

HEBREWS: THE HIGH PRIESTHOOD OF JESUS CHRIST

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Contents

Hebrews: The High Priesthood of Jesus Christ, chapters 1-7

1. The Epistle To The Hebrews
2. Jesus Christ: God's Supreme Revelation
3. Jesus: Man Triumphant
4. Finding God's Rest In Christ
5. Seize Your Destiny!
6. The Melchizedek Priesthood
7. The New Covenant
8. The True Sanctuary
9. The Effective Sacrifice
10. The Sure Promises

11. The Life Of Faith

12. Discipline For Our Destiny

13. Living The New Covenant In Love

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

In an unidentified city with an established Jewish community, a group of immature Hebrew believers in Jesus the Messiah were under tremendous pressure to renounce their faith and return to their religious and cultural roots in Judaism.

Think of the appeal. The law and the prophets. The fathers. The priesthood of Levi and the high priesthood of Aaron. The temple in Jerusalem. The covenants. The sacrifices. The exciting and meaningful feasts. The long history. The promises. The homeland. The nation. The kingdom.

In contrast, what did the followers of Jesus of Nazareth have to offer? No impressive buildings. No dramatic feasts. No pompous priesthood. No homeland. Ostracism by family, friends, and community. Increasing hostility by the Roman authority.

Some had already caved, making their renunciation of Jesus final and permanent (6:4-6), even equating His precious blood with the blood of those animals most abhorred by Jews (10:29).

These believers had been ridiculed and persecuted, but none had yet been killed (12:4). Although immature in their faith (5:12), as a whole they were remaining true. They had good spiritual leadership and were urged to follow them and their example (13:7, 17).

The epistle was written some time before the Roman armies under Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD. The Jewish polity and Mosaic system of worship were still intact, but fading fast and about to disappear (8:13).

An unknown person with obvious apostolic authority and inspired by the Holy Spirit addressed this remarkable letter to these Hebrew believers. Who it was we do not know for sure. The apostle Paul has always been a leading possibility. Tertullian (ca. A.D. 155-222) said that Barnabas was the author. Conjectures include Apollos and Luke. We must agree with Origen (ca. A.D. 185-254), "Who wrote the epistle God only knows certainly" (quoted by Eusebius). Whoever he was, he wrote from Italy (13:24).

The author was personally acquainted with these Hebrew believers. They had shown compassion on him in his bonds (10:34). Now he asks for their prayers that he will be restored to them (13:18), and tells them that he will come to them with Timothy if Timothy comes soon (13:23).

Although at times the author uses a rabbinic style (after all, he is addressing Hebrews), he does not derive the substance of his message from rabbinism or from Philo. The content is more than mere human genius could have produced. The imprint of the Holy Spirit is all over the epistle.

The Epistle to the Hebrews has a very specific focus. It is a magnificent portrait of Jesus Christ as our Savior and High Priest, demonstrating both His humanity and His deity. As the Son of God, Jesus stands supreme and transcendent over creation, over angels, over Moses and Aaron.

In Hebrews we see clearly the total superiority of Jesus Christ to the entire Levitical system of the Old Covenant. The key word of the epistle is "better"--better not in a somewhat comparative sense, but as a complete and permanent contrast. The old was a shadow; the new is the substance. The old was temporary; the new is permanent.

In Jesus Christ we have a totally and permanently superior covenant, sacrifice, sanctuary, promises, hope, priesthood, resurrection, a heavenly substance and a heavenly country. And it is for all who truly believe on Jesus Christ, both Jews and Gentiles.

In chapter 1 and the first part of chapter 2, Jesus is declared to be the supreme message of God, beyond what God spoke through the prophets. By His nature and His name He is far above all the angels, who are commanded to worship Him as God.

So if the Law of Moses, that was given by angels, was of divine authority with built-in penalties for those who transgressed it, how much greater is God's supreme message of salvation in Jesus Christ and how much greater is the guilt of those who neglect it.

In the remainder of chapter 2 we see Jesus fully taking on our humanity and triumphing over sin and death for us. The joining of His eternal deity and victorious humanity makes Him our perfect High Priest. He is both God and man, thus our Mediator between God and us.

In chapters 3 and 4 we are offered God's rest in Christ. Look at Christ carefully. Moses was faithful in God's house (Israel). Jesus is faithful as a Son over His own house (the Church). As believers in the Son, we must not make the same fatal mistake Israel made, described in Psalm 95:7-11. They failed to enter into Canaan rest because of unbelief. We must not fail to enter into (and remain in) God's heavenly rest in the gospel by faith.

In chapters 5 and 6 Christ's high priesthood is emphasized. The Melchizedek priesthood of Jesus Christ is far superior to the priesthood of Aaron and the Levites. For that reason continued spiritual immaturity in believers is inexcusable. We must go on, not go back. The choice before these Hebrew believers was either to crucify Christ afresh or to seize the glorious and eternal hope set before them.

Chapter 7 focuses on Christ's superior and effective priesthood on our behalf. The priesthood has now been changed from the order of Aaron to the order of Melchizedek. Christ alone occupies the Melchizedek priesthood. Because the priesthood changed, so did the law. The "better" hope came by the priesthood and sacrifice of the Son.

Chapter 8 describes five features of Christ's absolute superiority over the old Levitical system. He is the Mediator of the New Covenant. Where the Old Covenant failed because of the failure

of the people, the New Covenant is a complete success. Because Jesus Christ is the Mediator of the New Covenant, only those who know God in a personal relationship through Jesus Christ are in the New Covenant. They are His people; His laws are written in their minds and upon their hearts. They are forgiven and justified.

In chapter 9 and part of chapter 10, two features of the New Covenant are emphasized: the true sanctuary and the effective sacrifice.

The last part of chapter 10 urges the readers to be diligent in their faith in view of God's faithful promises. Even the Old Testament worthies lived by faith and overcame by faith. Chapter 11 is their Hall Of Fame. Chapter 12 continues by saying that faith is a race--not a short dash or sprint but a long distance run. Keep your eyes on Jesus. Stay the course. Follow the discipline and be faithful to it. Be holy. We are headed for a kingdom that cannot be shaken or moved.

In chapter 13 several solid principles and practical instructions are brought together to complete this most magnificent portion of God's inspired word.

Before we explore the Epistle To The Hebrews in detail, we step back and see in it a field of "let us." Here are some of the "heads" of "let us."

Let us fear unbelief (4:1);

Let us labor (be diligent) (4:11);

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith (4:14; 10:23);

Let us come boldly to the throne of grace (4:16);

Let us go on to maturity in Christ (6:1);

Let us draw near to God into the Holy of Holies (10:22);

Let us consider one another to encourage one another (10:24);

Let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together (10:25 NIV);

Let us lay aside every weight and sin, and run the race (12:1);

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus (12:2 NIV);

Let us have grace (be thankful--NIV) 12:28;

Let us take up His cross and go forth to Him, bearing His reproach (13:13);

Let us offer the sacrifice of praise continually (13:15).

The Epistle To The Hebrews is full of information, full of inspiration, and also full of obligation. Let us be doers of the word and not hearers only (James 1:22).

2

JESUS CHRIST: GOD'S SUPREME REVELATION

Hebrews 1:1 - 2:4

Hebrews 1:1-3. God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, . . . (New King James Version).

Immediately the past and the present are contrasted. In the past God spoke to the Hebrew fathers by the prophets. Now He has spoken to us by "Son"--not any "son," but the one and only Son, the Second Person of the eternal Trinity.

Jesus is the ultimate and final "speech" of God. He is the Word made flesh. The Messenger is the Message. This act of God in Jesus Christ ushered in the "last days."

Who is this Son?

He is the full radiance of the very glory of God. God has projected His own glory to us in Jesus Christ. Jehovah will not give His glory to another (Isaiah 42:8). This means that Jesus Christ is "very God of very God," Jehovah of Jehovah. Jesus is and must be Jehovah in the flesh--Jehovah incarnate. In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Colossians 2:9). He has *the* name that is above every name (Philippians 2:9).

Jesus Christ is also the "express image" of God's Person. The Epistle To The Hebrews was written before the invention of photography. So now we understand that Jesus is the living photograph of God. Jesus Himself said to Philip, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

Jesus Christ, now restored to His pre-incarnate glory, "upholds all things by the word of His power." As the Second Person of the eternal Godhead, He participated in the very act of creation, mediating the word of the Father, which was then carried out by The Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:2).

Christ is not only the creator of the universe but also its sustainer, for "by Him all things hold together" (see Colossians 1:15-17).

But, look! The great Creator took upon Himself our humanity in order to become our Savior, the sacrificed Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! Then having accomplished that great plan of redemption once-for-all, He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on High. He humbled Himself and became obedient to the death of the cross. For that reason God has highly exalted Him (see also Ephesians 1:20-23).

Jesus Christ rejoined The Father, reassumed His rightful place and prerogatives as co-equal with The Father, but now with the new and everlasting position--our Mediator and High Priest!

Hebrews 1:4-14. having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He ever say:

"You are My Son,

Today I have begotten you"?

And again:

"I will be to Him a Father,

And He shall be to Me a Son"?

But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says:

"Let all the angels of God

worship Him."

And of the angels He says:

"Who makes His angels spirits

And His ministers a flame of fire."

But to the Son He says:

"Your throne, O God,

is forever and ever;

*A scepter of righteousness is the
scepter of Your kingdom.*

*You have loved righteousness and
hated lawlessness;*

Therefore God, Your God,

has anointed You

*With the oil of gladness more than
Your companions."*

And:

*"You, Lord, in the beginning laid
the foundation of the earth,*

*And the heavens are the work
of Your hands;*

They will perish, but You remain;

*And they will all grow old
like a garment;*

*Like a cloak You will fold
them up,*

And they will be changed.

But You are the same,

And Your years will not fail."

But to which of the angels has He ever said:

"Sit at My right hand,

Till I make Your enemies

Your footstool?" (New King James Version).

Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?

This passage declares with extensive documentation from The Scriptures that Jesus Christ is absolutely and incomparably higher than the angels in nature, position, function, and power. He became human (lower than the angels) for the purpose of death, but He is now restored to His full glory, glorified with the Father with the glory that He had with the Father before the world began (see John 17:5).

Jesus is not an angel, or even an archangel. He is superior to the angels not only in degree but also in kind. He is qualitatively superior, not merely quantitatively. They are created; He is their Creator.

Being the Son, Jesus possesses an inheritance that the angels are not entitled to. That includes the uniquely superior name: SON. This was accomplished by the one-time-only act of being begotten by The Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary. He who was the Son by eternal designation and purpose became so in fact and flesh. And so He will ever be. No angel can come anywhere near this position. To support this the writer of the epistle quotes verse 7 of the great messianic Second Psalm. He draws also from the messianic meanings and implications of 2 Samuel 7:14, 1 Chronicles 17:13, and Psalm 89:26.

Also, all the angels are commanded to worship Jesus Christ. That would not and could not be so if He were only another angel or even the highest of archangels. All creation is obligated and commanded to worship only the Creator. No worship is to be given to any created being--ever.

In verse 6 the writer echoes the Septuagint reading of Deuteronomy 32:43 and also Psalm 97:7.

In verse 6 Jesus is called the "firstborn." The Greek word is prototokos. This certainly does not mean that Christ is a created being. He is eternally pre-existent. In Colossians 1:15 it means that the eternally pre-existent Christ was the mediator in the creating of all things (the "source" of the creation--Revelation 3:14), and for that reason He stands first of (above) all things. In Colossians 1:18 and Revelation 1:5 it refers to His resurrection. Some believe that in Hebrews 1:6 it refers to His second coming (depending on where one places the word "again"). It seems, however, that the reference is to His incarnation--His coming in the flesh to be our sacrifice and Savior. In that case it would refer to His virgin birth. The eternal Son by designation and position became so in fact and flesh in time/space history (see Hebrews 10:5). So He will ever be.

The angels are only created spirit beings, fiery servants of God and His people, as referenced from Psalm 104:4.

The powerful and authoritative declarations of the Father to the Son are quoted from Psalm 45:6, 7 and Psalm 102:25-27. The Father addresses Jesus Christ as God and affirms that He is eternal and immutable (unchanging). He is anointed as King above all created beings associated with Him.

In Psalm 110:1 David refers to the Messiah as Lord and states that Jehovah said to Him (Messiah), "Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool" (KJV). He never said this to any angel, only to Jesus. And that is just where our Lord and Savior is now seated--the right hand of God The Father!

Hebrews 2:1-4. Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will? (New King James Version).

