been destroyed, they say that the author would not have failed to use the event as God's judgment against ritualism. But Jerusalem and the temple had been destroyed before, yet Judaism had survived. Actually the Jews did not lose faith in ritualism when the catastrophe did come. Again, the reference to temple usages in the present tense is urged for an early date. But the sacrificial system and the whole ritual were based on the tabernacle, instead of the temple, and besides the present tense is used in Josephus and Clement of Rome after the destruction of Jerusalem. Perhaps not much place in this regard is to be given to "nigh unto vanishing away" in 8:13. From the reference to Timothy we are to infer that Paul was dead. If 10:32-34 refers to the Neronian persecution, it would follow that the date would fall on the eve of the persecution by Domitian. But "gazingstock" seems to be too mild a term to use for Nero's treatment of the Christians. Hence it narrows down to the limits of Paul's death and the Neronian persecution. But when we consider the general aging spirit of the Christians as set forth in the epistle, a later date might suit the situation better, say in the period between Paul's death and the decade 80-90 A.D.
THE AUTHOR'S ARGUMENT

At the very outset our author startles his readers into attention by the astounding claim which he makes for Jesus as the Son of God: Having passed the stage of development which employed prophets as mediators, God once and for all at the near close of this age has revealed himself to us in his Son. Through this same Son God created the worlds, and made him ruler over all his creation and the worlds to come. And now he sits at the right hand of God, with the glory of his Father and the very image of his person. But before he took his place there he made possible the purging of our sins which hitherto have always separated between us and God. Indeed, it was the sacrificial service which he offered in his life that fitted him for the exalted place by his Father's side.

And before the attention of his readers is averted he passes skillfully from his general theme to his first point of argumentation, namely, that Jesus is superior to angels as a Mediator: Jesus is as superior to the angels in his mediatorial work as his name -- the Son -- and its implied relationships is superior to the angels themselves. Even if they have ministered the Law, the Scriptures place them infinitely below the dignity of Jesus. While he is Son they are at best spirits that can be changed into winds and flames of fire at God's will. The angels further must worship him for he has been called to the throne of God in reward for his righteous life on earth. While angels are but creatures this Jesus was the mediator of the creation, and at the end of mundane affairs he will fold away the earth like an old garment. It was ever meant that he should come into his lordship at the appointed time as the Redeemer of the world, but the angels have only served as ministers in preparation for this final redemptive work. Therefore, in view of the high superiority of our Mediator and the dispensation which he inaugurates, we should be exceedingly watchful not to fail of its benefits. There has always been reward for effort, punishment for neglect under the old dispensation administered by angels. The same certainty obtains now. Men who have seen Jesus in human form and witnessed God's attestation of his position by signs and wonders, have told you of this salvation. Don't neglect it. For this new dispensation is of God's planning. The Scriptures announce the passing of the "angel-period" and the subjection of all creation to God's will. It is through Jesus that this subjection is effected, but, strange as it may seem, it is just because of his
humiliation and death that he has come to his exalted position, that he was crowned with glory and honor. Furthermore this was altogether consonant with the character of God and his attitude toward men. Only when Jesus became man, lived and suffered with God's children could he be their leader, the captain of their salvation. Men are his brethren, and all are sons of God. He did not become an angel, for being an angel would not acquaint him with the needs of his Father's children. He was thereby able to do for men what angels could never do, namely, relieve their minds of the anxiety of death, deliver them from the ultimate power of sin, and, as high priest, bring them into the presence of God himself.

Consider Jesus again, as our Apostle and High Priest, in relation to Moses. Both were faithful in the responsibilities entrusted to them, but remember that Moses was but a faithful servant in his Father's house, while Jesus was the Son of the house, hence its owner and Lord. I grant you that Moses was one of God's choicest worthies, but Jesus was infinitely greater. A rest of God was promised men in those days through Moses as the mediator. It was only a temporary rest, to be sure, but they forfeited their right to enter in through hardness of heart and unbelief. Take warning from them. For Jesus has made possible a permanent rest of God, eternal salvation. A much worse fate will be yours if you neglect its benefits. It's within your reach. Hear God's voice and enter in.

