**A BIRD’S EYE VIEW OF HEBREWS**

**WITH SOME WORM’S EYE VIEWS**

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In photography a bird’s eye view is a view from high above, an aerial view. A worm’s eye view is a view from below, a ground level view. Used as idioms for the analysis of a Bible book, a bird’s eye view is a comprehensive view or overview and a worm’s eye view is a close range view or concentrated view.[[1]](#footnote-1) This paper gives an overview of the book of Hebrews with some close range observations, interpretations and applications (with some illustrations) of the text.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Theme of Hebrews: Aim to be Christ’s partner in the life to come.**

A theme statement for the whole book of Hebrews is: We maintain our partnership with God’s exalted Son-Priest through a persevering faith. The theme of this GES Conference simply and pithily captures it as: “Aim to be Christ’s partner in the life to come.”

History and literature are filled with partners/companions analogies. For example in the classic myth of King Arthur, the knights invited to the band (or round table) with King Arthur repeated in each other’s presence a sacred vow. Each knight raised his sword, pointed it towards the center of the round table and spoke the oath below:

I vow in God’s holy name:

To fear god and defend the realm with honor and with might;

To do battle against all evil doers, but never in a wrong cause.

I will defend the helpless, protect all women,

And be merciful to all men.

I will honor my words and speak no slander.

I will be true in brotherhood and faithful in love.

All this I do in the holy name of Almighty God.

We learn of David’s mighty men in 2 Samuel 23:8-39. Every man who joined David in the wilderness entered into his kingdom, but only a few made the list of mighty men. David's chief men were known collectively as “The Thirty” and among them three were the best of the best. Every believer will be in the kingdom of Christ, but only those who are willing to serve our King with courage and loyal devotion, in spite of difficulty and rejection, will stand out as His "mighty ones."

The Book of Hebrews speaks of the *metochoi* of Christ (1:9; 3:1, 14). They are the partners or companions who will reign with Him in the life to come. They are committed to Christ, committed to each other, and committed to completing the race. Will we be among those who make and keep the commitment?

**Expositional Outline[[3]](#footnote-3) of Hebrews with Interpretive Comments**

The structure of the book of Hebrews presented in this paper comprises of a prologue, a tripartite body, and an epilogue.[[4]](#footnote-4) The body addresses the supremacy of the person of Christ, the superiority of the priesthood of Christ, and the steadfastness of the partners of Christ.

1. Prologue: God has climactically spoken to us through His Son, the heir of all things (1:1-4).

In a masterfully constructed opening paragraph, the author introduces us to the surpassing greatness of the Son. The Son is God’s climactic revelation and the heir of all things.

1. Opening Statement: God has finally and fully spoken to us through His Son (1:1-2a).

Though God variously spoke through prophets in the past, His revelation has now climaxed through the Son. However highly we regarded the former revelation, we must now listen closely to the Son.

1. The Sovereign Son: Seven phrases describe the person and work of the Sovereign Son (1:2b-3).
2. He is the appointed heir of all things.
3. He made the world.
4. He uniquely manifests God’s glory.
5. He embodies God’s essence.
6. He upholds all that exists.
7. He made the sacrifice of atonement for the removal of sin.
8. He has been exalted to sit at God’s right hand sharing His sovereign authority (allusion to Psalm 110:1).
9. Transitional Statement: The Son is supreme over angels (1:4).
10. Part 1 – The Supremacy of the Person of Christ: Jesus is God’s exalted King-Son leading other sons to glory (1:5 to 4:16).

The first major division of the body of the book begins at this point and ends at 4:16. It focuses on the fact that Jesus is God’s exalted King-Son who is preparing other sons to share in His reign. There is an alternation of exposition about the Son and exhortation to listen to His revelation and continue in steadfastness of faith to the end.