Therefore (2:1). Big word. High responsibility. Solemn warning. We must pay careful attention to what God has spoken in Christ and regarding Him. If we do not, we will become distracted and drift right on by the truth and lose everything.

In verses 2 and 3, as in other parts of the epistle, the author affirms the divine origin of the Old Testament law and the seriousness of the penalty inflicted on those who willfully violated it (see 10:28, 29). This becomes the point of contrast that shows the higher divine origin of the gospel, and therefore the far greater guilt of those who neglect it (carelessly drift away from it, disregard it). To do so is to miss salvation itself.

The Law of Moses was given by the arrangement of angels (Acts 7:53). God spoke to Moses by angels, and Moses spoke to the people. Now God has spoken directly to us in Jesus Christ. God's revelation--His message--to us in Christ far transcends the Old Testament law and has superseded it. It is direct, not indirect.

God's revelation in Jesus Christ is direct, not indirect. For that reason it places a greater moral obligation on those who are enlightened by it, and also greater guilt and punishment on those who carelessly disregard it.

This offer of salvation in Jesus Christ was first proclaimed by Christ Himself. Following His ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit, those who heard Him confirmed the message correctly to all who would hear. To demonstrate that they were not fabricating the message, embellishing it, adding to or deleting from it in any way, God put His supernatural seal of approval on it by signs, wonders, miracles, and other gifts of the Holy Spirit. This gives the gospel a far superior divine witness and corroboration than the Law of Moses had.

This should once and for all answer the long and logical question of verses 2-4. The bottom line is this: if they who disregarded the Law of Moses, spoken by angels, did not escape their just punishment, they who disregard so great salvation, declared by and in Jesus Christ, will most certainly not escape.

So let us diligently continue to pay more earnest attention to God's saving message in Jesus Christ.

3

JESUS: MAN TRIUMPHANT

Hebrews 2:5-18

Hebrews 2:5-8. For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. But one testified in a certain place, saying:

"What is man that You

are mindful of him,

Or the son of man that You

take care of him?

You made him a little lower

than the angels;

You crowned him with glory and

honor,

And set him over the works

of Your hands.

You have put all things

in subjection under his feet."

For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. (New King James Version).

Having focused on the deity of Jesus Christ, our attention is now directed to His humanity, specifically how His humanity relates to our humanity and our human condition and need.

In Genesis 1:26-28 we read the original mandate that God gave to man, that is, the human race. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (KJV).

That was Man's original destiny under God--dominion over all, including the age to come. God did not give this dominion to angels, even though angels are a supernatural and therefore higher order of being than we are in our present state. As confirmation of this, the author cites Psalm 8:4-6.

The old order (old covenant) came by angels. The new order in Christ that we are talking about came under man, not under angels.

Why?

Because in God's eternal purpose dominion belongs to man, not to angels. We, not angels, are created in the image of God and after His likeness (Genesis 1:26). In God's purpose for us, in view of our high origin and nature, we hold a high position and destiny. Our delegated authority is all-inclusive.

But what has happened? We do not see man exercising his full dominion. Sin has conquered and degraded humanity and reduced it to comparative insignificance in the cosmic order of things. Sin brought death, our terminal enemy. Human rebellion made it necessary for God to put a limit on individual life, especially individual human life. Sinners cannot be allowed unlimited personal opportunity to grow in selfishness and to pursue their personal selfish purposes on earth. That would result in far more evil and misery than exists already.

Nevertheless, human beings still bear the imago dei--the image of God. For that reason we still retain and exercise a very large measure of our dominion over God's earthly creation. God is the Creator--*our* Creator--and because He has created us in His image and after His likeness, He has endowed us with the ability to be creative also.

We see the results of our God-given creative ability in the sciences and the humanities. No matter how close to us biologically or anatomically it might be, no animal species has even the

remotest ability to found and build universities or to invent the computer. There is far more than a missing link. The entire chain is missing!

Notwithstanding all of our creativity and human progress, we still remain under the curse of death because of sin--not only Adam's sin but also mankind's continuance in it.

So "we do not yet see all things put under" man.

Hebrews 2:9. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. (New King James Version).

Man's destiny--his dominion--is fully realized in Jesus! He came down to our level, a little lower than the angels, to defeat everything that defeated us, including sin and death itself; and He did it as MAN, identifying with us in all things. Where Adam and his descendants failed and were defeated, Jesus (the last Adam--1 Corinthians 15:45) succeeded and is victorious. And He did it "by the grace of God," the same grace that is now offered to all. He experienced death for every human being. His victory is our victory, including our ultimate triumph over death. Though it is *sufficient* for all, it is *efficient* only for those who repent and believe.

Jesus is crowned. There is a Man in the glory! In Him we see humanity in full victory and dominion. (Please read Philippians 2:5-11).

Hebrews 2:10-13. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying:

"I will declare Your name to My

brethren;

In the midst of the congregation

I will sing praise to You."

And again:

"I will put My trust in Him."

And again:

"Here am I and the children

whom God has given Me." (New King James Version).

It is exactly what God would do. It is a "God-thing." It perfectly fitted God's nature and character. It was perfect. It was unique and outstanding.

What was it?

It was to make the Author (Pioneer, Leader, Captain) of our salvation, Jesus Christ, perfectly suited to be our Savior and High Priest through suffering.

"Perfect" does not imply any moral or character imperfection in Jesus. Our Savior was totally without sin. He was morally perfect.

"Perfect" means fully qualified through personal experience. God allowed Jesus to experience the entire range of human trials and temptations. Jesus knows human life because He lived it. He overcame every enemy of the human race, including sin and even death itself. And He did it as Man by the grace of God. Where Adam failed, Jesus succeeded. Now the defeated sons of Adam can become the victorious and glorious sons of God through Jesus Christ by faith. Christ went ahead, secured the victory, and opened the way for us to follow. As the victorious and glorified Son of Man, He is now the Prototype and Head of the new humanity, those who are redeemed by faith in His blood. In Him man's dominion is restored.

Christ has sanctified us by His blood and is not ashamed to call us His brothers. In His humanity He is one of us. And it all came out of the eternal purpose, plan, and power of God.

In verses 12 and 13 we read three supporting passages from the Old Testament Scriptures: Psalm 22:22; Isaiah 8:17; and Isaiah 8:18.

Hebrews 2:14, 15. Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (King James Version).

Jesus took upon Himself full humanity so that, as one of us, He could experience death on our behalf. This does not mean that His was merely an ordinary death. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

By this death Jesus Christ totally defeated Satan and his power of death. "Destroy" does not mean to put out of existence. It means to "put out of commission," render powerless. Satan *had* the power of death; he no longer has it. Death's ultimate power has been broken. Jesus Christ demonstrated that in His resurrection. It will be fully displayed when Christ returns.

Hebrews 2:16-18. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make

propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. (New King James Version).

The victorious humanity of Jesus Christ fully qualifies Him to be our all-sufficient High Priest.

Jesus did not reach down as it were to take hold of fallen angels to lift them up and restore them. Instead, He reached down and took hold of the fallen "seed" (descendants) of Abraham to lift them up to become truly the sons of God. This did not happen under the old covenant. Abraham was justified by faith (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6). Yes, Abraham was justified by works (James 2:21), not in the sense that his works supplemented his faith but that faith proves its reality by action. It has been said that we are justified by faith apart from works, but we cannot be justified by a faith that does not work (see Galatians 5:6).

Abraham's physical descendants, particularly his descendants through Isaac and Jacob, were in condemnation under the Law of Moses. Jesus was born of the seed of Abraham (Matthew 1:1). He died and rose again to justify the seed of Abraham by faith (Acts 13:38, 39). Now, all who are "in Christ" are the justified "seed of Abraham" (Galatians 3:29).

Once Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the eternal Trinity, was committed to be our Savior, it obligated Him to follow through and experience everything that was required for Him, as our sin-bearer, to become perfectly qualified to become our "merciful and faithful High Priest."

Jesus Christ is both the Sacrifice and the High Priest, faithful to God and merciful to us.

So then, in the things in which He Himself has also suffered, Christ is fully able to help those who are also being tempted and tested. Jesus was tested and proven faithful. Now He is able to help those who are being tempted and tested. The Greek word that is translated "succour," "aid," "help," in the various versions is boethesai. It means "run to the cry." So cry out to Him, your High Priest. He is listening, and He will *run to your cry!*

Hebrews 3:1. Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus. (New King James Version).

"Therefore." The theme continues and develops.

"Holy brethren." In 2:10 they are called sons of God, whom He is bringing into eternal glory. With that eternal destiny in view they are referred to here as "holy brethren." These are recurring reminders of who they (and we) truly are in God's eternal plan for us through Jesus Christ.

They share in a heavenly calling, and the author of the epistle urges them not to lose sight of that high calling, the calling to be "glorified sons of God" (2:10).

The apostle Paul states his own personal determination to attain his destiny in Christ. In Philippians 3:14 he writes, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (KJV).

"Consider." Fix your mind on Christ Jesus. Focus on Him. Get a clear understanding of who He is. The very fact that these Hebrew believers were seriously considering turning their backs on Jesus is clear proof that they had no clear concept, no full realization, of who He really is. Jesus is the Apostle and High Priest of their (and our) confession. They were in grave danger of repudiating their confession and thus suffering unimaginable eternal loss. If we realize who and what is the truth that we confess, we will do what we are urged in 4:14 to do--get a firm grip on it and never let it go.

Hebrews 3:2-6. who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house. For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end. (New King James Version).

Moses was faithful *in* all of God's house (Israel). So Christ also was faithful to God. The big difference--and the one that shows Christ's superiority over Moses--is that God through Christ built the house and thus Christ is Lord *over* the house, His own house (the Church).

We are that house "if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end."

In other words, the hope is real. It is not a sham, an illusion, a religious myth. Remember, "hope" is the anticipation of what is absolutely certain. It is based on God's word and His works. It has been firmly established by God's great historical redemptive acts in Jesus Christ. It is the "anchor" of our souls (6:18, 19). That is why we have absolute confidence, courage and boldness in it and why we glory and rejoice in it. So, get a tenacious "bull-dog" grip on it. Don't

"fumble the ball." Hold fast (get a firm grip) on what you have in Jesus Christ, and do not let anyone take your crown (Revelation 3:11).

Hebrews 3:7-15. Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,

"Today, if you will hear His voice,

Do not harden your hearts

as in the rebellion,

In the day of trial in the wilderness,

Where your fathers tested Me,

proved Me,

And saw My works forty years.

Therefore I was angry with that generation,

And said, "They always go astray

in their heart,

And they have not known My ways."

So I swore in My wrath,

"They shall not enter My rest."

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, while it is said,

"Today, if you will hear His voice,

Do not harden your hearts as in the

rebellion." (New King James Version).

Another "therefore." For this reason we are urged to "beware" (take heed, take care, see to it--verse 12). Most contemporary versions connect "Therefore" with "Today . . .," making "as the Holy Spirit says" a subordinate clause. That makes "Beware . . ." in verse 12 a new sentence. The King James Version connects "Therefore" (Wherefore) with "Beware" (Take heed) in verse 12, making the entire reference to what the Holy Spirit says in Psalm 95:7-11 a parenthesis.

That places more force on "Beware." The one translation is "Therefore . . . Do not harden" The other is "Therefore . . . Beware,"

The sense of the passage seems to call for the direct connect between "Therefore" and "Beware," with the quotation from Psalm 95:7-11 a parenthetical supporting reference between the two.

However that might be, we are reminded of the solemn warnings in Psalm 95:7-11 and how those warnings speak to us today. God has spoken. Are we listening carefully and attentively?

Do not harden your hearts! Proverbs 28:14 warns us that the person who hardens his/her heart will fall into a calamity.

Verse 13 declares that people are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

The examples are taken from the early history of Israel. They tempted God at the waters of Meribah (Exodus 17), and throughout the 40 years of their wanderings in the wilderness. That is called the day of "temptation"--embitterment, exasperation. They refused to believe what God said, demanding instead that God first prove Himself--His integrity, His honesty, His ability to do what He promised. Their attitude was, "Let's test God and prove Him first. Let's see if He is worthy of our trust."

Psalm 103:7 says, "He made known his ways unto Moses, his works unto the children of Israel" (KJV). Israel had seen God's *works*, but they did not know His *ways*. So God was totally disgusted with that generation.

So God vowed within Himself that they would not enter into His rest.

God has one true rest for His people. The weekly rest on the Sabbath Day was an earthly sample of it. So was the rest that God wanted Israel to enjoy in Canaan, even though the generation that died off in the wilderness never experienced it.