Take heart and hold fast your profession for the crucified Son is not only superior to angels and Moses, but he also qualifies for the priesthood of mankind. As has been stated, he is acquainted with man's afflictions, he has been tempted in all human experiences with us, but with victory, he has suffered even to the cross. Hence he can sympathize with the worshipper even more keenly and feelingfully than any ordinary high priest. And yet, just as was the case with Aaron, he did not arrogate this character and function to himself but was called and appointed to it by God. It was God who saluted him as priest after the order of Melchisedec. Now it's not an easy undertaking to present to you the claims of this priestly order as pertaining to Jesus, for you have failed to move forward in your religious experience. But there is no marking time in this matter, either you go forward to maturity or else you lapse back into Judaism, and I warn you for such apostasy repentance is almost never forthcoming. God expects Christian fruit from you in the same manner that he expects herbs from the well-husbanded fields. And yet I know you will not fail. I have only to call to mind how brotherly and charitable has been your concern for the saints and I am heartened in my confidence in you. Still I exhort you to diligence in maintaining your faith in the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise of salvation. You should not falter. For you must remember that God not only made these promises to Abraham but to make
himself more obligated to redeem them, he confirmed them with an oath. Furthermore the means of fulfillment is at hand: Jesus as High Priest after the order of Melchisedec has passed through the parted veil into the presence of his Father and ours. Our hope of salvation rests with him.

This new priesthood, while regal, is essentially eternal, and abideth forever. It belongs to no family. It has no ancestry. It is above all such tribal limitations. Abraham, our revered forefather, recognized his superiority to himself by giving him tithes and receiving of him a priestly blessing. And since those of the Aaronic line were fathered by Abraham, in his obeisance to Melchisedec they too potentially admit their inferiority to this new priestly order. Moreover the priests of the Levitical order are subject to death, as other men, but the new order liveth forever. Therefore, the old priesthood was not final, else the institution of another order would have been meaningless and of no worth. And it is well known that Jesus, who is of the Melchisedec order, came of the tribe of Judah. This means that the law which was established in the Levitical priesthood is superseded, that both priesthood and law were planned for provisional service, and now must give way to the new order which has the power of endless service. Jesus, the crucified, is this priest of the changeless order, confirmed in his office by an oath of God, which makes his service final and perfect. Salvation through him is complete: it purges man's heart of sins and brings him into intimate fellowship with his Father. A new covenant relationship is secured, and all men have priestly access to God in time of trouble. And again let me urge that such a High Priest is not a discredit to our faith or a source of shame among our fellows, instead he is what we have needed more than all else -- he is faithful to God, sympathetic with men and perfectly fitted for his office.

My chief point here is, that such a high priest is officiating in the true tabernacle, that is, in the heavens, and that he belongs there from the nature of his sacrifice as well as the character of his person. And his ministry is as much better than the Levitical ministry as the covenant which he mediates is superior to the old covenant. For the first was imperfect and God promised to make a new covenant with his people. Under this dispensation God's laws shall be written on man's heart, so that all men may know God personally. And the new priestly order makes this covenant operative when it makes possible perfect fellowship with God. For the ministry of the Levitical order was confined to the earthly tabernacle, and though the physical furnishings were most ornate and commanding, and the priestly ritual elaborate and complete, the daily ministrations had to do with such merely mundane matters as meats and drinks and washings and material ordinances, while
the worshipper's own moral life was unregenerated and his sin-laden heart unwashed. While the new ministry, on the other hand, is effected in heaven, and Jesus has made one offering of himself, of his own life, past, present, future, which offering covers the whole sweep of human needs and has established eternal redemption for all of God's children.