1. Greater than Angels: To God’s kingly Son and His fellow-heirs, not to angels, belong a triumphant eternal reign (1:5 to 2:18).
2. Exaltation of the Son: A chain of seven Old Testament quotations supports the point of the supremacy of the Son over angels (1:5-13).
3. Psalm 2:7 – Jesus is the unique Son of the Father.
4. 2 Samuel 7:14 – Jesus is the Messianic Son of David.
5. Deuteronomy 32:43 (LXX) – God calls the angels to worship the Son whom He has sent into the world.
6. Psalm 104:4 – The angels are servants.
7. Psalm 45:6-7 – The Son is God. God refers to the Son as God. The Son is elevated above His companions.
8. Psalm 102:25-27 – The Son’s role in creation puts Him alongside of God and separates Him from the creation.
9. Psalm 110:1 – The Son reigns with God at His right hand.

The Son has companions (*metachoi,* verse 9). The same word is employed in 3:1, 3:14 and 12:8. God’s exalted King-Son attained his dominion through a life of steadfast righteousness. His companions will share His experience by that same means.

1. The Role of Angels: The angels are commissioned servants for the sake of those who will inherit salvation (1:14).

Salvation is something future in this context. The word has a well-defined sense in the Psalms from which the writer chiefly quotes in this chapter. It describes the deliverance of God’s people from the oppression of their enemies and their enjoyment of God’s blessings. Final victory over all enemies belongs to God’s King-Son. The angels serve those who are destined to share in that victory, “those who will inherit salvation.”

1. First Warning – Don’t drift away from Christ’s Word: Neglect of our salvation-hope is perilous [It brings judgment in this world and the loss of reward or inheritance in the world to come] (2:1-4).

The “salvation” is the same as that just mentioned in 1:14 and alludes to our potential share in the Son’s dominion, in which he has “companions.” We can expect retribution for losing sight of the ultimate victory and deliverance promised to us in connection with the Son’s own final victory. That retribution is not hell but covenantal discipline and possible loss of an inheritance with Christ.

We are in constant danger of drifting from the word of Christ. Those who drift from the word of Christ will incur great loss in this world and in the world to come. We guard against drifting from the word of Christ by paying much closer attention to what we have heard.

This is the first of five warning passages. Together the five warning passages are exhortations to believers to listen to the Son and persevere in faith and obedience because the Son is the one through whom God has spoken. They call believers to “hear” and “listen” (2:1-4; 12:14-29) rather than distrust and disobey (3:7—4:16; 10:26-31) what God has promised through the Son. Furthermore, believers are to grow in their understanding about the Son (5:11—6:20).[[5]](#footnote-5)

1. Incarnation of the Son: In His humanity, the heir of all things has become fully suited to the needs of His fellow heirs (2:5-18).
2. God intended for mankind (the human race) to rule over creation but because of sin mankind has not realized its destiny (2:5-8).
3. Jesus’ humanity and suffering of death enabled Him to regain man’s lost dominion allowing God to bring many sons to glory through His high priestly ministry (2:9-18).

Jesus is the pioneer (*archegos*) or leader of our salvation (verse 10). He endured suffering and leads His people to their promised salvation in the world to come. Another use of *archegos* is in 12:2. We are to run our race by fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith (12:1-2). The Lord Jesus is the leader of the loyal band of people whom God is preparing for glory. Through the incarnation Jesus became intimately involved with those who will share His destiny in the world to come. Like an older brother He can teach us the lessons of faith in the path of suffering.

We can be a band of brothers with Christ in this life and in the life to come if with His help we persevere in faith. Of all of Shakespeare’s great plays, *Henry V* may rank as the most heroic. In one stirring scene, the English army stands fearfully before superior French troops. King Henry challenges his men to take heart. Because the battle will be fought on “the feast of Crispian,” their victory will be remembered in its yearly celebration. The king tells his men, “This day is called the feast of Crispian . . . We in it shall be remembered; we few, we happy few, we band of brothers; for he today that sheds his blood with me shall be my brother.”

Heb 2:17-18 anticipates (*prolepsis*) the following sections dealing with the High Priesthood of Jesus. He became like us that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest. He is able to come to our aid when we are tempted to quit.