God's true rest is experienced only in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30 New King James Version).

This is called "gospel rest." It is the perfect rest of the soul in Christ. The struggle is over. The rebellion is ended. The rebel has gladly surrendered and is now happily reconciled to God and in moral harmony with Him. Peace with God means peace with one's self. All the painful inner conflict between God and reason on the one hand and selfishness and pride on the other is past. The destructive dysfunctions and life problems that were caused by the person's disobedience are solved or being solved.

This results in eternal rest. Eternal rest is not eternal inactivity and boredom. Heaven is a busy place. Eternal rest is perfect fulfillment and satisfaction in God's presence, fellowship and service. The redeemed will enjoy that rest forever in Heaven.

So then, "beware" (verse 12). "See to it!"

To what? That none of you has an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.

Let's look at that warning carefully. First, the "heart." The moral heart is where the core character choices are made. It is the direction of the will, the set of the soul, either for or against God and the truth.

Unbelief is more than an opinion, more than a mental disagreement with an idea or assertion. It is a refusal to believe, even when truth, reason, and moral obligation demand belief and obedience. *That* is an evil heart.

In the case of these immature Hebrew believers who were under pressure to abandon Jesus Christ and go back to the old religious system and its culture, such a choice would mean the rejection of what they knew to be the truth. Therefore it would be unbelief, and an evil choice of the heart.

Even though they might have thought that they could forsake Jesus Christ and continue to worship God, the sobering truth is that if they forfeited the Messiah, *they also forfeited God*.

They would in fact be "departing from the living God." *No one can be a true worshipper of God who rejects His testimony concerning His Son, Jesus Christ.*

"Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also" (1 John 2:23 New King James Version).

"Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9 New King James Version).

So we are to exhort (warn, urge, encourage) one another daily, "while it is called 'Today'." *Today* is always the present opportunity and obligation. Yesterday was "Today" for those who lived it. Now it is gone. If and when it comes, tomorrow will be its own "Today." What we really have is Today. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2 KJV).

Sin is deceitful. It is rationalized, normalized, popularized. It has been said that the unthinkable first becomes controversial; then eventually it becomes unquestionable. This is a hardening process that can callous the heart of any believer whose moral senses are not kept alert and sharp. That is why we are to exhort and encourage one another daily.

This is necessary because our relationship with Christ is not a one-time experience. It is eternal, and whatever is eternal is continuous. We have become partakers--personal sharers (as in verse 1)--of Christ if (as in verse 6) we keep a firm grip on our confidence all the way.

"Confidence" here does not mean our level of certainty. It means the certainty itself--the essence, substance, reality that forms the ground and basis of our confident state of mind. For example, if you were walking across a correctly engineered steel and concrete bridge, your confidence is not in your mind. The bridge itself is your confidence. It is the basis of your confident state of mind.

So, let us not take eternal life for granted, but hold fast to the truth of the gospel and the hope that is laid up for us in Heaven (Colossians 1:5).

Hebrews 3:16-19. For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. (New King James Version).

These verses contain three pointed questions, each with its own answer, and also a conclusion.

Verse 16. Who provoked (exasperated) God? The whole bunch.

Verse 17. With whom was God disgusted (as in verse 10)? Those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness.

Verse 18. Who were excluded from entering into God's rest? All who refused to believe, who were unmoved by the truth and therefore disobedient.

Verse 19. The conclusion? They were excluded because of their own unbelief. The fault was not in God. God had promised and provided the "rest" that is attained and maintained through faith. Faith resulting in obedience brings the soul into a harmonious relationship with God--God's "rest." Unbelief shuts God out of the soul and robs the soul of a personal knowledge of the Father and the Son, which is eternal life (John 17:3).

Hebrews 4:1-10. Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said:

"So I swore in My wrath,

They shall not enter My rest."

although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: *"And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"*; and again in this place: *"They shall not enter My rest."* Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, again He designates a certain day, saying in David, *"Today,"* after such a long time, as it has been said:

"Today, if you will hear His voice,

Do not harden your hearts."

For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. (New King James Version).

Therefore consider Jesus (3:1). Therefore beware (3:12). Therefore fear (4:1). Therefore be diligent (4:11). Hold fast (4:14). Therefore come boldly (4:16).

This is no religious game. The truth is serious business. God is none to trifle with. One's eternal destiny is nothing to be careless about.

This should build into us a healthy, godly fear. It is more than "be careful." It is *fear*. God's promised present and eternal "rest" has been left behind. It is still there, fully valid, unclaimed by the unbelieving generation. The very thought that we might fall short of it ought to scare us, so much so that we will be constantly diligent (verse 11) not to fall after the same example of unbelief.

The promised rest is attained by faith and only by faith. Merely hearing the word is not enough. It must be mixed with faith; only then does it become united with us and a part of us. A head full of truth will do a person no good unless it comes alive in the heart and life by faith. We must be "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22). If we do not, we will be self-deceived, thinking ourselves to be religious when in fact we have fallen short of God's "rest"--the personal relationship with Him that is eternal life.

We who truly believe from the heart actually do enter into God's rest. That rest is a "finished product" that has been provided from "the foundation of the world," even though masses of people have not entered into it. It is a provision from eternity in the sovereign purpose of God. And so at the judgment Jesus will say to His sheep, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34 KJV).

Chapter 4, verses 4-7 give Biblical references to God's "rest." In verse 4 the seventh day is mentioned as the first reference to God's rest. The quotation is from Genesis 2:2. Then, the

reference in Psalm 95 is repeated. We notice that God's statement, "they shall not enter into my rest," is given three times (3:11; 4:3, 5).

It is God's rest, and that rest is still there. God's promise has not been completely fulfilled nor has it been withdrawn. Some *must* enter into it! God would not have done what He did to provide it if He knew that no one would enter into it. Through David (Psalm 95) God limits the opportunity to "Today," which is now *our* "Today." So let us hear and obey the word, and not harden our hearts as the unbelieving generation did.

"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2 KJV).

Verse 8 says that Joshua did not give the nation the promised rest when he led them in the conquest of Canaan. Had Joshua done so, God through David (Psalm 95) would not have spoken by implication of a future fulfillment of that rest, the fulfillment that we now experience in Jesus Christ.

It is available now--Today--to be attained by faith.

It is a finished work. The fact that God "rested" does not imply that He got tired. When God "worked," He did not labor.

When we enter into God's "rest" by faith, that is the end of our own struggling. "Religion" is full of human works and struggling, as we see from the apostle Paul's example in Romans 7. Before he "rested" in Christ, he struggled constantly to be righteous. And it is important to remember that Paul's experience described in Romans 7 was not the struggle of a believer against temptation. It was the struggle of a sinner against his own conscience. That is why he was such a "wretched man" before he entered by faith into Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah's "rest shall be glorious" (Isaiah 11:10). And so Jesus invites all of us, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30 NIV). It is not trying, but trusting; it is not struggle, but surrender.

Hebrews 4:11-16. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of

grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (New King James Version).

Anyone who has traveled by train in Europe knows that the trains there run on precise schedules. When it is time for a train to depart, the door closes and it is on its way. If you miss it, you miss it.

Some years ago my wife and I traveled through Europe by train. In one part of our journey we were in a large city where we had to change trains. Something came up that delayed us. Time was running short. After asking some quick questions at the station, we finally found the right train. My heart sank when I saw it. It seemed to be a mile long, and our car was way down at the far end!

I grabbed the handles of both pieces of luggage, and we were off for the races. We brushed by people, trying to be as careful as possible to avoid a collision. Our sense of urgency was heightened by the fact that we were not sure which car was ours. Providentially, when we reached the general area, there it was right in front of us. We clambered aboard, luggage and all, just in time. Finding our seats, we literally fell into them, nearly out of breath.

What stands out in my memory above everything else in that experience was the sense of total relief and rest that swept over me the moment we settled into our assigned place.

Now, if we had not exercised determined diligence, we would have forfeited that rest. A few moments of careless dawdling would have landed us in a very difficult and stressful situation.

That is what verse 11 is saying. We do not work to earn God's "rest." It is the gift of His free grace. At the same time, we cannot be careless about it. God's "rest" is not a state of spiritual and moral apathy. His rest energizes us! The free gift is for those who take the gift and the Giver seriously, who put their heart and soul into it, who get a firm grip on it.

The word of God is serious business. It is alive and active. It is thorough in its penetration. Nothing escapes its probing thrust. It lays everything bare.

The word "open" in verse 13 comes from the same word as "trachea." It is like jerking the head back and exposing the neck. That is the picture here of the all-penetrating eyes of God.

So here, as throughout the epistle, the glories of our great High Priest and His full salvation are balanced with solemn warnings about the horrible consequences of carelessness and unbelief. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (10:31). "For our God is a consuming fire" (12:29). There is no "cheap grace" here!

In verse 14 the epistle transitions back to its main theme; yet it continues to urge us to hold fast to the eternal realities that we confess (as in 3:6).

Our High Priest is not one who is unable to "feel with us." He was tempted and tried in every way that we are. He felt the pressures of life just as we do. He was in a different time and culture, of course, but what He experienced was just as intense and trying as what we experience today in whatever culture we live. He sensed the same powerful passions. And He overcame them all. He was without sin!

Having come through that human experience completely victorious, Jesus Christ is now able to bring everyone who comes to Him completely victorious through the same human experiences. So let us come with complete confidence to the throne of grace, where our High Priest is now in session, to obtain (take) the mercy He offers, and to find "well-timed help" (boetheian--from the same word as "run to the cry" in 2:18) in time of need!

5

SEIZE YOUR DESTINY!

Hebrews, Chapters Five and Six

Hebrews 5:1-3. For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way, for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. (King James Version).

The high priesthood of Aaron was ordained by God for the purpose of offering gift offerings and also sacrifices for the sins of the people of Israel.

These common sins of the people were ceremonial transgressions done in ignorance or in carelessness, errors due to misguided straying, actions done in the impulse of the moment by giving in to human weakness. They did not include determined disobedience. The Law of Moses made no provision for that. "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses" (Hebrews 10:28 KJV).

These human high priests were able to have compassion on those who committed offenses in ignorance and also on the erring. That is, he could be "measured" (moderate) in his feelings and attitude toward them. Why? Because he himself was "wrapped around" with human weakness.

Thus the Aaronic priesthood met its two essential requirements: divine appointment and human sympathy.

Notwithstanding the fact that the Aaronic priesthood was ordained by God, it was essentially deficient because of the moral weakness and failings of the priests themselves. On account of this the priests themselves had to offer sacrifices for their own sins as well as for the sins of the people.

Hebrews 5:4-11. And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him:

"You are My Son,

Today I have begotten You."

As He also says in another place:

"You are a priest forever

According to the order of

Melchizedek";

who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest *"according to the order of Melchizedek,"* of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. (New King James Version).

Under the Old Covenant no one could just assume the position and honor of the high priesthood. It was given by divine appointment only to those called by God, namely, to Aaron and to those among his descendants who succeeded to the office.

In the same way Jesus Christ did not assume on His own the glory and position of eternal High Priest. He was given that glorious position by the decree of the Father. The One who said to Jesus, "You are My Son, today I have begotten You" (Psalm 2:7 NKJV), also said to Him, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4 NKJV).

So we see the connection between "Son" and "Priest." The Son is the Priest!

In the "days of His flesh" (His incarnation), after He had offered up prayers and supplications" (His agony in Gethsemane), Jesus was heard (His intercession was received) by the Father because of Christ's absolute godly reverence. He was completely successful before the Father as an intercessor. Accordingly, He is now forever established as our Intercessor.

Jesus, the Son-Priest, "learned obedience by the things which He suffered." This does not imply that Jesus ever was disobedient. He always fully obeyed the Father. Unlike the priests under the Law, Jesus had no sins of His own to atone for. He was always victorious over sin. Yet His lifestyle of constant, uninterrupted, full obedience was strengthened by what He suffered. To become "perfected" (fully qualified) to become our compassionate great High Priest, Jesus (Son-Priest) had to experience the same trials and temptations that we experience.

Jesus Christ did not take the attitude, "I am God; therefore I know what you are going through." Instead, He became one of us so He could go through it with us in time-space human experience. His attitude is, "I am God the Son. I know what you are going through because I am also fully human. I have been there and done that--and I am still here. I am here for you."

Jesus Christ became fully qualified morally by His fear (reverent piety expressed by His perfectly careful life) and experientially by His sympathy with human weakness and suffering.

