

# The Epistle to the Hebrews

Lesson # 51 April 23, 2023

Benediction and Final Greetings

Hebrews 13:20-25

## Introduction

This is a bittersweet moment in our study of and journey through the book of Hebrews. For me, this is the culmination of a series of Sunday School lessons that I began to teach on Sunday, Sept. 13, 2015. We have run a course of 6 months per year units, so this series has taken us about 48 months to arrive at this point, but my intense study of Hebrews began about 6 -7 months prior to teaching the first lesson, then I have used the 6 month gaps between sessions to write the notes and type them up.

But as we now approach the end of the fascinating epistle/sermon, we still have a few choice facts and intriguing hints that will help us tie some loose ends together about the author, his relationship to those he wrote this to, where he wrote from, and the destination of the letter ( some of these were discussed briefly in lesson # 1 ). This section – this epilogue - is not devoid of some theological doctrinal information, especially in vv. 20-21. Verses 22-25 are really about Timothy's release and the author's potential visit and greetings. Some theologians argue that this epilogue was tacked on by a different author, and that it does not fit the rest of the book. However, those who think this are in the minority. Most are convinced, as I am, that this is the perfect ending for Hebrews as the Holy Spirit intended, written by one author from beginning to end.

## Benediction<sup>1</sup>

vv. 20-21

A benediction ( which means, "good word" ) is a prayer to God on behalf of the readers ( or hearers ) and is a feature found in virtually every other NT epistle, near the end of each one. This one here is a bit longer than many, and is a bit more involved. The purpose of it is direct and plain – it is a letter of exhortation ( cf. v. 22 ) that the author's recipients would stand firm in the faith and live in ways that please God.

Richard Phillips points out something that is obvious to us as believers, but is still worth considering;

"There is something important here for us to notice. The writer has hopes for how the readers will respond, for how they will live in their difficult setting, but ultimately, it is not to them that he appeals, but to God himself. While we have the responsibility and moral agency, we lack the power to carry out what God commands. Our writer has exhorted these Christians frequently, but

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<sup>1</sup> Or "Invocation" per Philip Hughes, Hebrews, p. 588

ultimately he must appeal to God for the good things needed for doing his will."<sup>2</sup> ( emphasis is mine )

V. 20 states, *"Now may the God of peace.."*. This is really saying that it is God who gives peace, and this is a phrase found in a lot of Paul's writings – Romans 15:33; 16:20; Phil. 4:9; I Thess. 5:23, and in John's – cf. John 20:19,21,26. The author wants the readers to be reminded that God grants peace to believers. This is especially something this audience needed because they were going through many disturbing things in their lives. This idea of a God of peace is unique to Christianity, for example, as Al Mohler points out;

"In the Muslim system of thought, God's peace is something one hopes for but cannot presume upon. The reason for this is simple: Christ is missing from their theology. If it were up to us to achieve peace with God, we would always remain eternal enemies with him. Instead, we thank God that Christ has achieved that peace for us. Thus it is a wonderful thing to be able to say, "the God of peace."<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, the AH says that this God who gives peace *"brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus."* Schreiner comments;

"The author also emphasizes the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection, contrary to the opinion of some scholars, plays a major role in Hebrews. Jesus cried out to God and was saved from death by being raised from the dead ( 5:7 ). Jesus enters the heavenly sanctuary as the resurrected and exalted Lord ( 6:20 ). He is a Melchizedekian priest who abides as a priest forever by virtue of his resurrection ( Ps. 110:4; Heb. 7:3 ). What sets Jesus apart as a priest is that "he lives" ( 7:23-25 ), for he has "an indestructible life" ( 7:16 ). He isn't like the Levitical priests, who were hindered by death, but He "remains forever" and "always lives" ( 7:23-25 ). Jesus is the resurrected Lord, sitting at God's right hand ( 1:3,13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2 ). The resurrection of Jesus signifies his superiority to all Levitical priests."<sup>4</sup>

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the key to the superior value of the Christian faith. Without it, Jesus becomes someone to honour because of His goodness, and perhaps for His exemplary life or His selflessness and sinlessness, but we remain with our sins unforgiven! Philip Hughes makes a great point here;