1. Entering His Rest: As partners of the Son, we must acquire our salvation-rest by a persevering faith (3:1 to 4:16).
2. Call: We are invited to be partakers in the Son’s priestly house through our persevering faith (3:1-6).

We are partakers (*metochos*) of a heavenly calling with Christ (3:1). To be a partaker is to be a rewarded heir. We partner with Christ by following Him. As the leader of our salvation, He is our example. We gain our inheritance by faithfully serving Him. God’s King-Son invites us to participate in his future dominion.

We can distinguish between two calls in Scripture: a call to relationship and a call to partnership based on that relationship. Elliot Johnson in a 2005 GES plenary session, *The Scripture’s Call to Partnership*, comments:

The response to the first call “is a **passive** **faith**, as one is drawn, persuaded or convicted by the Spirit that the message is true.” “The response to the call of partnership involves **active faith** and **active obedience**. It is a response that needs to grow in knowledge and to be fruitful in every good work.” Distinct gifts are received from the distinct calls, “The call to a relationship with God receives the gift of life, in coming to know God (Jer. 31:33 and John 17:3). The call to a partnership receives the gift of inheritance as a reward (Col. 3:24).” “Inheritance is the promise of a future participation with the Heir and His inheritance.”

We forfeit our role in the Son’s priestly house if we fail to hold firmly to our confidence and hope (3:6). This does not mean that we forfeit eternal life. “House” is not equivalent to the body of Christ. The exalted Son presides over a royal priestly house. As long as we hold firmly to our Christian commitment, we also function in this royal priestly arrangement.

1. Second Warning – Don’t disbelieve Christ’s Word: We enter into our salvation-rest by believing the word of Christ and receiving grace to help in time of need (3:7 to 4:16).
2. Peril of Disbelief: Rejection of Christ’s word is more serious than rejection of Moses’ word and will keep us from entering into our promised inheritance of reigning with Christ (3:7-19).
   * 1. Psalm 95:7-11 uses Israel’s experience of disobedience as a warning against unbelief (3:7-11). The Exodus generation was not able to enter into the land of Canaan because of unbelief.
     2. The warning applies “Today” (3:12-19). Unbelief will keep us from entering into our promised inheritance of reigning with Christ.

The wilderness community serves as a reminder that God judges those who distrust and disobey him and his messengers. God has not changed. The warning passages reveal that God is consistent in dealing with lack of faith and disobedience. The consequence for the wilderness generation was not entering into their inheritance of Canaan. The consequence for church age believers is not entering into their inheritance of reigning with the Son in the kingdom and world to come. Learn from Israel’s mistake and obey Christ today.

We become partakers (partners) of Christ’s kingdom reign if we hold firm our confession until the end (3:14). We have the privilege of being among the “many sons” whom God is bringing to the glory of shared dominion over the created order Christ is destined to rule. But like the privilege of serving in the priestly house (v. 6), this role is contingent on continuing faithfulness (see Rev. 2:26-27).

1. Entrance into Rest: We enter into our salvation-rest by believing God’s word through Christ (4:1-13).

God is not to be trifled with. We cannot ignore His word. The word of God is “living,” it has the capacity to search the heart. It is “powerful,” it is effective. It will bring a believer to either rest or to judgment. All believers will someday stand before the judgment seat of Christ where they must give account to God for their lives.

Our promised rest is to reign with Christ. The Israelites did not enter into God’s rest because of unbelief. They were permanently excluded from taking possession of their inheritance in Canaan. We enter into our rest because of our persevering faith. There is always the danger of falling into disobedience and unbelief and lose our participation in the future rest. We do not have to fall as the Israelites because we have direct access to the throne of grace.

1. Application and Transitional Statement: We hold fast our confession by drawing near to the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace to help from our sympathetic great high priest Jesus (4:14-16).
2. Part 2 – The Superiority of the Priesthood of Christ: Jesus is God’s exalted Priest-Son able to aid His brethren (5:1 to 10:39).