With such a means of salvation, such a covenant and such a ministry, let us draw near to God in the true spirit of worship and service, holding steadfastly our former faith in Jesus. May such relations energize us for practical brotherly responsibilities in the community. And may I caution you once again that apostasy to such a faith will entail upon you more frightful punishment than I have words to describe, for "it's a fearful thing to fall in the hands of the living God." Bolster your faith in God's goodness and the correctness of your Christian faith, by recalling the fine courage and patience that marked your approach to former afflictions when you were in the enthusiasm of your newly found hope. It's by faith after all that you must appropriate the blessings of this new covenant relation. Cheer your hearts and nerve your wills by dwelling upon these ancient heroes of God from the creation down to the present period. For while they trusted even till death and the promise was not fulfilled, you have a better hope than they. With such a company of faithful heroes watching you, how can you falter and fail? I admit that you haven't always been whole-heartedly serious, but if chastisement comes, just realize that character comes only through difficulties met and overcome. God is a wise Father who is working for your highest development. Straighten up. Look ahead. Remember your vow and go forward. Your first move will be at home and in your daily relationships. Don't lose salvation for a few passing, temporary pleasures. Think of unfortunate Esau, hungry and sense-bound. The blessing was gone forever. The old covenant was sensible and provisional, even though awful in the God's manifestations. In this new dispensation when God is approachable to all men, may we still reverence him and have respect for his laws.

Be brotherly and hospitable to strangers. Have respect for the sacred ties of the home. Don't grow avaricious. Remember with respect those who first taught you this new way of life. Don't run after every new doctrine that comes to light. Break completely from the old influences and the Mother Church. Go out from them as Jesus went outside the city to suffer and die. Henceforth let your sacrifices be the expression of the thankfulness of your heart. Be obedient to your rulers. Remember us in your prayers, for I hope to see you soon. My prayers in your behalf. Timothy is free, and we may visit you together.
THE GREAT PARADOX OF THE EPISTLE

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Our author has a great task before him. He is attempting to meet a definite situation, but in order to do it he must employ terms, ideas, and relations that have implications for all men and all time. He wrote specifically to faint-hearted, wavering Christians who had found their religious belief assailed by local circumstances. And yet his words come with singular meaning to us, for his problem after all, is our problem, the age-old problem of how God makes known his purpose to man. This problem in any strict sense of finality and completeness is still unsolved, for the ways of God are past finding out. But what we cannot attain by knowledge we can apprehend by faith, and life goes on hoping sometime, somewhere to have an answer to the eternal "How?". And so we must expect some discrepancies in our author's letter, some lack of complete unity, a falling short of consistency. For in view of subsequent efforts in this field, perhaps he could not solve the problem if he would. It's possible of course, that it did not occur to him in the form in which it presents itself today. The mountain stands out in all its detail of contour and outline only to the man with the perspective of miles. We must have the lapse of years to evaluate significant events. And even if the solution had occurred to him, he was not obliged to offer it in any theological way, for he was interested in saving his readers to the new faith, more than presenting them with a new theology. We feel that he made his point, but we wonder if he convinced his reader friends, and thereby saved them for the growing momentum and influence of the developing church. Having no evidence on either side, we can only hope he succeeded.

But the problem is still with us. Specifically put, it could be expressed in this form, how reconcile Jesus' humiliation with his exaltation? This is the paradox. We find him taking on human weakness and suffering, its temptations in their most telling form, on the one hand, and we see him exalted to the right hand of God with all creation serving as his footstool, on the other hand. Though in his very nature he was Son of God, he was made lower than angels, and in that condition he suffered the experience of death for all men (2:9). He became a brother to mortal kind, becoming a veritable son of Abraham, and experiencing a real participation in the limitations and weakness of human flesh and blood. It was through such common experiences with man that he came to know man's lot, what of moral resourcefulness was necessary to
maintain a sinless life in the press of human temptations and failings. But this he must do that he may be a true brother and have a brother's sympathy and mercy. For in that he met all the temptations that face men and has been able to match strength with resistance, to outdo and fully to overcome, he is better able to judge the power of the appeal and the insidious charms of life's evils, and thereby help other sons of God who are caught in the toils of the struggle (2:9f).