"The price of our peace was the blood of Jesus, that is, the sacrifice of the incarnate Son on the cross. The proof of the acceptance of this sacrifice on our behalf is his resurrection from the grave and his exaltation to the right hand of the majesty on high ( Heb. 1:3; 12:2 ); whereby he is declared to be Lord of all ( Phil 2:8-10 ). Had he not shed his blood for us he could not be our Savior. Had he not been brought again from the dead he could be neither Savior or Lord. His dying would have been just one more in the long sequence of sacrifices which cannot take away sins ( Heb. 10:11f ). Death would have had the final word. But the resurrection manifested his glory as the prince of life and conqueror of death and confirmed that his blood is the seal of a covenant

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Phillips, Hebrews, p. 622-623

<sup>3</sup> Albert Mohler, Exalting Jesus in Hebrews, Holman, 2017, p. 234

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Schreiner, Hebrews, p. 428

that is eternal and that by this single offering of himself “*he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified*” ( Heb. 10:14 ).”<sup>5</sup>

In v. 20, Jesus is also called “*the Great Shepherd of the sheep*.” Of course, when we read this, we are drawn back to John 10 and the declaration of Jesus Christ as “the Good Shepherd, the One who leads “His sheep”, the One whose voice they hear when he calls them out of the sheep-fold. Let’s read John 10:1-18 & 24-32. This revelation about Jesus as the great Shepherd is a fulfillment of Ezekiel 34:22-24 ( see also Zech. 10:3 ). This prophecy connects Jesus to David, as in v. 23 here, He is called “*my Servant David*,” and to the concept of a shepherd who will love and care for His flock, in contrast to Ezek. 34:1-10. Prophetically, as we see in John 10, these false shepherds of Jesus day were the Pharisees, priests and scribes of Israel, who, in John 9 & 10 exhibit their hatred of the masses of the people they were supposed to serve. Note also Ezek. 34:11-16. Jesus’ death at the hands of Israel’s leaders was also prophesied in Zechariah 13:7, and that verse is used by Matthew 26:31 ( Par Mark 14:27 ), also as a prophecy of the disciples leaving Him alone with His captors in Gethsemane. But note, “*Awake O sword against My Shepherd*.” The image of Messiah as Shepherd is not a minor theme in the Bible. ( Moses and David were both shepherds ). Note one last reference – I Pet. 2:22-25.

Lastly, in v. 20, the author connects all this to a major theme in Hebrews – the blood of Jesus Christ, shed on our behalf. Here, he calls it “*the blood of the eternal covenant*.” Some, especially reformed believers, think this phrase refers to a covenant between God the Father and Jesus, the second Person of the Trinity – a covenant that covered the entire plan of redemption from before the foundation of the world until its end. It is possible that verses like Eph. 1:11 & I Pet. 1:19-20 ( as well as Acts 2:22-4; 4:27-28 ) may be a strong argument for this position, but, in light of the very strong argument regarding the New Covenant in Hebrews, which replaced the Old Covenant ( Mosaic ), I lean more towards this being the New Covenant here.

This part of v. 20 is likely also an allusion to Zech. 9:16. Schreiner points out that this is about the New Covenant, when he says

“The author revisits a major theme in the letter, for the death of Jesus, the blood of Jesus, inaugurates the new covenant and effectively and final provides forgiveness of sins so that believers enter God’s presence boldly ( 9:12; 10:19 ). The blood of animals could not cleanse from sins in contrast to the blood of Jesus ( 9:14 ). Furthermore, the contrast between the new and old covenant permeates Hebrews. Jesus inaugurates a new and better covenant ( 8:1-13; 10:15-18 ). He guarantees a “better covenant” ( 7:22; cf. 8:6 ), and it is characterized by full and final forgiveness of sins ( 10:18 ). Believers enjoy an “eternal salvation ( 5:9 ), “eternal redemption” ( 9:12 ), and an “eternal inheritance” ( 9:15 ) secured “through the eternal Spirit” ( 9:14 ) because Jesus has instituted through his blood “an eternal covenant” ( 13:20 ).”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Philip Hughes, Hebrews, p. 589