Two major themes emerged in the first division of the body of the book: (1) the exalted position and destiny of God’s King-Son and (2) the salvation-inheritance of those who continue with Him in faith. Included with those themes have been warnings not to neglect and forfeit the inheritance. The focus has been on the Son’s kingship. At the same time, it has been revealed that the King-Son is also a High Priest. As High Priest He is able to aid those who would be His companions. The second division will now focus on the Son’s priestly role. Like the first division, passages of exposition will be interspersed with passages of exhortation and warning.[[6]](#footnote-6)

1. The Son’s Melchizedekian Priesthood: The superiority of our Lord’s Melchizedekian priesthood over the Levitical priesthood is the anchor of our salvation-hope (5:1 to 7:28).
2. The Son’s Priestly Role: God’s kingly son is fully suited to His priestly role (5:1-10).
3. The Qualifications of the Earthly High Priest: The high priest must have a human nature, human compassion and divine appointment (5:1-4).
4. The Qualifications of the Eternal High Priest: Jesus was divinely installed as High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek after He had been perfectly equipped by the sufferings and trials of life to be our High Priest (5:5-10).

Having learned obedience from the things He suffered, Jesus became the source of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him (vv. 8-9). This salvation is the inheritance mentioned in 1:14 and the “eternal inheritance” in 9:15. It is not to be confused with the acquisition of eternal life which is conditioned on faith not obedience. The Priest-Son is the source of salvation-inheritance for those willing to live obediently. From Him flow all the resources that make a life of obedience possible.

1. Third Warning – Don’t defect from Christ’s Word: Avoid the danger of defection by a persevering progress toward spiritual maturity (5:11 to 6:20).

Verse 11 transitions from the exposition on the priesthood of Christ to an exhortation to press on the maturity. The beginning exposition of the high priesthood of Christ brings to mind the spiritual condition of the readers.[[7]](#footnote-7) They are sluggish believers who have not progressed beyond the elementary teaching of the oracles of God.

1. The Problem of Immaturity: Beware of relapsing into a state of spiritual infancy (5:11-13).
2. The Remedy: Press on to spiritual maturity (6:1-20).
3. The Need for Progress: Press on beyond the elementary teachings about the Christ (6:1-2).
4. The Danger of an Irremediable Fall: Beware of backsliding to a state where repentance becomes impossible (6:3-8).

God may discipline his people without “repentance.” They may cross a line where God will not permit them to come to repentance and go on to maturity. There only remains temporal judgment and loss of inheritance. The impossibility of repentance (Heb. 6:6) is an echo back to Israel’s failed attempt to reverse God’s verdict the day after their rebellion (see Num. 14:39-45). They learned that the Lord was “a forgiving God . . . yet an avenger of their evil deeds” (Ps. 99:8).

1. The Call to a Persevering Faith: Anchor to the hope set before us by being imitators of those such as Abraham who through faith and patience inherit the promises (6:9-20).
2. The Melchizedekian Priesthood: The Lord’s superior Melchizedekian priesthood is our anchoring hope (7:1-28).

In order to persevere in faith through the pressures of life, we need a correct conception of the High Priest who can help us. Hebrews 5:1-10 showed that Jesus is qualified to be our High Priest. Now we will learn the qualities that prove Him to be a high priest superior to Aaron.

1. Type of Christ: Melchizedek prefigured Christ in his name and title, office, and lack of priestly ancestry (7:1-3).

Melchizedek’s lack of father and mother typifies the deity of Christ who as the divine Son had no human father or mother. Having neither beginning of days nor end of life he typifies the eternality of the Son of God and insures us that He shall remain a priest forever.

1. Greater than Levitical Priests: Melchizedek was a priest greater than the Levitical priests since he received a tithe from Abraham and blessed him (7:4-10).

This first part of the discussion of Melchizedek is based on the historical account in Genesis 14. Now attention will turn to Psalm 110:4.

1. Better Hope: Since the Levitical priesthood could not bring perfection, God called for a new priesthood which would give a better hope and enable us to draw near to Him (7:11-20).

OT believers could know God, pray to God and love God, yet our hope and access to God are better since Christ has come. We have direct access to God through the blood of Christ.