In preparing his readers for his venture of priesthood for Jesus, he refers to his days in the flesh with striking emphasis. We see our Master again in the shadows of the fast leafing olive trees in Gethsemane pleading with his Father that the cup of complete humiliation might be withdrawn (5:7). But his filial submission to the inevitable, though supremely hard to endure, indicated the fine development in the Master's ever-present, yet ever-maturing attitude of obedience to his Father's will. Further Jesus is spoken of as "this man" (8:4), and "it is evident that Our Lord sprang out of Judah" (7:14). He offered himself (7:28), and by "his own blood" (9:12) he entered into heaven, thereby having secured eternal redemption for us all. His physical body was prepared by God (10:6), but he sacrificed himself (9:26), and thus through the medium of his flesh and his life's blood he has established a new and living way into God's presence (10:20). From the grave he was brought to life again by his Father's will (13:20).

Over against this indication of Our Lord's humiliation, of his human limitations, his temptations, his sufferings even to tears and cryings, his development in obedience, the shame of the cross and the ignominy of his death, stands the grandeur of his pre-existent state, and the splendor and glory of his exaltation from his earthly companionship with man to his eternal dignity and intercession at his Father's right hand. The references to the Son's pre-existence are brief and few in number. In the burst of his introduction the author imputes to the Son the creatorship of the worlds through God; he declares that he sources in God, and is exactly like God. He is eternal, without beginning of days and end of life, in his assimilation to the Melchisedec type of the Old Testament (7:3). The spirit that moves him in all this remedial work is the eternal spirit of God himself (9:14) which has always been active in its attitude and relation to mankind. In the first stage of his existence he maintained all creation by his power (1:3), but any detailed account of his relation to particular events or creatures is wholly lacking. In the statement that he was made a little lower than angels (2:9) lies the evident inference that his pre-earthly state was superior to the angel order. -- When we come to his exalted life we find that the transition to this state from his incarnate existence is not definite and clear-cut. As some one has put it, there seems to be a vestibule or entrance to this last period. In this vestibule are
to be included his voluntary death (7:27), the resurrection (13:20) and ascension of Jesus (4:14). There is also an anointing (1:9), and the crowning with glory and honor (2:9) and the final position at the right hand of God (1:13, 10:12). How much of this is timeless, we cannot say. But on the ministry of the last period the author rests the weight of his emphasis. Here salvation is proclaimed (2:5), here his death becomes efficacious in delivering his brethren from the terror of death (2:14, 15) and affording them sanctification (10:10, 14); here also he first begins to exercise his High-Priestly function (6:20; 7:28; 8:1-3; 10:21) for men; here he secures forgiveness of sins committed under the old covenant (9:15), the cleansing of man's conscience, and complete access to God (4:16; 10:19). The experiences of his human days now become operative: he can help men and deliver them from temptation (2:16,18), and make propitiation for their sins (2:17). "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever" (13:8) is applicable to this exalted period. Here he mediates and sponsors a better covenant (7:22; 12:24), and becomes the Apostle and High Priest of man's confession (3:1), and the supreme example, author and perfecter of human faith (12:2).