Having therefore become complete for the position of High Priest, He became the author (source, cause) of eternal salvation to all who yield loving obedience to Him in faith. Jesus is now called (addressed, titled, designated, hailed) by God: "High Priest after the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4). Christ's eternal Melchizedek Priesthood is totally superior to the old temporary Aaronic priesthood.

This preliminary reference to the Melchizedek priesthood is somewhat of a "teaser." It introduces "a person concerning whom" and "a subject concerning which" many things could be said (and will be said later in Chapter 7). But it was difficult to bring out the full interpretation of this truth to these immature believers because they were "sluggish of hearing." Their spiritual "receptors" were not tuned in and turned up.

Hebrews 5:12-14. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (New King James Version).

It was hard to explain to these believers the Melchizedek priesthood of Christ. Only the spiritually mature or maturing can grasp it. So the author of the epistle reproves them for their *continued* spiritual immaturity. The same reproof should greatly benefit all today who are

content to remain stuck in spiritual infancy year after year. They are not in the battle because they are still on the bottle! They are "high-maintenance/low-impact" Christians.

Considering the length of time that this group of believers had been in the faith, they should be mature and knowledgeable, able to teach others. Instead, they need someone to teach them the elements (first principles) of the oracles of God. They had come to need milk. They were not prepared to digest even a soft spiritual diet. They were even much less prepared for solid spiritual fare. Spiritually they were like infants whose baby teeth had not yet come through. They were still "gumming" the gospel.

By contrast, the believers at Rome were "full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another" (Romans 15:14 KJV).

A marvelous quality of God's word is the range of its adaptability to each believer's stage of spiritual maturation. Babes in Christ are urged to yearn for the pure milk of God's word (1 Peter 2:2). They are like the newborn infant who looks at its mother and thinks: "breakfast!"

A new believer reads a passage from the Bible and feeds on the milk it contains. As the same believer grows in grace and knowledge, he or she feeds again on the same passage and discovers "cereal." Continuing to advance in Christ, the believer looks again at the same passage and says, "yum--veggies!" Eventually the mature believer studies the same Bible passage and exclaims, "beefsteak!"

It's all in there!

Notice, the milk-feeding Christian is unskilled in the word of *righteousness*. The Bible is more than historical literature and information (although it is certainly that). It reveals moral truth that builds character. It produces spiritual grown-ups, adults who have their moral and ethical "organs of perception" (a medical term) developed by "locking them in" to The Scriptures. They know by exercise (a gymnastic term) how to distinguish between good and evil.

These knowledgeable, experienced, well-rounded and well-grounded people no longer ignorantly blunder into non-biblical and harmful behaviors, relationships and situations. Like the early believers at Rome, they are able not only to discriminate between good and evil in their own practical living but also to guide others in the principles and path of righteousness.

Hebrews 6:1-3. Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.
(New King James Version).

Here we have another "therefore," urging us to act decisively based on what has just been said. This is an appeal to progress in doctrinal truth and its practical application to daily living.

When constructing a building, no builder lays a foundation and calls that the finished product. That would be unthinkable. And certainly no builder would lay the foundation, tear it up, and re-lay it over and over. That would be insane.

The same is true of building the "edifice" of our personal spiritual life and character. Repentance, faith for salvation, baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection, and eternal judgment--these are the elementary teachings about Christ. They are the foundational truths of salvation.

But we must not stop after laying the foundation, much less build it over and over again. We are to lay it right the first time, then leave it and go on and build *upon* it.

New and immature Christians have a high calling to grow up in thinking, character, and conduct; and that high calling places a solemn responsibility upon each of us. It is also an exciting adventure, full of possibilities and certainties for time and eternity.

So, "let us go on." That is, "let us be borne on." Let us all advance together in love, knowledge, and Christlikeness.

"If God permits." That is, if they are ready, if they have indeed laid the solid foundation of repentance, etc. Otherwise, God would require them to do so. Some people try to by-pass this essential foundation and build an edifice of "spirituality" without real moral integrity. They "talk the talk," but they do not "walk the walk." Their spiritual "front" can be quite impressive. But they are hollow on the inside, where real spirituality resides.

Hebrews 6:4-8. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned. (New King James version).

This is one of the most solemn and stern warnings to believers not to abandon Christ. This is *not* about or addressed to people who have merely "tasted" (mouthed) the gospel and "spit it out," or have been only enlightened and brought under conviction by the Holy Spirit but not converted. In the word of God, "tasting" and "partaking" mean personally experiencing the reality.

We must keep in mind to whom this epistle was initially addressed. These were Hebrew believers who were under pressure to renounce and abandon their personal Savior in Whom they had placed their trust for salvation and with Whom they had come into a personal saving relationship. They were born-again believers. If they were only pre-Christian--interested but still

unregenerated--this entire passage would be completely out of harmony with its context. In that case it would make little or no sense. The attempt to force it to fit that meaning requires exegetical contortion. Verses 4 and 5 contain a four-fold description of believers.

Chapter 10, verse 29 gives us an insight into what is meant for these Hebrew believers to "fall away." "Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?" (NKJV). "Common" here means unsanctified and therefore unholy (unclean). In renouncing Jesus Christ, they placed the blood of Jesus in the same category as the blood of a pig.

This was no ordinary "backsliding." It was a crucifixion--*their* crucifixion--of Jesus.

In their International Critical Commentary on the Epistle To The Hebrews, page 80, Driver, Plummer, and Briggs put it so clearly and forcefully. "The meaning of the vivid phrase is that they put Jesus out of their life; they break off all connection with him; he is dead to them . . . as if he is not worth their loyalty! Their repudiation of him proclaims to the world that they consider him useless, and that the best thing they can do for themselves is to put him out of their life."

The impossibility is not that they never *could* be saved, but that they never *would*. If they would truly repent, they would be restored. But they so definitely, publicly, and finally renounced Jesus Christ that to persuade them to repent would be a human impossibility. The impossibility is not with God; it is with them and with any human effort to change them. It is their "sin unto death" (1 John 5:16).

Verses 7 and 8 illustrate the point by the analogy of the two fields and by the contrast between what they produce. Both fields are fertile. Both receive an adequate supply of rain. The one produces food and thus uses God-given resources to fulfil its God-given purpose for humanity. It has God's blessings. The other produces thorns and thistles and thus uses God-given resources wastefully and detrimentally so far as people are concerned. Left to itself, it functions under the curse ("cursed is the ground . . . Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth . . ." See Genesis 3:18, 19).

Being Hebrews, these endangered believers must have caught the full force of the analogy and its application to them. They were well acquainted with what The Scriptures say about God's blessings and His cursings upon different fields. See Genesis 27:27; Deuteronomy 28:2, 3, 15, 16; Proverbs 24:30-34.

The issue for them (and us) is whether they were going to stay true to the Son of God, produce the fruit of the Spirit, and receive God's blessings and approval; or turn away from the Messiah, place themselves under the curse, become a spiritual wasteland producing only what is useless and detrimental to themselves and others, and in the end suffer the fire of God's judgment.

In addition to the Old Testament passages regarding blessed and cursed fields, they also knew what Jesus said in His parable of the "tares" and the wheat. "As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire . . ." (see Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43).

Eventually God will purify His earth by purging out of it all who use it and its resources to produce "the unfruitful works of darkness" (Ephesians 5:11).

Hebrews 6:9-12. But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (New King James Version).

The tone changes abruptly and completely to one of confidence and commendation. The writer addresses them as "beloved," and affirms his confidence that they will remain faithful, experience the "better things" and the blessings attached to salvation, even though he has just warned them of the horrific consequences awaiting those who do apostatize.

They *are* fruitful, and God will remain fully cognizant and appreciative of the practical expressions of their love. Later in the epistle (10:32-34), they themselves are urged to remember the fervency of their first love and how that love was expressed in so many sacrificial ways.

Now (verses 11 and 12) they (and we) are urged to put the same diligence (as in 4:11),

the same energy, into pursuing our hope (our destiny) to the end. "Each of you," shake off the spiritual and moral sluggishness mentioned in 5:11 and diligently follow the example of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

This theme, this high calling, this holy ambition, this supreme motivation of life, this diligent pursuit of the HOPE recurs throughout the entire epistle. We saw it in 3:6; we see it here again in 6:11; we will be reminded of it again in 6:18-19 and 7:19.

In his first epistle the apostle Peter urges the same diligence. "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:13 KJV).

Hebrews 6:13-20. For when God made promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying "*Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.*" And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them

an end of all dispute. Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. (New King James Version).

We are now assured of the certainty of the fulfillment of the divine promises. Before, we had a warning in the form of an example (40 years in the wilderness); now we have encouragement in the form of an example (Abraham).

In verses 13-15 our steadfastness is our response as believers to God's sure promises of our eternal destiny. Here again, as so often in the Bible, Abraham is cited as an outstanding example of faith, the faith that follows-through.

The emphasis here is on God's promise and His oath. God's promise and His oath are what Abraham relied on completely and what motivated him to persevere until he obtained the promise. We are to follow the same example diligently, with the assurance that, if we do, we also will obtain the destiny promised to faithful believers.

Verses 16-20 focus on the nature and the certainty of the "two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie"--His promise and His oath.

Great emphasis is placed upon God's oath, because His oath establishes the absolute and unchanging certainty of God's decree and purpose. By His oath, God put Himself personally into the promise, pledging Himself to it and backing it up with all of His divine qualities. Nothing can be more sure!

God's promise alone is sufficient ground for belief. Still, some of His promises are conditional. Their fulfillment depends on whether or not the attached conditions are met and fulfilled. By contrast, God's oath is unconditional and irrevocable!

By God's immutable promise made irrevocable by His immutable oath, we who have fled to Christ for refuge have a strong encouragement.

The thought of fleeing to Christ for refuge reflects back to the cities of refuge established in Israel (see Deuteronomy 4:42 and 19:5).

This hope, this sure destiny in Christ, is an anchor that is fixed in eternity, securely fixed by God and in God. It is like a ship's anchor attached firmly to an unmovable rock. We do not see the anchor, only the rope as it disappears beneath the surface of the water. But we know that the anchor is there and that it is secure. So it is with the certainty of the destiny of God's elect. We

do not see the anchor, but we know where it is and we have a firm grip on the rope. We cannot see it, but we know that it holds.

This hope, this certain destiny, is the anchor of our souls. It keeps the soul from drifting, no matter how much the storms rage, the winds blow, and the waves rise and fall.

No, this is not "pie in the sky," but an anchor in the Holies! It is where Jesus, our forerunner, went ahead and is now preparing a place for us (John 14:2). He is our High Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

So, let us "lay hold on eternal life" (1 Timothy 6:12). It is the gift of God (Romans 6:23). Get a firm grip on it and never let it go. Trust God completely. He "is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24 KJV).

6

THE MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD

Hebrews, Chapter Seven

Hebrews 7:1-3. For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, being translated "king of righteousness," and then also king of Salem, meaning "king of peace," without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually. (New King James Version).

The focus of this chapter is Jesus Christ and the absolute superiority of His priesthood, the Melchizedek priesthood.

Just who is "this Melchizedek"? We meet him in Genesis 14:18-20. When Abraham returned from defeating the coalition of kings that had captured his nephew Lot, Melchizedek came to meet him. "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine; and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, . . ." (KJV).

Melchizedek was the "king-priest" of "Salem" (Jerusalem). He took the initiative to meet Abraham and his men with food and drink. He blessed Abraham and gave blessing to God, and Abraham gave him the tithe of all he took in battle (probably Lot had never tithed on it himself!). The ancient Jews thought that Melchizedek was Shem.

We lose sight of Melchizedek until King David by the Holy Spirit suddenly announced the majestic decree of the Father to Christ: "Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4 KJV).

Again, Melchizedek is absent from the subsequent pages of divine revelation until the Holy Spirit re-introduces him in the Epistle To The Hebrews.

Much more is said about him here than in the two short statements in Genesis and The Psalms. But, just who *is* this person? We read a "teaser" back in Hebrews 5:10 and 11. Jesus is called of God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Concerning Melchizedek and the Melchizedek priesthood much could be said that was hard for the immature Hebrew believers to understand. This seems to imply that there is something more to this than mere typology. It takes spiritual receptivity and maturity to understand this mystery.

Currently there are two basic views regarding Melchizedek. The one view regards him as only a man, an ancient Canaanite king-priest who was a remarkable type of Jesus Christ. The references to him in the Epistle To The Hebrews are interpreted to fit this view by those who hold it. This seems to be the view held by the great majority of Bible scholars.