1. Superior Priesthood: The Melchizedekian priesthood of God’s Son is superior to Aaron’s because of God’s oath and Jesus’ eternality, sinlessness, and efficacious sacrifice (7:20-28).

Jesus is able to save completely those who come to God though Him (v. 25). This is the salvation-inheritance first referred to in 1:14. God’s Son-Priest can see those who come to God through Him through every trial and difficulty right to the end of the road because He always lives to intercede for them. This is in line with the invitation to come to the throne of grace to receive mercy and grace in 4:14-16. Jesus will lead those who come to Him victoriously into the glory of the many sons. In this way Jesus saves “completely.”

1. The Son’s New Covenant Priestly Service: The superiority of the Son’s New Covenant service is the basis for a worshipper’s complete acceptance and confidence before God (8:1 to 10:39).

Chapters 5-7 demonstrated the superiority of the new priesthood. Chapters 8-10 will show that Jesus carries out a superior priestly ministry. The New Covenant underlies this priestly service.

1. Introduction to Jesus’ New Covenant Ministry: Jesus serves in a better sanctuary and mediates a better covenant (8:1-13).
   1. The True Tabernacle: Jesus performs His priestly work in the true tabernacle in heaven which is associated with a better covenant established on better promises (8:1-6).

Verses 1-2 summarizes what has been taught and goes on to a new idea. The idea of service (*leitourgos*, priestly ministry) is the new theme. The true tabernacle in heaven is where that service takes place.

* 1. The New Covenant: The better covenant is the new covenant spoken of in Jeremiah 31:31-34 which renders obsolete the first covenant made with Israel at Sinai (8:7-13).

1. Explanation of Jesus’ New Covenant Priestly Ministry: Jesus is superior in His new covenant functions (9:1 to 10:18).
2. The Earthly and Heavenly Sanctuaries: Jesus serves the true tabernacle of God in heaven, not a symbolic earthly sanctuary (9:1-14).
3. The Old and New Covenants: Jesus’ death has inaugurated a new and everlasting covenant so that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance (9:15-22).
4. The Old and New Sacrifices: Jesus’ one sacrifice, unlike the annual sacrifices of the Day of Atonement, is truly effective for the forgiveness of sins (9:23 to 10:18).

Jesus will appear a second time for salvation to those who eagerly await Him (9:28). His first advent was to bear sins away. His second will not be to bear sins but to bring salvation. The implication is that those who are waiting for Him is a smaller group than those who benefited from His death. They are the ones who hold firmly to the end the confidence they had at first (3:14). The salvation that He will bring them at His second coming is the eternal inheritance of which they are heirs (1:14; 9:15).

1. Warning and Encouragement: Our steadfast faith, hope, and love deters divine retribution in this life and results in great reward in the life to come (10:19-39).
2. Basic Admonition: Come before God with full assurance of faith and gather together to encourage one another (10:19-25).
3. Two Great Privileges: We have access to God by the blood of Christ and we have a great high priest in Him (19-21).
4. Three Solemn Duties: Draw near to God with full assurance of *faith*, hold fast the confession of your *hope*, and stir up one another to *love* and good deeds by gathering together and encouraging each other (22-25).
5. Fourth Warning – Don’t go on sinning willfully against Christ’s Word: Expect God’s family judgment for continuing to sin willfully against the truth (10:26-31).
6. Encouragement: Anticipate great reward for steadfast faith (10:32-39).

The reference to faith introduces the main theme of the third division of the body of the book. The lifestyle of faith of those who have gone on before will encourage the readers to faithful endurance.

1. Part 3 – The Steadfastness of the Partners of Christ: We maintain our partnership with God’s exalted King-Priest through persevering faith (11:1 to 12:29).

The third and final division of the body of the book focuses on the persevering faith of the believers who would share in the reign of God’s exalted King-Priest. As in the two preceding divisions there is exposition and exhortation.