In this brief survey of the functions of Our Lord's life as set forth by our author in the periods of Jesus' ministry we come upon the great chasm between his earthly existence and his exalted state, both previous and subsequent. What is the difference between the two states? Is it merely temporal or is it metaphysical? Did the humiliation happen in time or in essence, or both in time and essence? Holtzmann calls it an "unreconciled dualism of metaphysics and history, an unbridged gap between the speculative construction which starts from above and deals with the pre-existent world-creating Son, and the historical, which starts from below and deals with the life of Jesus". Metaphysically we believe that our author attempted no reconciliation of the paradox. As has been suggested, it may not even have occurred to him. His purpose was a practical one. His readers, in all probability, were not hypercritical in matters of philosophy. They were merely losing heart and turning backward to the old faith. Hence they probably found no discrepancy in the fact that Jesus was of the tribe of Judah, in one instance, and in another, that he is eternal, without father and mother. It was more a matter of experience with our author than theological reasoning. He knew of the earthly life of Jesus, of his service and his sufferings. He was also assured of his power to bring men into fellowship with God. It is not impossible that he experienced the present existence of his Lord in much the same fashion as the waiting people experienced their Lord at Pentecost, and as we experience him today. Hence out of his own heart's convictions he could exclaim, "Jesus Christ
the same yesterday, today and forever." For him Jesus exalted to the right hand of God was a fact, just as his earthly ministry was a fact. And with these facts he must convince his readers that Christianity is superior to Judaism. The readers also have the facts of his life, and their enemies will never let them forget the shame of his death. But what remains? Such a humiliation could not accord with their conception of the Messiah, and besides if he were truly the Messiah why did he delay his second coming?

From the metaphysical standpoint our author offers no solution, and no such solution is easily, if at all discoverable from the implication of his position. His effort is practical and ethical. The end to be attained in this great transaction of the ages, is the bringing of men into fellowship relations with God, the bringing of His sons into glory. This aim he declares to be worthy of the nature of God. Presumably the argument would take this course; it is fitting that God should prevent his creation in man from being destroyed by sin. Otherwise he would be chargeable with failure. This end then would justify any appropriate method employed by God in attaining it. But more than that, men are the very sons of God and he is their Father. Hence it is altogether fitting that he should provide for their salvation. But why should he employ this method? Why not some other, even though the object is so praiseworthy? Because God has always mediated his revelation to man. He might have saved men by some direct, sovereign act of intervention. But he chose the method hitherto used in the olden days. But a leader, or mediator must at some time be a visible, historical character, and he must endure temptations and hardships in common with those whom he would lead. It was by this means and for this purpose that Jesus became the Captain of our salvation. But if his experience is complete when first he becomes man, then why the humiliation? The situation, then, implies the need of development in the requirements for leadership. And it was just his sufferings and his temptations and his human experiences in toto that fitted him to be the leader of men. He was perfected in obedience to God on his human side and officially equipped for the leadership of all men into perfect salvation. All this process of development took place within the ethical sphere. The metaphysical difficulties in such a growth are wholly ignored.

So much for the rationale of the humiliation. How the transition to the exalted state? Some consider his exaltation as reward for his earthly life of obedience and suffering. Again some say, God made him heir of all creation, because he was the maker of creation and such a position became the dignity of his Son. Or, his seat at the right hand of God was in keeping with his nature as the effulgence of God's glory. He
was appointed above his fellows because he loved righteousness (1:9). He was set over the house because he was its builder (3:4; 10:21). But all these suggestions give us a very indefinite answer to our question. The crux of the situation rests, it seems, with the interpretation of 2:9. For the main thesis of the letter has to do with the mediatorial work of Jesus. His interest in his Master's exalted glory was not considered for its sake alone, it was a link in the chain of his argument. And we look for the connection in this verse. Here his death and his crowning are logically related. Which is first in point of time or influence, or may they be mutually contemporaneous? The traditional view holds that his crowning was subsequent to his death. But this does not give good sense to the verse. To meet this difficulty some have suggested that Christ's exaltation was retroactive, thus giving his antecedent death redemptive efficacy. Other explanations are offered but all require a readjustment of the text. The one most plausible to me is that offered by Bruce: Christ's humiliation in his earthly life and death is his exaltation. This is not easy for some, and, at first, perhaps difficult for any one to grasp. How much more must it have staggered the original readers. Or did it? If we only knew. This then would be our author's reconciliation of the great paradox: Christ's humiliation is at the same time and in genius his exaltation and glorification. It does not follow in time. To suffer with men, to reveal the heart of his Father to them, to die for them that the fear of death might forever be removed, and to perfect their salvation, what greater honor, what greater glory could come to one of God's creatures, or to God himself? Has not God always been loving us, and is not the very genius of his ever active love for us service, and was this not the greatest service ever effected in a point of time -- the life of his own Son, lived and sacrificed for man's eternal redemption?