The other view regards Melchizedek as a christophany, that is, an Old Testament appearance of Christ in human form. At present (2004) I favor this view.

A christophany is *not* the Incarnation. The Incarnation was a one-time event, when the Second Person of the Trinity became fully man while at the same time remaining fully God. A christophany is far less than that, although in itself it is still a divine event.

We find instances of christophany in the Old Testament. In Joshua 5:13-15 we read that at Jericho "the Captain of the host of the Lord" met Joshua. Joshua fell down at his feet and "did worship." Then "the Captain of the Lord's host" ordered Joshua to remove his shoes because the place was holy. Now, mere angels refuse to accept worship (Colossians 2:18; Revelation 19:20; 22:8, 9). Worship belongs only to God. This Person not only accepted worship from Joshua but also commanded him to perform an act of deep reverence.

The appearance of the "fourth man" in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:25) could also be a christophany, and is so regarded by many.

In the Greek original, Hebrews 7:1-3 appears to be one continuous sentence. The subject of this long sentence is "Melchizedek" (verse 1). The predicate is "remains" (verse 3). "Melchizedek . . . remains." Everything between the subject and the predicate builds up to the predicate.

Between the subject and the predicate we read a majestic series of categorical statements about "this Melchizedek." He is "king of righteousness" and "king of peace, without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God."

To say that the author of the Epistle To The Hebrews is merely following the interpretive methods of Philo is to deny its divine inspiration and therefore its rightful place in the canon of The Holy Scriptures. What a loss that would be. That goes against all the evidences of its divine inspiration. The imprint of the Holy Spirit is all over this epistle.

Also, the position that Melchizedek was just a Canaanite king/priest who happened to be a type of Christ only because there is no *record* of his ancestry, his father's name, his mother's name, his birth, and his death does not rise to the demands of the text. In fact, such a typology breaks down immediately due to a complete lack of parallelism. In the case of Jesus, we *do* know His ancestry (Matthew 1 and Luke 3), His mother's name (Mary), the history of His birth, and the time when He gave up His mortal life on the cross.

If indeed Melchizedek was a christophany, a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ in human form, that would make "made like the Son of God" (verse 3) to mean "made a facsimile off from the Son of God." In that case (to use a modern term), Melchizedek was a "fax" of Christ. Jesus is the original.

Hebrews 7:4-10. Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils. And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law, that is, from their brethren, though they have come from the loins of Abraham; but he whose genealogy is not derived from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the greater. Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives. Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him. (New King James Version).

We are directed here to observe "how great (dignified, distinguished) this man." Please notice that "was" is not in the text of the original here and in Genesis 14:18.

The point here is the surpassing superiority of the everlasting Melchizedek priesthood over the old Levitical (Aaronic) priesthood that it replaced. Melchizedek is greater than Levi and Aaron, as is demonstrated by the fact that they potentially and positionally "paid" tithes to him through Abraham (verse 9).

Melchizedek's genealogy is not counted from Levi (nor subsequently from Aaron). But he received tithes of Abraham and blessed him (literally, "has taken tithes," and "has blessed").

Melchizedek blessed Abraham. Beyond dispute, that places Melchizedek above Abraham!

Verse 8 declares that the Biblical record concerning Melchizedek stands as a witness to the fact that "he lives." That establishes the Melchizedek priesthood of Jesus Christ on "the power of an endless life" (verse 16), and as a continuation of that life.

In verses 9 and 10 we read that, "so to speak," Levi paid tithes through Abraham, being "still in the loins of his father [that is, great grandfather]" at the time. This does not support the notion of the pre-existence of souls or the doctrine of traducianism (that the soul as well as the body is begotten and produced by the parent or parents). It is merely a Semitic figure of speech meaning descendants.

The Melchizedek priesthood received tithes, and still does.

So we have three proofs of the ascendancy and superiority of the unique and everlasting Melchizedek priesthood over the temporary Aaronic.

1. The Melchizedek priesthood was established before the Aaronic.
2. Melchizedek took tithes of Abraham and thus indirectly, positionally, and potentially from Levi and thus Aaron.
3. It is never recorded that Melchizedek lost the priesthood through death.

He lives (v. 8)!

Hebrews 7:11-19. Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. For He testifies,

"You are a priest forever

According to the order of

Melchizedek."

For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand,

there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. (New King James Version).

The transfer of the priesthood from Levi and Aaron to Melchizedek made necessary a transfer also of the law. A different priesthood must bring in and administer a different law. So when the priesthood changed, so did the law.

Remember, Melchizedek is king of righteousness and king of peace. So the law of the Melchizedek priesthood is righteousness and peace (and also joy in the Holy Spirit--Romans 14:17). This is now the law of the kingdom of God; and remember, Melchizedek was and is both king and priest.

If perfection (moral integrity in a saving relationship with God) came by the law, there would be no need for a different priesthood. So in anticipation of this, God provided ahead of time for the Melchizedek priesthood. God knew that the Aaronic priesthood would never save people from sin and bring them into a right relationship with Himself. God provided the Mosaic law under the Levitical and Aaronic priesthood (see Exodus 19:24) as a "tutor" to make us aware of sin and to bring us to Christ (see Galatians 3:19-25).

The Mosaic law and the Aaronic priesthood were only temporary provisions. By contrast, the Melchizedek priesthood is an everlasting order. It was God's "Plan A" from the beginning.

Verse 19 emphasizes the "better hope." We read about it in Chapter 6, verses 18 and 19. Remember, "hope" in the Bible contains no element of uncertainty. It is the anticipation of what is absolutely certain.

The old law separated us from God because of our sin. The old priesthood of Aaron could not secure victory over sin; so fellowship with God was impossible under the law. Even in Old Testament times all who came into a right relationship with God were justified by faith, not by the law or by any of their own works (Romans 4; Hebrews 11). Their works were the result of their faith and the proof that their faith was truly a living faith (James 2:14-26).

The *hope* came by the sacrifice and high priesthood of the Son, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 6:18, 19). The new hope said to the old order, "Move out! I'm taking your place!"

Hebrews 7:20-28. And inasmuch as He was not made priest without an oath (for they have become priests without an oath, but He with an oath by Him who said to Him:

"The Lord has sworn

And will not relent,

'You are a priest forever

According to the order of

Melchizedek"),

by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant. And there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them. For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever. (New King James Version).

This brings us to the divine oath in Psalm 110:4, "Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (KJV).

The priesthood of Aaron and his successors operated without a divine oath. Because of this, they had no permanent decree to guarantee the permanency and perpetuity of that priesthood.

By contrast, the Melchizedek priesthood of Jesus Christ was established by an irrevocable oath. God declared Jesus Christ "a priest forever." On this solid basis Jesus Christ is God's guarantee of a better and everlasting covenant for all who believe in Him.

The high priesthood of Jesus is far superior to the Aaronic priesthood also in the fact that the Melchizedek priest is not subject to death. Death prevented the high priests under the Aaronic order from continuing. The priesthood was transmitted from generation to generation. But Jesus arose from the dead and is alive forevermore. His priesthood is non-transferable. He and He alone holds it permanently and forever. The Melchizedek Priesthood has always had, now has, and will always have only one Priest--Jesus Christ!

That is why He is able to save "to the uttermost" (completely and forever) all who come to God through Him. He ever lives to make intercession for them. He is ever interceding. He is our High Priest, our Mediator, our Advocate, our "Attorney" at the right hand of the Father.

There is no other mediator--not angels, not Mary, not "saints," not earthly priests. "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5 KJV).

No other mediator is necessary. Jesus is our all-sufficient, fully qualified, totally successful, completely victorious, perfectly reliable High Priest.

And He is perfectly suited to us. He fits us. He is exactly the High Priest that we need, and need so desperately. He became one of us. He came into our situation and overcame it by living sinless in it. Then He took our sins upon Himself, died in our place, and conquered all of our

enemies including death itself. He is now the Man in the glory--holy, innocent, pure, safe from harm from sinners, and lifted higher than the heavens. He is passed *through* the heavens (Hebrews 4:14) to the very throne of God the Father.

He is far above the old daily routine of the Aaronic high priests. They had to offer sacrifices daily, first for their own sins and then for the sins of the people. Jesus, our High Priest, had no sin of his own. That qualified Him to offer up Himself once-for-all for us. He is both the Sacrifice and the High Priest. He presented His own blood before the Father. The Father fully accepted His sacrifice on our behalf. Now we can come directly to the Father through Him, to "obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:14 KJV).

The old Mosaic law made priests of men who were morally weak. But the word of the oath (Psalm 110:4) established Christ as our High Priest. His qualifications and His preparations are complete. By the divine oath and His human triumph He is perfected forever, fully able to meet our every need. He is now in session. Come directly to the Father through Him. No appointment is needed.

7

THE NEW COVENANT

Hebrews, Chapter Eight

Hebrews 8:1-6. Now this is the main point of the things we are saying; we have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "*See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.*" But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. (New King James Version).

This section (8:1-6) heads up what has just been said about the high priesthood of Jesus Christ and introduces the essential features of His high priesthood: the new covenant, the true

sanctuary, the effective sacrifice, and the sure promises. All of these are taken up and developed in order in the next few chapters.

In this section we see five features of the absolute superiority of Jesus Christ. These are said to be "better" than what they replaced. They are "better," not in the comparative sense of merely a moderate or even great improvement but in the absolute sense of a total contrast.

Feature number 1. Christ is an absolutely superior Priest to Aaron, and His priesthood is absolutely superior to the entire Levitical system. We have "such a High Priest" as is described in Chapter 4:14 through Chapter 7:28.

Feature number 2. Christ conducts His high priestly ministry in a "better" sanctuary, the true sanctuary (verses 2 and 5). He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens (verse 1; see also Hebrews 1:3). He finished His redemptive work and entered into His high priestly ministry.

This is not merely an "ideal" sanctuary, but the *real* sanctuary, the true tabernacle which the Lord erected and not man (verse 2). The earthly tabernacle was only a copy of the heavenly order. Christ's priesthood *is* the heavenly order. He is in Heaven itself, now appearing in the very presence of God the Father for us (see 9:24).

Feature number 3. Christ offered a "better" sacrifice (verses 3 and 4). That is, He offered Himself once-for-all. That all-sufficient, once-for-all sacrifice was offered by the Melchizedek priesthood only.

Feature number 4. Christ is the Mediator of a "better" covenant (verse 6). That new covenant is the subject of the rest of Hebrews Chapter 8.

Feature number 5. That new covenant was established and rests on "better" promises (verse 6).

Therefore, Jesus Christ has a more excellent (surpassing) ministry. *This* is the sum, the head, the main point.

Hebrews 8:7-13. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: *"Behold, the days are coming,"* says the Lord, *"when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah--not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them,"* says the Lord. *"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days,"* says the Lord, *"I will put my laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. for I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."* In that He says, *A new covenant,"* He has made the first

obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. (New King James Version).

Verse 6 is transitional and leads us into the subject of the new covenant. Jesus' once-for-all sacrifice of Himself established the new covenant and thus abolished the old.

God always deals with mankind through a covenant relationship. Each covenant that God established has been based on a sacrifice, a sacrifice for sin. An atoning sacrifice is essential to a right relationship with God and personal communion with Him. Sin separates man from God; so before we can have fellowship with Him, the barrier of sin must be removed. Before the New Covenant that was done provisionally and potentially by animal sacrifices. Animal sacrifices could not take away sin because they could not satisfy the demands of the broken moral law. They were only a temporary provision until the permanent sacrifice was made. Faith in the temporary provision was counted as faith in the permanent one that was to come.

When God dealt with Adam and Eve after they sinned, He clothed them with garments made out of skin. This implies that an animal had been sacrificed (Genesis 3:21). It was under that covenant arrangement that Abel brought an animal sacrifice to God (Genesis 4:4).

God's covenant with Noah and his descendants was sealed with blood sacrifice (Genesis 6:18; 8:20-22).

On Mount Sinai God gave the Law and established the Mosaic Covenant with Israel. At a dramatic moment Moses "took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words" (Exodus 24:8 KJV).