1. Persevering Faith and God’s Approval: Faith is the indispensable basis of all effective spiritual living (11:1-40).
2. The Nature of Faith: Faith is grounded on God’s Word and gains God’s approval (11:1-3).
3. The Approval of Faith: The life of faith illustrated by the many heroes of faith receives approval and reward from God (11:4-16).
4. The Victory of Faith: The life of faith triumphs over all experiences of life though it may not always be rewarded in this life (11:17-40).
5. Persevering Faith and God’s Discipline: Our new covenant relationship with God’s exalted King-Priest should motivate us to faithful perseverance under divine discipline (12:1-29).
6. Running the Race: Run your race with endurance by looking to Christ (12:1-3).

Perhaps one of the greatest races that the world has ever witnessed happened in Munich, Germany. 85,000 people were roaring as 70 men came to the starting line. It was the finals of the 10,000 meter run. In the middle of the 70 men was a young man from Finland by the name of Viren. He had trained in the footsteps of the great Pavvo Nurmi. Nobody gave him a chance. He wasn’t even picked in the top ten.

He came from Finland down to Munich with the hope that he would place in the Olympic Games. Well, the gun went off. The tremendous roar of the crowd was almost deafening as the 70 men struggled for the championship of the world. Two and a half laps had gone by when, all of a sudden men started hitting each other from all directions. Viren’s right foot was stepped on. He came forward, hit his left foot, and fell down. Another runner lay unconscious on the track. Viren sprawled out in the middle of the field, ten yards off the track semi-conscious, his dream apparently shattered. Ten years of training down the drain. However, he stood up, rushed back on the track and started running, 50 yards behind.

The crowd watched the young man from Finland. They encouraged him. He kept running. To make a long story short, he not only caught the other runners, he not only broke the Olympic record, he also set a new world record – and he had fallen down! Can you imagine setting a world record in a race after you’ve fallen down?

Some people think the reason Viren won that race was because he did fall down. Sometimes it takes a shock treatment like that where you are faced with the harsh reality of having to come back to cause you to stand up and run like he did. Viren not only won that race, but he went on to win back-to-back gold medals in the 5,000 and 10,000 meter runs in the 1976 Montreal Olympics!

Another great story of perseverance came out of the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. Derek Redmond of Great Britain was in agony as he was helped to the finish line by his father, Jim, after tearing his hamstring muscle in the semi-finals of the men's 400 meter run. Redmond collapsed about half way through the race with the injury, but got up, determined to finish despite the pain. His father came out of the stands and onto the track to help his son. Redmond initially tried to push him away, not realizing who he was, but then heard a familiar voice. "Derek, it's me" his father said. Redmond told his father "I've got to finish this race." His father said "If you're gonna finish the race, we'll finish it together." With his father's help, Redmond made it to the finish line.

1. Enduring Discipline: Endure and learn from God’s discipline (12:4-13).
2. Fifth Warning – Don’t refuse him who is speaking: Render to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe to avoid judgment in this life and loss of inheritance in the life to come (12:14-29).

Hebrews 2:1-4 and 12:14-29 (esp. vv. 25-29) share a similar exhortation. “Hear” or “listen” to the message spoken by the Son, because if you do not, you will not escape judgment.

Esau is an example of a believer who forfeits his inheritance (12:16-17). Esau forfeited the temporal blessing of his birthright, but did not lose his status as a genuine son. The fact that “by faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come” (Heb. 11:20) suggests that Esau, in spite of his irreverent behavior was not cut off from “the age to come” (Heb. 6:5 and 13:14).

1. Epilogue: Offer to God an acceptable service relying on the grace of Jesus Christ (13:1-25)

Heb 12:28 exhorts us to render to God an acceptable service. Chapter 13 defines that acceptable service. The writer concludes his written sermon with specific exhortations to enable his readers to continue to worship God acceptably under the New Covenant. He includes a benediction and some closing comments.

1. Concluding Instructions: Serve God acceptably in social and spiritual areas (13:1-19).
2. Social Instructions: Love the brethren, honor marriage, be content (1-6).
3. Spiritual Instructions: Submit to spiritual leadership and offer spiritual sacrifices (7-19).