Though not stated in so many words, this we feel was probably the author's bridging of the chasm. If not, then we suspect he did not recognize the discrepancy, or, recognizing it, felt that he had made his point without a reconciliation. He manifestly gives us no hint of the "How?". It is not his purpose to explain the process that must be undergone in order to have God become man. That would never establish his readers in the newly found faith. That would not grip their hearts. But if they could once grasp the eternal attitude of the Father, his un-tiring, un-changing, out-reaching love for them; if they could realize that this attitude was an active attitude, an attitude of unceasing effort; if they could only be made aware of the eternal, loving labor of their Father in their behalf, then they would readily follow his bidding. Then could they exclaim with the author, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever", for he is God in human form, and his mind is his Father's mind, and it changeth never.

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THE AUTHOR'S CONCEPTION OF RELIGION

The problem that confronts the author of this epistle in the matter of religion, at heart and fundamentally, differed very little from that which confronts us today, namely, how to make God real to men and vital in their lives. Ritualism had been inefficient. It had grown mechanical in the consideration and the participation of many communicants. The real spirit was gone. To add to this inherent tendency of any purely ritualistic system to chill the spirit and dampen the ardor, and to render men unthinking in their worship, the Jewish leaders had developed numerous tiresomely tedious rules and regulations. No approach could be made even toward God without some form of sacrifice. The very genius of the Levitical priesthood made it impossible for the laymen to come into personal relations with God. Man could not see through this maze of forms and formalities to his God. He could only look Godward. With the rules and regulations went penalties for transgressions and expiations for sins and wrong-doings. A jealous arrangement was effected for the protection of the majesty of God. All this tended to engender an oppressive sense of solemnity and a chilling feeling of fear. It was a system that inspired awe and reverence. To the worshipper God was afar off, seated in unapproachable regal splendor. He was a king, powerful, jealous with his serving priests of his name and honor. Into his presence only once a year could man venture, and then only the High Priest, and he only when protected from the face of Jehovah by a cloud of incense. True the Psalmist exhorts the spirit of thanksgiving: "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands", but if the religion of Israel was generally joyous it was in spite of its Levitical system of worship. It was only when the human heart in its unconquerable yearning for the true God of love and nearness transcended the forms of its man-made worship that it could join with the poet in such sentiments. More than that, with all his offerings of bulls and goats and first fruits of the fields, with all his punctilious attention to the demands of the temple there was no permanent relief for the worshipper. His heart was unchanged, his conscience unwashed, and the pardoning face of his Father it was never his privilege to see. It was ever a striving, but never an achieving. There was soul struggle, there was toilsome wrestling with the thongs of ritualism that bound him. Paul in his letter to the Romans has given us his interpretation of the power of such a system to make a man miserable, almost to the point of blank despair. The worshipper would come closer to his Father. He longed for
the pardon that satisfies. As does every heart at its most exalted moments, the heart of the Jew reached out silently imploringly for that closer fellowship with God, his Father; he yearned to know that he understands and cares.