Later, God made a special covenant with king David and his royal descendants (see 2 Samuel 7:12, 13; 2 Chronicles 21:7; Psalm 89:3, 28, 34; Jeremiah 33:21). Nothing is said directly about a blood sacrifice, possibly because the Davidic Covenant operated within the Mosaic Covenant and was ultimately fulfilled in David's Son, Jesus Christ. We do have evidence of a blood sacrifice attached to the Davidic Covenant, however. In Leviticus 2:13 God commanded that salt be included first in all meal sacrifices and then in *all* sacrifices (see also Ezekiel 43:23 and 24). When the ten northern tribes revolted against the Davidic royal line, king Abijah (David's grandson) raised an army in a futile attempt to force them to return. Before the disastrous battle, Abijah gave a speech to the opposition from Mount Zemarim. In it he stated that God had given the kingdom to David by "a covenant of salt" (2 Chronicles 13:5). If Abijah's claim is correct, it would imply that a blood sacrifice had been offered in connection with the establishment of the Davidic Covenant.

The New Covenant was established by Jesus Christ. The New Covenant had been prophesied many times in The Scriptures (see Isaiah 42:6; 55:3; 61:8; Jeremiah 31:31-34; 32:40; Ezekiel

16:60, 62; 37:26; Hosea 2:18; Zechariah 9:11; Malachi 3:1). Hebrews 8:7-12 is a direct quotation from Jeremiah 31:31-34.

At last! We now have the New Covenant that God promised so often and so long through the prophets of Israel! It the supreme, the effective, the *final*, the EVERLASTING Covenant! Through Christ we have come into a real, vital, living, personal covenant relationship with God!

When Moses announced the Old Covenant, he dramatically splashed the blood of the sacrifice out toward the people, saying, "Behold the blood of the covenant . . ." (Exodus 24:8). When Jesus announced the New Covenant, the scene was far less dramatic but far more profound. Gathered with His disciples just before He sacrificed Himself on the cross, our Lord took the cup and calmly announced, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28).

In the New Covenant God's laws are placed into our minds and written in our hearts. Because it is an internal rather than an external covenant, our relationship with God is now internal and not merely external.

He is our God and we are His people. "Through him we both [Jews and Gentiles] have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:18, 19 KJV).

All who are in this covenant relationship with God know Him, because we came into personal fellowship with Him by the Holy Spirit through personal faith in Jesus Christ.

We have both forgiveness of sins and justification before God. Because of the complete sufficiency and full effectiveness of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, God grants His full mercy to all who truly believe on Christ from the heart; and our sins and our iniquities *He will never recall*.

The New Covenant promises and provides full salvation. That is the closing promise; that is the supreme and ultimate blessing. [God] "also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6 New King James Version).

By bringing in the New Covenant, God made the old obsolete. At the time of the writing of the Epistle To The Hebrews, the old was decaying and becoming old. In fact, it was ready to disappear (verse 13). It was "out of gas" and merely coasting on its own religious and cultural momentum. Its demise was closer than they realized. The Old Covenant and all that was associated with it disappeared in A.D. 70 when the Roman army under Titus destroyed the temple and put an end to the old system.

The New Covenant is the everlasting covenant (Hebrews 13:20). Anything else would be abysmally anticlimactic. What would there be to go back to? Animal sacrifices after Christ has

shed His blood and presented it before the Father on our behalf? Never! That would be consummate sacrilege.

No, the New Covenant is God's final and ultimate covenant. There is no other sacrifice and never will be--no other salvation; no other Savior; no other High Priest!

Remember, there is no salvation apart from the Covenant, and no Covenant without the sacrifice.

Also, there are always two parties to a covenant. The two parties to the New Covenant are God and the believer. Like any covenant, the Everlasting Covenant contains both benefits and responsibilities. On His part, God is faithful to His promises, and He has gained our eternal love, devotion, fellowship, and obedience. On our part, we are to give Him our eternal love, devotion, fellowship, and obedience--willingly and gladly. That is our free response to His free grace. And what do we gain?

EVERYTHING!

THE TRUE SANCTUARY

Hebrews 9:1-12

Hebrews 9:1-5. Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. For a tabernacle was prepared: the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary; and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, which had the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. **Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.** (New King James Version).

Remember, the New Covenant includes: the true sanctuary, the effective sacrifice, and the sure promises. The true sanctuary is the subject of Hebrews 9:1-12. The first five verses are a summary of the setting of the old sanctuary without a detailed analysis of each feature.

We notice in verse 1 that the old covenant *had* (used to have) rules and regulations for divine service and also an earthly sanctuary. A sanctuary is a sacred place dedicated to worship and religious procedures. In the Bible, sometimes the term refers to the entire tabernacle compound that was erected in the wilderness, and sometimes it refers only to the two-compartment tent containing the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place.

As we enter the first compartment of the tent (the Holy Place), we see the Table of Showbread ("bread of the presence") on the right side, the Golden Lampstand on the left side, and the Altar Of Incense right in front of the veil. This area took up two-thirds of the tent, and it was as far as the priests could go in performing their priestly duties.

Beyond the veil was the Most Holy Place, the "Holy Of Holies." The Ark of the Covenant with its contents was there.

The golden "censer" (King James Version) was also associated with the Holy Of Holies. The Greek word translated "censer" in the KJV is thymiaterion. In the Septuagint (LXX) Greek version of the Old Testament it means "censer." If the author of the Epistle To The Hebrews is following the Septuagint usage, it means the golden censer that the high priest took with him into the Holy Of Holies once a year. Some scholars prefer this meaning, and there is no compelling reason not to accept it.

Others take it to mean the Altar Of Incense. The Altar Of Incense was physically located in the Holy Place, just outside the Holy Of Holies and next to the veil. If the word thymiaterion refers to the Altar Of Incense, it means that the Altar Of Incense was so closely associated with the Holy Of Holies that it was practically regarded as part of it (because the smoke of the incense filtered into the Most Holy Place itself; or, as the sign on a building is considered to be an appurtenance to the building itself).

Although the setting of the tabernacle is rich with typological meaning, that is not our subject here. Verses 1-5 do not concern the details of the tabernacle and their significance. The subject here is the absolute and permanent superiority of the true sanctuary (that is, the reality in Heaven) over the earthly copy, and how that demonstrates the total contrast between the old covenant and the new.

Hebrews 9:6-10. Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance; the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience--concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. (New King James Version).

Verses 1-5 summarized the *setting* of the Old Testament tabernacle (tent). This section is about the *process* that took place in the old sanctuary and its ineffectiveness to provide true salvation and fellowship with God.

In the Old Testament tabernacle (the actual tent itself), the priests went in and out of the first compartment (the Holy Place) by courses ("teams"). Each priest was assigned to a specific part of the ritual. Luke 1:9 records that when the time came for him and his group to serve in the Holy Place, Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, was assigned to offer incense on the altar of incense before the veil. That was the closest any regular priest could get to the Holy of Holies, and whoever had that assignment did not want to stay there any longer than necessary. That is why the people "marveled that he tarried so long in the temple (Luke 1:21). They did not know that at that very moment Zacharias was having an angelic visitation.

Only the High Priest was permitted to enter into the Holy of Holies, and then only once a year alone with the blood of the sacrifice to atone for the "errors" of the people.

Now, no mercy was provided for those who despised (deliberately rejected) the Law of Moses. They "died without mercy under two or three witnesses" (Hebrews 10:28).

The "errors" (agnoemata) of the people that were atoned for on the Day of Atonement were offenses that had been committed due to ignorance, carelessness, and lack of proper concern.

They were largely thoughtless oversights. The people who committed them did not "despise" the Law of Moses; they just did not take it as seriously and pay as careful attention to it as they should have. It would be like people today running through red lights and stop signs through a careless and irresponsible attitude.

The fact that only the High Priest was allowed to enter into the Holy of Holies was the Holy Spirit's way of making it very clear that the way into the Holiest of all was not yet disclosed (the Amplified Version says "thrown open") as long as the old tabernacle and its rituals were still in place. *There was no personal access to the mercy seat.* Who would want to go back to that? That was the lesson for the Hebrew believers in Jesus Christ, and also for us today.

These gifts and sacrifices that were offered repeatedly in the old tabernacle (and temple) were ineffective to purify the conscience. They did not make the heart of the person offering them right with God; therefore, they could not cure his conscience. Those repeated rituals served a purpose for the time, even though they tended to become "conscience salve" and gave temporary "feel good" relief. They were like the ascetic practices described in Colossians 2:20-23, that had "no value against fleshly indulgence" (NASB).

This elaborate system of regulations regarding food and drink, various washings, and fleshly ordinances was imposed on the people "until the time of reformation" ("setting straight"), that is, the New Covenant order established by Christ.

Hebrews 9:11, 12. But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. (King James Version).

We have seen the setting in verses 1-5 and the process in verses 6-10. Now in verses 11 and 12 we come to the *reality*. It is faith instead of formalism, relationship instead of ritual, substance instead of shadow.

Christ arrived--came on the scene. He is the High Priest of "good things to come." These "good things" are the very things that were "to come" (anticipated) under the old covenant. They are ours right here and now--and forever in Heaven--under the New Covenant. Christ, our High Priest, has provided all these "good things" *through* the "greater and more perfect" tabernacle.

Remember, the "true tabernacle" is not an "ideal" tabernacle, but the real, the true tabernacle that the Lord set up (8:2). *It is the heavenly order itself.* Jesus, our great High Priest, is passed *through* the heavens (4:14) to the right hand of the Father. *That* is the true Holy of Holies. That is the true way of approach to God, of reconciliation to Him, of fellowship with Him. What priceless and eternal "good things" we now have through our High Priest, Who is now in Heaven itself, carrying on His full mediatorial ministry on our behalf!

Jesus Christ did not accomplish this through the blood of goats and calves (goats for the people; calves for the priests--Leviticus 16), but through His own blood. And it was not an act to be repeated annually, as it was in the old tabernacle. He did it once-for-all. "Once-for-all" is the strongest, most intense form of the expression.

This once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ is never to be repeated, not even in the Eucharist. It is to be commemorated, but not repeated.

Jesus entered into the "Holy Place." Again, this is not an "ideal" tabernacle, but the true tabernacle. It is Heaven itself, in the very presence ("face") of God (verse 24). He is on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens (8:1), having obtained ("found") eternal redemption for us.

Redemption means ransom, liberation, release from the penalty. Redemption is the effect and the result of the New Covenant in Christ's blood. "I will forgive their iniquity" (Hebrews 8, quoted from Jeremiah 31:31-34).

When Jesus died on the cross, the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom. That veil was about 30 feet by 60 feet. It symbolized the barrier between humanity and God. And so we read in Hebrews 10:19 and 20 that believers have "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, **that is to say, his flesh**" (KJV, emphasis added).

The sacrifice of Christ's flesh on the cross removed the barrier. The way into the Holiest of all is now open through Jesus Christ to all who truly believe.

9

THE EFFECTIVE SACRIFICE

Hebrews 9:13 - 10:18

Hebrews 9:13, 14. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the

blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (King James Version).

Verse 12 makes the transition from the tabernacle (sanctuary) to the sacrifice. This passage in verses 13 and 14 begins the explanation of what was declared in verse 12.

What was there about Christ's sacrifice that was (and is) absolute in its character and final in its nature, so that it secured eternal redemption for us (verse 12)?

The answer is simple: Christ's sacrifice purges the conscience from dead works and brings the heart into loving obedience to the living God. In contrast, the sacrifices and rituals of the Mosaic Law did not produce spiritual life in those who practiced them. For that reason they could not purge the conscience from the sinful practices that lead to death.

The sacrifice of animals had no power over sin. They did not have the moral influence to stop people from sinning. They did not lead to "repentance from dead works" (Hebrews 6:1). For that reason they could never satisfy the demands of divine justice nor fulfill the necessary conditions for divine mercy. The people as a whole just kept on sinning.

According to Numbers 19, the blood and ashes of the sacrificed animals were offered to "purify" ceremonially the "unclean" (common, unhallowed) flesh of the ones who offered them from ceremonial "contamination."

"How much more!" There is no comparison. The contrast is as great, as complete, as that between life and death. The Old Covenant sacrifices accomplished nothing beyond merely reminding the people of the contrast between the clean and the unclean, and that a substitutionary sacrifice for sin is necessary. They did not have the moral and spiritual power to clear the conscience. By contrast, Christ's sacrifice accomplished everything. The one was total failure, defeat, and death; the other is total success, victory, and life.

Hebrews 9:15-17. And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives. (New King James Version).

Here we are reminded of the necessity of the death of the person who creates a will and testament (in this case, Jesus Christ).

"For the same [reason]" means to purify the consciences of those who repent of dead works (6:1) and believe.