Heb 13:8 says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” There are three settings in time in the book of Hebrews: The Former Age – Yesterday (*long ago*), The Present Age – Today (*these last days*), The Age to Come – Forever (*the world to come*) [1:1-2; 3:13; 13:8]. Looking back to the outcomes of the faithfulness (Jesus, members of “Hall of Faith”) or faithlessness (wilderness generation, Esau) of those who preceded us, “today” we must fix our eyes on Jesus (*the author and perfecter of faith*) and persevere in faith while looking forward to the “forever” God has promised.

1. Benediction: May God through Jesus equip you to do that which is pleasing in His sight (13:20-21).
2. Closing: Heed this brief exhortation in fellowship with God’s people and reliance on God’s grace (13:22-25).

In the closing verses the writer urges his readers again to listen to the word of exhortation contained in this letter rather than rejecting it. He makes several personal references and closes with a final prayer that God's grace would be with his readers (see 2:9; 4:16; 10:19; 12:15; 13:9). This would happen as they persevered faithfully in the truth and relied upon Jesus their great High Priest (10:19-25).

**Summary of Hebrews**

Jesus the exalted Son is our sympathetic high priest who has gone before us and enables us to enter into the promise of our inheritance. If we listen to Him and rely upon His grace and mercy and persevere in faith to the end, we will receive the inheritance of reigning with him in the world to come.[[8]](#footnote-8)

***Aim to be Christ’s partner in the life to come.***

After finishing their mission in Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Frodo and Sam are seated upon thrones by Aragorn, the King of Gondor. The chapter entitled “The Field of Cormallen” in *The Return of the King* relates the story (excerpts from pages 246-249 of the Ballantine Books paperback edition):

* “The wanderers were lifted up and borne far away out of the darkness and the fire.”
* “Sam cried aloud . . . ‘Where are we?’ And a voice spoke softly behind him: ‘In the land of Ithilien, and in the keeping of the King; and he awaits you.’”
* “What’s happened to the world?” “A great shadow has departed.”
* “When they were washed and clad, and had eaten a light meal, the Hobbits followed Gandalf . . . As they came to the opening in the wood, they were surprised to see knights in bright mail and tall guards in silver and black standing there, who greeted them with honour and bowed before them.”
* “And as the Hobbits approached swords were unsheathed, and spears were shaken, and horns and trumpets sang, and men cried out with many voices and in many tongues: ‘Long live the Halflings! Praise them with great praise! Praise them with great praise, Frodo and Samwise! Praise them! Praise them! Praise them! The Ring-bearers, praise them with great praise!’”
* “Frodo and Sam went forward and saw that amidst the clamorous host were set three high seats . . . on the [highest] throne sat a mail-clad man, a great sword was laid across his knees, but he wore no helm. As they drew near he rose. And then they knew him, changed as he was, so high and glad of face, kingly, lord of Men, dark-haired with eyes of grey.”
* “. . . and taking them by the hand, Frodo upon his right and Sam upon his left, he led them to the throne, and setting them upon it, he turned to the men and captains who stood by and spoke, so that his voice rang over all the host, crying: ‘Praise them with great praise!’”

**Appendix – Some Matters of Introduction**

Authorship: The Book of Hebrews is an anonymous work. Numerous suggestions have been given as to who wrote the book. No clear consensus has emerged concerning who the writer was. Perhaps the best suggestion was articulated by Origen when he wrote, “As to who actually wrote the epistle, God knows the truth of the matter.” Hebrews seems to fit the description of one of its puzzling characters: “without father, without mother, without genealogy” (7:3). Because the writer desired anonymity, it seems best to let his wishes stand.

Audience: The traditional title “To the Hebrews” is first encountered toward the end of the second century. The document lacks the usual epistolary opening. Nowhere does it tell us that the original readers were Hebrews, nor does it tell us where they lived. The book’s argument suggests believers of Jewish background who were being tempted to lapse back to their Judaism.