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Schreiner, Hebrews, p. 429

Al Mohler concurs;

“Even in this prayer, the author doesn’t miss another opportunity to emphasize the superiority of the new eternal covenant God has made with his people. Jesus is the great Shepherd of the sheep precisely because he shed his blood on their behalf. And that blood establishes this eternal covenant with God. There is no need for another covenant to come. This is the “everlasting” covenant, the purpose for which God made the world: to demonstrate his glory in the salvation of sinners by the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>7</sup>

And Richard Phillips points out by citing 2 older commentaries why the New Covenant was necessary;

“The first statement that the blood of Christ makes is God’s holy judgment on our sin. It is only, really, when we see the blood of the Son of God spilled upon the earth that we comprehend anything of the sinfulness of sin. The Puritan Jeremy Burroughs wrote: “From hence we see what is the evil of sin. How great it is that has made such a breach between God and my soul that only such a way and such a means must take away my sin. I must either have lain under the burden of my sin eternally, or Jesus Christ, who is God and man, must suffer so much for it.” J.C. Ryle adds, “Terribly black must that guilt be for which nothing but the blood of the Son of God could make satisfaction. Heavy must that weight of human sin be for which made Jesus groan and sweat drops of blood in agony at Gethsemane and cry at Golgotha, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” ( Matt. 27:46 ).”<sup>8</sup>

The book of Hebrews is not shy to talk about Jesus’ blood, as a great portion of its pages have to do with the unique saving efficacy of His shed blood in His role as our sin-bearer/substitute. It is with the blood of Christ that God makes His final statement to the world – a message we must hear if we are to be saved. – Note Heb. 1:1-4.

While most would prefer some statement from God, some edict from “*our God of Love*” that our sin is OK, all is forgiven, so we can simply live your lives and then spend eternity in heaven; but God’s holiness makes such a thought a complete farce. Demanding a full accounting of sin’s debt and offense to God, in the Person of the incarnated Jesus Christ, who came into the world, experienced all we experience – even death itself – he remained sinless, and defeated Satan, and conquered sin and death on our behalf. God’s holiness was satisfied ( the resurrection proves that ) and those who believe and honour God by that belief are saved from His wrath by the imputation of Christ’s righteousness by grace through faith ( 2 Cor. 5:21 ). This is, in part what Romans 1:18-31 is saying about those who reject His Great salvation, and note Heb. 2:17-18.

Then, in v. 21, still part of the sentence begun in v. 20, the AH continues to pray “*that this God of peace will equip you with everything good [so] that you may do his will.*”

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<sup>7</sup> Mohler, Hebrews, p. 234

<sup>8</sup> Phillips, Hebrews, p. 628

Because of what he has written in v. 20 and the implications of that, and since this Jesus now reigns as risen Lord and as our High Priest, the readers can confidently know that the prayer here will be answered. His main thought, unexpressed in so many words, is for their perseverance.

They need to be equipped by God Himself to perform His will and do what he commands. It is God who deserves all the glory and praise for every victory they attain. He is the “One working in us that which is pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ...”

Philip Hughes reminds us of a couple of passages which parallel what the A.H. is saying here:

“What could be more sublimely satisfying than humanity so dignified as to be united with the will and work of God? Accordingly, Paul urges the Philippians to “work out,” that is, to give practical expression to the salvation that is theirs, but to do so with the assurance that “God is at work in them, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” ( Phil. 2:12-13 ); and he reminds the Ephesians that “we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” ( Eph. 2:10 ). The Christian’s service of God, therefore, is not passive submission but willing, joyful, and cooperative obedience. Thus in Christ the lifeline which connects the creature to the Creator and his eternal purposes is restored.”<sup>9</sup>