So much for the Jews as such. But our epistle is directed to men who have found perplexity added to perplexity. They have learned of Jesus and his message. They have accepted his gospel. But their faith is wavering. Their feet are slipping. They are about to return to "the flesh pots of Egypt." Many had thought that Jesus would return shortly. But as the years came and went and still no return, they doubted. They knew the ritual of their fathers. Men had lived by it and had died by it long before Jesus came. In spite of all its inadequacy it was a tangible somewhat. They could understand its forms though it did not satisfy. It was a recognized institution. It was a present mode of worship, still operative. And if Jesus should not come, if it were a mistake after all, what for a religion was left them? More and more it became evident that the Jews as such would not accept Jesus as the Christ.

The Christian Jews were in a quandary. They were halting between two opinions. They did not care to return to the fold of Leviticalism, and yet what was there besides? The synagogue was becoming alienated from the Church of the Believers. This pointed to an early separation from the temple and the privileges of all its ministrations. Was there to be no Kingdom of God after all? Instead of a Messiah they had but a crucified Jesus. Even his resurrection had failed to remove the shame of his death. And he had not yet returned to earth to reconcile the double event. This was the plight in which our author finds them, made a "gazingstock" because of their Master's ignoble end and his unmessianic role, confused because the new religion offered no outward, commanding means of worship.

To this exceedingly difficult problem our epistle is directed. In meeting it the author establishes for us, as some one has said, something of a philosophy of religion. True it is not as such that he presents it, but his plan must be all-inclusive to meet the situation. He canvasses the whole sweep of God's relations with man. He accepts the Old Testament as a foundation, as a book of types, as a prophecy. God "at sundry times and in divers manners" has spoken to our forefathers through the prophets. Mediation has further been effected through angels; later and more specifically through Moses and Joshua through whom the first formal economy of grace was transmitted to man. Under this dispensation Leviticalism was established. It was a step in God's revelation of himself to man. All the features and functions, all the regulations and restrictions, all the offerings and sacrifices, altar, incense, burnings, all the temple and priestly furnishings was of God's ordering. But such provisions were only temporary and provisional. They were but shadows of the real abiding relations that were to be. And under such a dispensation how much is still to be desired. With the daily coming of the priest to the temple only
the technical and ceremonial uncleanness could be cleansed away. The innermost life was still unchanged. The blood of bulls and goats could never take away sins. The prophet of years now gone recognized the inefficacy of mere sacrifices when formally offered. But even devotedly and obediently made, they were still powerless to cleanse the heart. Such a system is decadent and ancient now, and "ready to vanish away".

To replace this outgrown, superseded form of worship, our author presents Jesus in what, to his readers, must have been a most remarkably bold venture! He lifts him from the grave of a convict, enrobes him in the dignity and splendor of a changeless priesthood, and sets him at the right hand of God where he makes continual intercession for every seeking human heart. Though God formerly mediated through prophets and angels and Moses and Aaron and the rubrics of the temple, in these "last days" he has spoken through his own Son. This Son, who was Jesus the crucified, is God incarnate. God had always planned such a revelation of himself to take place in the "fulness of time". And the superiority of this revelation is determined by the superiority of Jesus the Mediator. By appeal to the Old Testament we find that the angels are but "ministering spirits", but Jesus, though made lower than the angels in taking on human form, is still God's Son and has been "crowned with glory and honor". He is superior to Moses and the prophets as the builder and owner of a house is to its servants. As a priest his order is qualitatively different from that of the Aaronic line. He is of the Melchisedec type, eternal, unchangeable. The Levitical priesthood is temporal, transitory, provisional. His sacrifice has been made once and for all, it is efficacious to the cleansing of a man's heart of sins. The Levitical sacrifice must be made each year and "it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins". Jesus mediates the new Covenant; Leviticalism operates under the old Covenant. Leviticalism was but a shadow, a rude outline (skia) of heavenly and eternal realities. Jesus in his mediatorial work offers an exact life-like image of the hidden things of God. He is the brightness of his Father's glory and "the express image of his person".