"A death happened" (verse 15) to redeem the transgressions of believers who lived under the Old Covenant. Even the most devout of Old Covenant believers did not have their sins washed

away by the blood of the sacrificial animals. God "passed over" their sins through His forbearance (Romans 3:25) and counted their faith in His temporary provision (the sacrifices) as faith in His permanent provision--the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. They were justified by faith, not by the practices of the Law (see Romans 4).

Jesus Christ is the Mediator of the New Covenant (see also Hebrews 8:6, 12, 24). He made (appointed) it; He proclaimed it; His death put it and all of its provisions into full force. Then He arose from the dead to be the living Administrator of His own will and testament. And believers in Christ are the full beneficiaries!

Hebrews 9:18-22. Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, *This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you.*" Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. And according to the law almost all things are purged with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission. (New King James Version).

This is a review of the dramatic ceremony that inaugurated the first covenant and placed it in force. It is based on Exodus 24:3-8.

The point is that the entire Mosaic Covenant had to be based on blood sacrifice. In fact, that is true of every covenant God has ever made with man.

A covenant establishes the terms of a relationship between God and man. The only way a guilty person can possibly have fellowship with a holy God is through an atoning sacrifice. The innocent must take the place of the guilty and die as his or her substitute. That is the foundational fact that is taught repeatedly throughout the entire practice of offering animal sacrifices, from Adam on until Christ. Without the pouring out of blood no remission (forgiveness of sin, release from guilt and the penalty) is morally and governmentally possible.

"For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that maketh and atonement for the soul" (Leviticus 17:11 KJV).

For that reason everything connected with the Old Covenant had to be "sanctified" by blood: the book itself, the people, the tabernacle, the utensils for worship--almost everything.

Hebrews 9:23, 24. It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. (King James version).

A few years ago my wife gave me a new BMW Roadster. It is a beautiful blue. Its doors and hood open. Its wheels turn. It has bucket seats and "four on the floor." It is about 9 inches long and it sits on the bedroom dresser. Of course, it is an exact scale model, a copy of the real thing.

Now, suppose that was my only concept of a BMW Roadster. Then one day I passed a BMW dealership, went in and saw the real thing. What an amazing, shocking revelation!

That is an idea of the contrast between the heavenly realities and the earthly copies. Although it was necessary under the Old Covenant that the earthly copies of the heavenly realities be purified by blood sacrifices, the heavenly realities themselves required a far better sacrifice.

But only one sacrifice could possibly meet the requirement: the pouring out of the blood of Jesus Christ Himself. Nothing less could satisfy the moral and governmental requirements of divine justice. Therefore, Jesus alone offered the "better" sacrifice. It is better not by limited comparison but by total and absolute contrast.

The heavenly reality, of course, is our approach to God and personal reconciliation with Him. The earthly copy merely modeled and illustrated that in the tabernacle and its sacrifices, altars, furnishings, and sacred enclosures.

Thus the Sacrifice became the High Priest. He is the Lamb on the throne!

How were the heavenly realities purified?

Before Jesus Christ "presented" His blood to the Father in Heaven, Satan and his angels still had access to that realm. Satan accused Job before God (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6). Demons could address God (1 Kings 22:19-22). Satan and his angels were under condemnation for their evil rebellion; still, for some reason God had not yet executed certain sanctions on them. That included not yet expelling them from Heaven. Perhaps God was saving that action until the "great ejection."

Jesus spoke of that event proleptically; that is, He saw it as an accomplished certainty. "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" (Luke 10:18 KJV). Also, God gave John a dramatic account of it in Revelation 12:7-12 (" . . . Satan . . . was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" KJV). Please read and study the entire passage.

Satan can no longer accuse believers before God. He and his angels have been thrown out of Heaven. The sacrifice of Christ has been made. His blood now speaks on our behalf before God. It would be an enormous insult to Jesus Christ if God the Father would allow Satan to accuse believers right in the presence of our sacrificed Lamb, our High Priest, Jesus Christ! The heavenlies have been purified! See Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 2:1.

Hebrews 9:25-28. not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with the blood of another--He then would have had to suffer

often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who early wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation. (New King James Version).

Under the Old Covenant system, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies once a year with the blood of an animal sacrifice. In contrast, Jesus offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice ONCE-FOR-ALL.

If Christ's sacrifice need to be repeated, He would have started at the beginning of human sinning. It is not to be repeated--not in the Eucharist, not in a "mass"--not ever!

Jesus came in "the consummation of the ages" to abolish sin--do away with it--out of our heart, our conscience, our record, our lives. The Greek word is athetesis. It is a legal term that means to set aside, abolish (see Ephesians 2:15; Hebrews 7:18). The purpose of Christ's incarnation--His coming in the flesh--was His sacrifice to do away with sin.

Just as it is appointed to human beings to die once (notice, no reincarnation), and then face judgment, so Christ was once-for-all offered as the effective sacrifice for us. He did so for "the many"--all human beings. It is *sufficient* for all; it is *efficient* (effective) only for those who truly believe and thus become reconciled to God through faith in Christ.

In verse 28 we see the two once-for-all "comings" (appearings) of Christ. The first time He came to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. The second time He will appear "apart from sin." He will come not to bear sin or atone for it (this He already accomplished), but to bring about the final triumph of our salvation.

Unbelievers fear His second coming. But believers "eagerly await" this glorious future event. We love His appearing (2 Timothy 4:8; see also Philippians 3:20).

Hebrews 10:1-4. For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. (King James Version).

The "good things to come" refers to our salvation (9:28) and every blessing that comes with it for time and eternity.

The animal sacrifices offered under the Law of Moses could not purify the conscience, that is, rid it of moral failure and real moral guilt (not merely "guilt feelings"). If they could, they would

not have been offered the second time. The very fact that they were offered repeatedly, year-after-year, proves and demonstrates that they were not the answer to mankind's sin.

The blood of bulls and goats could not take away sins because the sufferings and death of animals do not have sufficient moral influence to break the power of sin in our lives. Seeing an animal suffer and die for one's sins does not move the heart of the sinner to hate sin and forsake it. For this and other reasons animal sacrifices cannot take the place of the penalty under the moral law. The broken law demands a penalty. Either the offender must suffer the penalty, or a substitute must suffer under the penalty on the behalf of the offender. The sufferings and death of the substitute must both bring the offender to cease sinning (repent) and also uphold the honor and integrity of the moral law by suffering under its penalty on behalf of the offender. Only the death of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, could accomplish this. And it did, once and for all!

Hebrews 10:5-10. Therefore, when He came into the world, He said:

"Sacrifice and offering You did not

desire,

But a body You have prepared for Me.

In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin

You had no pleasure.

Then I said, 'Behold, I have come--

In the volume of the book

it is written of Me--

To do Your will, O God.'"

Previously saying, "*Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them*" (which are offered according to the law), then He said, "*Behold, I have come to do your will, O God.*" He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (New King James Version).

This is based on Psalm 40:6-8, which is a prophecy concerning Christ's first coming to be our sacrifice for sin. It emphatically affirms that divine justice is not satisfied by animal sacrifices. To satisfy the moral requirements of divine justice took nothing less than God Himself coming in human flesh in Jesus Christ to die on the cross as our perfect substitutionary Sacrifice. This

required a human body, conceived of the Holy Spirit and prepared in the womb of the virgin Mary.

Christ came to do (fulfill) God's will. That will, that is, that purpose, is to redeem us from our sins and to sanctify us (make us holy, set apart from sin and to Himself) to live for Him in the integrity of a purified and clear conscience. That will, that purpose, could never be accomplished by sacrifices and offerings.

This gives fuller meaning of our Lord's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42).

By fulfilling the will of the Father, Jesus took away the first system of sacrifices and established the second, final, once-for-all sacrifice. *That* accomplished God's will in believers to purify us in heart, conscience, and life.

Hebrews 10:11-14. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. (New King James Version).

Christ's once, permanent sacrifice did what all the other sacrifices together could never do. Christ secured full and perfect salvation to make us permanently (continuously) holy and morally perfected (complete).

As we have already seen in Hebrews 1:3 and 8:1, after Jesus fulfilled God's will in offering Himself as our perfect sacrifice for sin, He arose from the dead, ascended to Heaven, and sat down on the right hand of God the Father.

Christ did not sit down to retire. He is established on a seat of accomplishment, not of inactivity. He is our ever-living Mediator, interceding before the Father in our behalf. He rules triumphant, having made the once-for-all sacrifice for us. In that authority He rules over all, fully anticipating the inevitable and complete subjection of His enemies.

Hebrews 10:15-18. And the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them," then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin. (New King James Version).

This is an encore of Jeremiah 31:31-33, quoted before in Hebrews 8:10-12.

The result of Christ's accomplishment of God's will is the *actual removal* of the sin of those who truly believe on Him. It is finished. There is no further sacrifice, no other sacrifice. There will never be another sacrifice, and Christ's sacrifice is not and will not be repeated.

God will never go back to the sacrifices of the Old Covenant. That would be an unthinkable denial of and insult to the accomplished work of His Son.

Christ's sacrifice is fully sufficient *for* you, but is that sacrifice efficient (effective) *in* you? Is your heart pure, your conscience clear, your life clean? If not, come to Christ now. Surrender to Him in faith. Trust Him alone as your all-sufficient Savior. Let Him live His victorious life in you.

10

THE SURE PROMISES

Hebrews 10:19-39

Hebrews 10:19-21. Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, (New King James Version).

These verses form one long sentence that actually continues through verse 22. It lays down the premise for what follows in verses 22-25.

In Christ we have right now the two possessions mentioned in this passage: confidence to enter the Holy of Holies, and a great Priest over the house of God.

We have confidence to enter the true sanctuary (the presence of God) by a new and living way that Christ dedicated for us through the veil (curtain) that had shut us out. That veil, that curtain, was the barrier of our own failed humanity--that is, our sins that we committed in our flesh as we used the members of our bodies as "tools of unrighteousness" (Romans 6:13). That shut us out from the holy presence of God.

Jesus took our place on the cross. His humanity stood in the place of our humanity, His flesh in the place of ours. As His flesh was ripped open for us, the veil (curtain) was ripped open and the

barrier of our failed humanity was removed. By faith in Christ we now have confidence to come into the Holy of Holies by the blood of the Lamb.

This is the new and living way prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31-33. It is unique. Nothing like it has ever been opened before, and nothing like it will ever be (nor need to be) opened in the future. It accomplished the divine purpose and fulfilled the divine requirement for our reconciliation to God, once and for all.

It is living because it is the reality rather than the shadow. It is a living relationship rather than the symbolic representation of that relationship that was in the Old Covenant.

Also, the Great Priest, Jesus Christ, is now our High Priest over the house of God. He not only represents us *to* the Father; He has also been set over us *by* the Father (Ephesians 1:15-23). Not only have we been reconciled *to* God the Father through Christ; the Father and the Son dwell *in* us (John 14:23). We are the house of God. All of this ties in with Hebrews 3:6 and 4:14-16.

Hebrews 10:22-25. Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye [you] see the day approaching. (King James Version).

Now that we have confidence to enter the Holy of Holies and also have a great High Priest, what are we to do? This section urges us to do three things (the New International Version lists them as four by including the appeal in verse 25).

The Epistle to the Hebrews has been referred to as "a field of 'let us'." These exhortations reemphasize and reinforce the appeals made previously in Hebrews 3:7 through 4:16.

The first appeal to us as believers is to come near to God. We are to do so with a true heart. No insincerity, no hypocrisy, no false pretence can stand in the presence of the Holy One. Half-hearted forms and perfunctory rituals have no place in the Holy of Holies.

We are also to come near in full assurance of faith. Our confidence that we are in a right standing before God rests on the completed work of Christ for us, received and made effective in us by faith. Our High Priest now appears in the presence of God for us (Hebrews 9:24), and God accepts His intercession on our behalf. So we come with full assurance of faith.

We are to come near "having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." This "sprinkling" is the counterpart of the blood of the sacrifices

offered under the Old Covenant. Those sacrifices could not purge the conscience; Christ's sacrifice fully purges the conscience of the believer (Hebrews 9:14).

The idea of our bodies being "washed with pure water" is also the counterpart of the washings of the priests under the Old Covenant, particularly in connection with the offering of the sacrifices. To us this signifies the cleansing of the whole person, inside and out. In Ephesians 5:26 this is identified with the cleansing effect of the word of God in us.

The second appeal is for us to "hold fast" the profession (confession) of our faith without wavering. Get a firm and unshakable grip on the truth that we confess. We confess it because we possess it. It is real. It is an anchor of the soul (Hebrews 6:11, 18, 19). It is our hope, our sure destiny. We are to set our course for Heaven, lock onto it, keep our eyes on Jesus, and "steady as she goes." He is faithful who promised; so our faith rests in His faithfulness. His promises will never fail (Romans 4:20-22).