This lines up with what the author is saying in 13:15-17. Verse 21 ends with the idea that God will equip us to do what we need to do, and how He will work in us to accomplish these things is “through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever. Amen.” In 13:15, praise was to be given to God through Jesus Christ, and here in v. 21, this glory is given to Jesus Christ. Far from stealing praise from God, we, in fact glorify Him when we worship Jesus Christ in the manner He has prescribed. He is the Mediator and High Priest whom God has appointed for us to go to – to pray in His name, to honour and glorify Him with our lives. God gives Him the title, Lord, because of His unique ministry of substitution and sin-bearing ( Phil. 2:5-11 ), and He now sits at God’s right hand, ensuring our full salvation ( Heb. 7:25-27 ). When Jesus says, in John 14:6, “*I am the way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me,*” He is saying that all of our salvation and worship are from Him, through Him and to Him, and all of the glory goes to the Father.” ( Rom. 11:36 ).

## The Author Hopes to Visit Them

vv. 22-23

“I appeal to you” ( or – NASB – “I urge you” – v. 22 ) is a strong term ( cf. Rom. 12:1 ) and signifies the critical importance of carrying out what the AH has instructed in this letter. His phrases, “*my word of exhortation*” and “*I have written to you briefly*” designate the letter as quite likely a sermon – an urgent word of warning and admonition to the readers.<sup>10</sup> His main point has been that they must hold fast and

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<sup>9</sup> Hughes, Hebrews, p. 591

<sup>10</sup> Schreiner, p. 430

persevere, resist the temptation to walk away from what they have received from Christ, and to continue to trust Him for all the reasons and contrasts between the OC and NC he has given to them.

Now, in v. 23, an interesting connection is made between the author and one we've come to know through Paul's letters and the book of Acts – Timothy. They are acquainted, and it does not appear to be just a casual acquaintance based on what this says here. They expect to be travelling companions soon to visit the readers. Verses 23-24 are rich in clues ( but unsatisfying ) as to the identification of the unnamed author. I have been working on an excursus lesson to attempt to identify the author, which I will not be delivering to the class. In that, I argue that the author of Hebrews is Luke, the same Luke that wrote the Gospel of Luke, and Acts, and who was Paul's travelling companion for quite awhile. His connection to Timothy through his friendship with Paul is easy to surmise.

He mentions that *"Timothy has been released"* – possibly implying from prison somewhere, although the NT never fills us in about any time when Timothy was imprisoned, but it could have occurred after Paul's death, which would have been almost concurrent with the writing of Hebrews. He calls him *"our brother Timothy"*, which conveys the distinct possibility that the recipients of this letter knew him closely as well. The ESV says *"you should know"* this, but the NET better translates it, *"I have news for you."* Apparently, he was imprisoned ( presumably for his faith ) and released but was not in the same location as the author, because the author says, *"with whom [ Timothy ] I will come and see you if he comes soon."* If and when he does, they will both come to visit the readers of this letter where they are.

## Greetings

## vv. 24-25

David Allen sees 6 clues regarding the background of the letter in these 6 final verses;

1. The author and readers are associated with Timothy since he is referred to as "our brother."
2. Both the author and Timothy are away from the readers but plan to travel to see them shortly.
3. Timothy has apparently been imprisoned, or at least detained for some reason, and released.
4. The author was apparently in the same locale as Timothy, but apparently was not himself imprisoned.
5. The recipients are exhorted to greet their leaders, implying a location of considerable population – enough to have a church with multiple leaders. This may indicate that the writer was not addressing an entire church, but rather a smaller group within the church.
6. Whether the author is writing from Italy or not, he sends greetings from Italian Christians who are with him.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> David L. Allen, *Lukan Authorship of Hebrews*, B & H Publishing, 2010, p. 342

Verse 24 – David Allen has said that ( in his 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> points above ) ‘the leaders’ are singled out for greetings – “*All the leaders.*” These would be leaders that the author referred to in Heb. 13:17, the ones that the readers were to obey and be subject to. The greeting is also directed to “*all the saints*” – IOW – all the Christians who were in their circle of congregants or even those believers they knew in the vicinity. This further implies that the author was well known to all of them in this area, wherever it was.

What is obvious is that, as fellow believers, wherever they are and wherever the author is writing from, they are united in a bond of love. The sentence, “*Those from Italy greet you.*” is too ambiguous to identify either location. It is possible that he is in Rome and the people who send greetings are also with him there, which seems to be the most likely conclusion apart from more evidence, which we are unlikely to come across.