To the worshipper with his unanswered prayers, his unrealized longings, his restlessness of soul, our epistle comes with the Father-God religion. He is cautioned to realize that Christianity has a ritual, if he needs that, more complete than any that God has hitherto instituted. But of deepest worth is the access to God which he makes plain before them and urges them to improve. Jesus has been tempted in all points with mortal man. He has shared their human lot with "strong cryings and tears". He knows their weaknesses, their failings, their heart's yearnings. And because of these experiences he can sympathize with man. Moreover since it was God's plan that he should acquaint himself with human hearts and human needs, even
to the extremity of death, if need be, his dying was the crowning act in the unwavering loyalty of his life. Hence instead of defeat in death, and shame upon the cross, both for himself and his followers, he was thereby perfected in his training for obedience, and was "crowned with glory and honor". He sits at God's right hand with all the regal powers of the long-awaited Messiah. But he is nearer than that to men. He is their captain, leading them through the parted veil into the very presence of God himself. And his life, lived and living, represented in the blood of the cross, ever makes possible our access to God. Christianity is the religion of intimate fellowship with our Father. It is the final religion because he has achieved the great end of religion. God's votaries can now come to Mount Zion in filial devotion. The unapproachable austerity of thundering Mt. Sinai is of the past. Henceforth for the Christian God is his Father, the generous, bountiful giver of all good, a being who takes no delight in the darkness of isolation, apart, but welcomes to his fellowship even the sinful and sinning, who confess their sins, and treats them as his erring children, meets them with the glad expectancy of the Father of the prodigal son.

But there is place for man's part in this scheme of religion. God will not gather him into the closeness of his fellowship. The worshipper must exercise his privilege and appropriate its blessings. The sacrificial life of Jesus has revealed God to us in all his Fatherly goodness, but it is left for us "to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling". He must be convinced that God is and "that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him". By the power of faith must he come into God's fellowship. The author's conception of faith differs from Paul's theological, mystical interpretation. "In Paul's presentation faith works for love; in our epistle faith derives its virtue from its psychological character as a faculty of the human mind, whereby it can make the future present and the unseen visible. This faculty is not, as such, ethical or religious; it is a natural endowment of man". The faith that caused Columbus to push his voyage westward was the same as that which sent Abram from the lands of his fathers to unknown parts. Yet faith while psychologically the same varies in the nature of its object. It's the faith that sees God as a forgiving Father, which apprehends heavenly things, and appraises eternal values that our author recommends in his epistle. Such faith is man's answer to God's grace. It was unbelief that kept many away from God under the old dispensation. "Because of unbelief" the rest which was promised to the forefathers was never attained. His readers must not miss the goal from the same fault. They are encouraged to come "boldly unto the throne of grace", and through "faith and patience inherit the promises". And recognizing how needful it is that the Hebrews fail not to play
their part in this scheme of salvation, the author parades before them not fewer than a score of Old Testament worthies, all of whom have achieved both success and blessings by exercising faith in God's goodness. And about them even now is this great company of God's heroes, like a low hanging cloud, who watch eagerly and expectantly the race that the present generation is running.

The epistle is not a theoretical approach to the problem alone. It is intensely practical. Access to God should make men more brotherly, more chaste in thought and conversation and conduct. For in spite of the finality of this religion there is grave danger that many may fail of salvation. No man can serve God without holiness of life and heart. "Let brotherly love continue", he exhorts them. Be hospitable. Have charity towards those in need. Remember your marital obligations. Be humble, not moneygetters. You will be tempted. Your faith will be assailed. You will doubt again. The race is not yet won. But always remember that Jesus Christ is unchangeable in his service for you. His intercession for you has no end. He is with the Father. Why tarry longer with the dead formalism of the past? You must make your choice between Christianity or Judaism. There is no compromise. Go out from it all to suffer, if need be, as Jesus suffered "without the gate". And let your sacrifice from this time forth be continual praise-giving and thankfulness to your Father who has loved you and revealed himself unto you.
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Meaning of stars: * read in part; ** read all that pertains to subject; *** read in full.