Date: The writer said that he and those to whom he wrote had come to faith in Jesus Christ through the preaching of others who had heard Jesus (2:3-4). The original readers had been Christians for an extended period of time (5:12). The reference to Timothy's release from imprisonment (13:23) dates the book in his lifetime. The imprisonment of Christians seems to have been a well-known fact of life (10:34; 13:3). This was true after Nero launched an empire-wide persecution in A.D. 64. All of these factors when taken together seem to point to a writing date near A.D. 68-69.

Genre: The writer/speaker describes his work as “a word of exhortation” (13:22). He alternates exposition with exhortation. The expositional material serves the exhortative purpose of the whole book. Hebrews is much more a sermon than a typical letter, although it is also a letter. It does not begin as letters normally do. There is no identification of author or addressees, and no opening salutation. It is more typical of speech than of writing. Indications of this are the references to speaking and hearing (2:5; 5:11; 8:1; 9:5; 11:32). It ends as a letter, with personal information, greetings, a doxology, and a benediction. We could call Hebrews a written sermon sent to a Christian community facing a serious issue of defection from Christ to exhort them to remain faithful to Christ that they might share in His glorious reign in the world to come.

1. I’m using bird’s eye view and worm’s eye view as roughly equivalent to the terms structure and texture in rhetorical criticism. Structure refers to the higher levels of the work, those of sequences and scenes. Texture refers to the lower levels of the work, those of words, phrases, and sentences. The boundary between structure and texture is fluid and can be found on the levels of sentences and sequences. The concept of texture begins to lose its value at levels higher than the sentence, but structure can descend to the lowest levels. Key words can be of structural importance. See Martin Kessler, “An Introduction to Rhetorical Criticism of the Bible: Prolegomena,” *Semitics* 7 (1980): 1-27; and J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: King David* (Assen: The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1981), 15-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Three helpful resources from a free grace perspective are the commentary on Hebrews by Zane C. Hodges in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, the class notes on Hebrews by Dr. J. Paul Tanner that can be found online at <http://paultanner.org/>, and the comments on the controversial passages of Hebrews by Joseph C. Dillow in *The Reign of the Servant Kings*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. I am indebted to Allen P. Ross, one of my Old Testament professors at DTS, for this expositional approach to presenting a book of the Bible. He summarizes the process in an online article “Exegetical Exposition” that can be found at <http://www.christianleadershipcenter.org/616/exegexposition.htm>. His commentary on the book of Genesis, *Creation & Blessing*, illustrates the approach. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Zane Hodges presents a comparable outline for Hebrews in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. A lot has been published on the structure of Hebrews. See Barry C. Joslin, “Can Hebrews be (sic) Structured? An Assessment of Eight Approaches” *Currents in Biblical Research* (2007; 6:99). The online version of the article can be found at http:cbi.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/6/1/99. Wolfgang Nauck and George H. Guthrie are among those who see a tripartite division in the body of the discourse. See the online article by Guthrie “The Structure of Hebrews Revisited” at www.hebrews.unibas.ch/documents/2006Guthrie.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Herbert W. Bateman IV has a helpful discussion of these warning passages: “Introducing the Warning Passages in Hebrews: A Contextual Orientation,” *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews* (Kregel, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Guthrie observes that the exhortatory material draws force from the expositional material. The exhortatory material includes encouragement, warnings, promises, positive and negative examples, and centers on the vital importance of hearing and responding to the revelation of God through Christ. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Guthrie observes, “In some ways, the most arresting use of exhortation is in the *digressio* beginning at 5:11 and extending to 6:20. Digressions were used in ancient oratory, not to distract from the main topic at hand, but rather, strategically, to refresh the hearer in the midst of a logically developing argument and to rivet the attention with supportive but varied material . . . by the time he [the author of Hebrews] returns to the topic of Melchizedek, anticipated in 6:13-20, and reactivated as a primary topic of discussion in 7:1-10, the hearers’ ears are straining to hear this more advanced teaching alluded to in 5:11.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Guthrie suggests the following concerning the central purpose of Hebrews: “The purpose of the book of Hebrews is to exhort the hearers to endure in their pursuit of the promised reward, in obedience to the word of God, and especially on the basis of their new covenant relationship with the Son.” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)