But where are the recipients? Schreiner believes they may be in Egypt or Palestine, but he cannot be certain. It could be that they are somewhere in Greece or ancient Turkey. If Timothy was imprisoned, it would likely have been somewhere near Ephesus.

The final sentence ( v. 25 ), “*Grace be with all of you*” is a quite concise ‘sign-off.’ It is identical to Paul’s words in Titus 3:15. The brevity of it likely means that these people were close friends, as many of Paul’s longer sign-offs include references to Jesus Christ or other complexities and this one does not. ( I use Paul as an example here, not because I think Paul may have written this, but by far he has more sign-offs recorded in the NT than anyone else ).

Richard Phillips comments on this verse;

“The one thing absolutely essential is to hold fast to Jesus Christ. These early Christians were seeing their world change right before their eyes, just as we do. Their security, their peace, and their prosperity in the world were falling away in the face of sin and death. Meanwhile, they were commanded to live the kinds of lives they could hardly imagine: doing everything according to God’s will, and pleasing him in all things. No wonder the author of Hebrews concludes, “Grace be with you all” ( v. 25 ), because great and stable power to which the Christian can hold, firm and secure, an anchor within the veil – the grace of almighty God. And it is from Christ’s blood that grace is made available to us. It is through his present ministry that we find grace for the trials of the day. It is to him who is enthroned at the right hand of the Majesty on high that we offer all the fruits of this grace.”<sup>12</sup>

If Hebrews is a sermon, or even if it is simply a theological epistle, it is not abstractly or oddly different from other NT letters. A pastoral issue precipitated it, and we must receive it that way – to consider the whole message as if it were sent to us ( in a sense, it has been ) and live accordingly.

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<sup>12</sup> Phillips, Hebrews, p. 631

I am going to close out this lesson and our main study of Hebrews with this quote from Leon Morris, and my own epilogue. I had selected this quote to end the study of the book many months before I got to the end of my notes.

“The writer of this epistle has an individual point of view. No other NT writer thought of interpreting the work of Christ for man through the symbolism of Jewish ritual. This approach enables him to bring out certain truths about the atonement which we do not see quite as readily elsewhere. But it is essentially the same doctrine that we have seen elsewhere. For this writer as for all the others, the problem is posed by the holiness of God and the sin of man. For him as for them, our hope is solely in Christ, who alone can deal with our sins. In that situation the individual point of view of this epistle is that we have been saved by the mediatorial work of a great high priest.”<sup>13</sup>

## My Epilogue

Here, I decided to add my own comments about this lengthy journey through this incredible epistle. When I was near the end of teaching through the Book of James, in early 2015, I was considering teaching through either Acts or Hebrews. Acts, of course, at 28 chapters would have been a daunting job, probably taking about 10 years at 6 months per year, so I chose Hebrews because I have always been intrigued by it, because it is so different from every other NT book, and because it alludes to or quotes from the OT so often. I enjoyed Pastor Scott’s preaching it back in 2006-2008.

As I began to study Hebrews, I was struck almost immediately by a number of things about it: 1) It immediately glorified Christ in chapters 1 and 2; 2) The first of five warning passages in chapter 2:1-4 was a challenge; 3) In chapters 2 & 3, I encountered something that staggered my thinking about the Person of Christ ( cf. lessons # 8 and 8A ) – he really was ( and is ) 100% God and 100% man. Too often, authors of theology books tend to stress His deity at the expense of His humanity. Probably for the first time in my life, the humanity of Christ grabbed my mind and I had to study it out and teach it ( 9/11/16 – 10/30/16 ) – over 6 weeks. Those 2 lessons changed my thinking about Jesus Christ for good. I had similar comments from a few other people in the class; 4) When I reached Heb. 7:22 and chapter 8 and 9, especially 8:8-13, I encountered Jeremiah 31:31-34 cited almost verbatim by the AH – the New Covenant. This was in 2018, and again, I was taken captive by the biblical importance of the New Covenant ( cf. Lessons # 20-27 ). In the back of my mind, I began to develop an idea for a sermon series on the New Covenant, the first sermon of which I preached here in October, 2022 on Jeremiah 31:31-32. The next opportunity I have to preach, it will be the 4<sup>th</sup> sermon of the series out of a potential for 9 sermons total.

One of the most prominent features of Hebrews is of course, the 5 well-known and intensely debated warning passages:

- Hebrews 2:1-4 ( Lesson # 5 )
- Hebrews 3:12-4:13 ( Lessons # 10-11 )

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<sup>13</sup> Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, Eerdmans, 1965/1999, p. 308

- Hebrews 5:11-6:12 ( the most famous one ) ( Lessons # 14-15 )
- Hebrews 10:26-39 ( Lesson # 30 )
- Hebrews 12:25-29 ( Lesson # 47 )

The reason for the intense debate centers around the fact that Scripture is very clear that once you are saved, you cannot lose your salvation ( cf. John 10:7-32; Romans 8:28ff and more ). Yet, the warning passages seem to say that your disobedient actions after being saved can cause you to lose your salvation. I taught that you cannot lose your salvation and gave you the arguments to support that. I also presented alternative positions ( that argue you can lose your salvation ) so you could see other arguments as well. These warning passages, written to Jewish converts to Christ, were written so that they would realize that to refute belief in Christ and go back to “safe” Judaism, was to commit apostasy, which would manifest that you were never saved in the first place.

Of course, who is not struck by the “great cloud of witnesses” found in Hebrews 11 – the great Hallmark of faith.” ( Lessons # 31-42 ), which was interrupted by Covid-19 in 2021?

Chapter 11 covers a lot of ground, mostly talking about OT saints and their God-given faith from the book of Genesis ( Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph; and Exodus – Moses; Joshua – Rahab; Judges – Barak, Samson, Jephthah; Samuel & Kings – David and Samuel – all by name and then general comments of unnamed people who demonstrated their love for and devotion to and trust in God. The list is summarized in vv. 39-40, but of critical importance are vv. 1-3 and 6 which tell us what faith consists of.

We began chapter 12 ( lesson # 43 ) in May 2022, and obviously, today we are wrapping it all up. In chapter 12, a great theological chapter, we see Christ’s reason for His incarnation and crucifixion in vv. 1-2, and how we can apply that truth. Then follows a treatise on God’s use of discipline in the lives of believers – vv. 3-17; and the final vv. 18-29 contain the 5<sup>th</sup> of 5 warning passages, and give us a glimpse of heaven and one last comparison between the Old and New Covenants.

Now, we have gone through chapter 13 and have arrived at the end of our, I hope, very helpful and informative journey through this fascinating book of Hebrews.

It is my hope and plan ( DV ) to start to present my lesson on Heb. 12:28; Rev. 20:11; 21:1; and II Pet. 3:10-13 next time we meet for this class. This is as a result of a discussion we had in this class back in February. Once I have completed that lesson, the class will revert back to Ken Baird and his teaching on I Peter. I look forward to that.

As for me, I am undecided what I will do from this point going forward. I still have my health, thank God, but I realize to take on another book length Sunday School teaching project could be foolhardy. I may just work on fill-in lessons and study for

leading on Wednesday evenings, or start a Sunday School topical study for next spring when Ken has completed his 6 month stint. I am waiting on God's direction.

Thank you to everyone who has been willing to be here every week and to participate in the class for so many years. I love all of my brothers and sisters.

It has been my distinct privilege to teach this book to you, and to myself. I must say, as every SS teacher or Pastor will tell you, I got much more out of this study than I could ever convey to you. As you read and study the Word, alongside numerous commentaries and theology books to present lessons, there is so much that has to be left aside because of time constraints. I have tried to edit and reduce the voluminous information in order to give you the condensed and most important facts and advice for lives that honour and glorify our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ, by absorbing it and applying it to our lives.

All praise and glory goes to Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour for His providence in bringing us through this lengthy but important study. He alone is worthy – Revelation 5:1-14.

Thanks for your presence and patience.

Mike Daugharty