The third appeal is to consider one another. This means to pay attention to one another for the purpose of helping, strengthening and encouraging one another in the same high and holy calling. We are not alone as we move toward our glorious destiny in Christ. We are part of that "great multitude" John saw on Patmos (Revelation 7:9, 10). We are going forward together as the people of God. We are doing so in love for God and for one another. We are not isolated individuals; we are a unit--a body, a flock, a temple, a family of God. We are not concerned exclusively with ourselves. We are concerned also about our fellow sojourners. For that reason we are to "provoke" (stimulate, stir up, spur on) one another to love, and then to put that love into action in good works. Good works are based on and are the natural outflow of love (Galatians 5:6 and Hebrews 6:10).

The New International Version makes verse 25 a fourth appeal. However, this is a continuation of the previous thought. It is a practical condition of doing what we are commanded in verse 24 to do. In fact, it is a necessity. How can we as believers "consider" (pay attention to, assist, exhort, help) one another if we do not "assemble together" regularly and consistently? It is obvious that we cannot. Professed Christians who have the habit of staying away from church or attending irregularly and spasmodically have no one but themselves to blame if they feel isolated and/or neglected. Believers who are committed to the body of Christ on earth and who make it a priority to be in church if at all possible do not complain about not feeling accepted. They realize how vital it is to come together and encourage one another consistently, and increasingly so as we see the day of Christ's return and the realization of our hope approaching.

Some people have the "custom" of staying away from church. It is a dangerous habit. Resist it; break it.

All of these appeals point to the "better" promises, the "good things to come" mentioned in 9:11 and 10:1. Truly, the day is approaching.

Hebrews 10:26-31. For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "*Vengeance is Mine; I will repay*, says the Lord." And again, "*The Lord will judge His people.*" It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (New King James Version).

This very solemn warning connects with Hebrews 6:4-6. In verse 26 the word "willfully" actually begins the sentence. It means deliberately to go on sinning after receiving the full knowledge of the truth concerning Christ.

We must remember that these were Hebrew believers in Jesus the Messiah who were under heavy pressure and temptation to renounce Him and go back under the Old Covenant system. This informs them that if they do so, they have forfeited the only sacrifice for their sins (verses 1-18). There remains no other sacrifice. The sacrifices they consider returning to are no longer valid. They have been fulfilled in Christ and therefore done away. No sacrifice remains to go back to.

It is worthy of note in passing that apostasy (verses 26 and 31) follows the "forsaking of ourselves together" (verse 25).

Do not join the enemy (verse 27). Unbelief is a doomed rebellion. It fully deserves and will receive the most horrific penalty: judgment and a furious fire that will eat those who oppose God (see Isaiah 26;11). Rejecting Jesus Christ outrages God, insults the gracious Holy Spirit, and makes a person an enemy of God. The penalty is "fiery." Jesus made that very clear (see Mark 9:44-49).

This warning parallels the penalties under the Old Covenant (see Deuteronomy 17:6). It is an urgent appeal to the endangered Hebrew believers made by relating to their highest spiritual nature and convictions. Its purpose is to shock them to their senses.

The Hebrew believer who would deliberately and openly renounce Christ is said to be worthy of a far more severe penalty than those who despised Moses' law. Such a person deserves a penalty far worse than death. Such an apostasy involves three heinous crimes: trampling under foot the Son of God, counting Christ's blood as an unholy (profane) thing, and insulting the gracious Holy Spirit. Certainly, to turn away from Christ is to outrage Almighty God.

The quotation in verse 30 is from Deuteronomy 32:35 and 36. It is quoted also in Romans 12:19. This is not personal revenge. It is legal retribution in order to vindicate God, Who has been so outraged and injured.

The principles so clearly expressed in this passage apply not only to the Hebrew believers to whom they were initially addressed. They are part of the Divine revelation that the Holy Spirit inspired the holy apostles and prophets to embody in His holy word. They apply to all in every generation.

It is a terrifying thing for anyone to fall into the hands of the living God--the God Whose great love has been rejected, Who has been so horribly abused, Whose honor has been treated so contemptuously, and Whose universal authority has been so scorned. Truly, "our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29).

Hebrews 10:32-34. But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. (New King James Version).

We move now from solemn warning to urgent appeal. The readers are called to remember the record of their great spiritual past as believers in Christ.

Memory is a great spiritual asset to believers and a powerful motivator to faithfulness. How often the Holy Spirit has held believers steady or restored them by reminding them of their past struggles and victories, their priceless blessings in Christ, and the precious experience of their fellowship with Him.

The story has been told of a man who decided to turn away from Christ. Before he did so, he wanted to take the time to thank the Lord for all He had done for him. He got down on his knees and said something like this: "Lord, I'm going to say 'goodbye' to You. But before I do, I just want you to know how much I appreciate all You have done for me. I thank you for healing my little daughter when she was so sick. I thank You for supplying my needs when I didn't know where my next meal was coming from. I thank you for all the blessings You gave me, and for all the happy times You and I had together in prayer." He went on like this for a while. As he came to the end of his prayer, suddenly he burst into tears and cried, "Lord, You love me so much! I don't want to lose You, and I don't want to lose this joy and peace I feel inside of me. Please forget what I said at the start. I'm going to keep on serving You!"

These Hebrews had been believers for some time (Hebrews 5:12). They had been enlightened by the full knowledge of the truth (Hebrews 10:26). They had endured a great struggle (athlesis: athletic contest) with afflictions and sufferings.

These believers had been made a spectacle to unbelievers, put on stage as a "sideshow" of "freaks," as it were. They had endured all that, had remained steadfast, and had come through it all victorious in Christ. They had endured it as part of a common brotherhood in Christ, a family of believers. They had suffered ridicule with other believers, "suffering while sympathizing" it has been said. Imprisoned believers had to be fed by other believers. In verse 34 most modern versions read "the prisoners" (see Hebrews 13:3). They had suffered and survived without bloodshed (Hebrews 12:4).

They had endured the confiscation of their property and had done so joyfully, not regarding it as a real "loss" because they knew that their true riches are in Heaven. They had endured without bitterness or retaliation all of these attacks of Satan through those who were motivated by Satan.

Do not throw it all away. Remember!

Hebrews 10:35-39. Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:

"For yet a little while,

And He who is coming will come

and will not tarry.

Now the just shall live by faith;

But if anyone draws back,

My soul has no pleasure in him."

But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul. (New King James Version).

This is a summary made up of an appeal, a warning, and an expression of confidence. Do not throw away your confidence (verse 19). Throwing away is the very opposite of holding fast (verse 23). Keep your eyes focused on the reward (the promise), just as Moses did (Hebrews 11:26). The promise (verse 36) is the reward that awaits the faithful. God is the rewarder of them who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). All of this requires "patience" (endurance). Steadfastness in doing the will of God leads to the promise. We must continue to live out the will of God here on earth before we receive the fulfillment of the promise.

And what is the will of God mentioned here? It is found in verses 7-10. It is God's sanctifying purpose in us, established by Christ (see also Romans 8:28-30, particularly verse 29).

This is not "pie in the sky when you die." It is grace for the race that you face! And a lot more than "pie" awaits beyond the finish line. It is the crown of righteousness (see 2 Timothy 4:8).

Faithfulness has its own rewards. Be steadfast in your relationship with God. The rewards are built into the relationship.

In verse 37 we are assured that Christ will come. This is an essential part of the promise. It has been many centuries since these words were given by the Spirit of God through the author of this epistle. To us this seems much more than "a little while." But to Him to Whom a thousand years is as a day (2 Peter 3:8), it is only a little while. When the moment arrives, the One who will come will do so without delay.

The just shall live by faith (verse 38). This is the fourth time this is stated in the Bible (see also Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11). It is stated here as a preface to the great principles and personalities of faith recorded in Chapter 11. It also reaffirms the necessity of steadfastness. Faith is a life to be lived. The alternative to a steadfast life of faith is to draw back and face the horrible consequences of being rejected by God and forever alienated from Him.

This section ends on a positive note with a ringing assurance of confidence that they (and we) "are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul" (verse 39 New American Standard Bible). Others might and do fall away, but God does not see backsliding in the future of His elect. May we all make our "calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10).

May we all follow the examples of a living faith that we shall meet in Chapter 11.

11

THE LIFE OF FAITH

Hebrews 11:1 - 12:2

Hebrews 11:1. Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (King James Version).

We have just been reminded that the just shall live by faith (10:38). The emphasis is on "live." Living by faith is living in trusting obedience to Christ and His word. True faith purifies the heart (Acts 15:9), works by love (Galatians 5:6), and overcomes the world (1 John 5:4).

Faith is the "substance" of things hoped for. The word is hupostasis: "that which stands under"--"sub-stance"--basis.

The Christians' hope is "that which is absolutely certain." It is our destiny. It is "eternal life eternally." That hope is an anchor of the soul, anchored out of our sight in Heaven (Hebrews 6:19). Our faith rests in the absolute verities of Christ's word. His word is the basis--the foundation--of that certainty.

Faith is also the evidence of things not seen. Suppose that you purchase an item that is not in stock and has to be ordered. The seller requires that the item be paid for before it is ordered. The seller then gives you a receipt marked, "paid in full." The item will arrive in about 30 days. During that 30 day period your receipt is the evidence of something not seen as yet.

So it is with faith. We have the evidence. It is given to us by God Himself in His word and in His redemptive work in Jesus Christ. Christ died; Christ arose; Christ ascended; Christ will return. That is abundant evidence, even absolute proof, of the reality of what we as believers do not yet see.

Hebrews 11:2, 3. For by it [faith] the elders received a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. (King James Version).

Almost the entire eleventh chapter of Hebrews is taken up with the record of how the ancient believers under the Old Covenant lived by faith. It demonstrates that the just have always lived by faith no matter under what dispensational arrangement they lived. Each one exemplifies one or more characteristic of victorious faith. It is faith's "Hall Of Fame."

We start with the creation of the ages (verse 3). How do we really know about the origin of things, including time itself? It was an unobservable event. It is not reproducible under controlled conditions. That puts the event outside of the self-imposed limits of the scientific method. It is understood only by faith.

Please notice where the word "not" is placed in verse 3. This statement stands against the ancient theory of the eternity of matter. It declares that the Creator is before the creation.

So then, any theory of the origin of the universe is a statement of faith. The data belong to all of us. How we interpret the data is a matter of one's "faith." It has been said that we are all biased; the question is: "what is the best bias to be biased by?"

Thus it is by faith that we understand that the ages and all that they contain "were framed by the word of God." That is not "blind faith." On the contrary, it is a most reasonable faith, a faith that

is built on a strong foundation of Divine revelation that accords most naturally with the empirical data that, taken together, best fit the creation model. We are driven to the position that it all had to be created ex nihilo by an infinitely intelligent, all powerful and caring Deity.

Hebrews 11:4. By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts, and by it he being dead yet speaketh. (King James Version).

We come now to Abel, a son of Adam and Eve. Abel offered an animal sacrifice, a blood sacrifice, to God. This was an act of humility and faith in God's mercy. Cain brought an offering "of the fruit of the ground" (Genesis 4:3). This was an act of pride, an assertion that he was acceptable the way he was, a statement that he did not need nor want to follow the principle that God established when He clothed his mother and father with "coats of skins" (Genesis 3:21). In effect Cain was saying, "my offering, produced by the ground that God cursed, is good enough and the fig leaves should have been good enough for my father and mother." Cain's act was permeated with pride and rebellion.

God accepted Abel's offering and thus declared him righteous--justified by faith. Abel died because of his faith and in his faith, murdered by his own brother. This was the first instance of the wicked hating the righteous, and it certainly was not the last.

Abel's blood cried to God from the ground. His example of justification by faith still speaks to us. True faith always comes to God by the "more excellent sacrifice, the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ that Abel's offering pointed to.

Hebrews 11:5, 6. By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please him, for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (King James Version).

Enoch is the next example of justification by faith. Enoch was translated to Heaven without going through physical death. The point here is that Enoch pleased God. This means that he lived a life of faith, because true faith always aims at pleasing God. Verse 6 goes on to tell us that without this true faith it is impossible to please God.

The person who comes to God must have two facts firmly established in his or her mind and heart: God is; God rewards those who diligently seek Him.

One can go half-hearted through forms of prayer if he or she is not sure God truly exists. But the person who truly believes that He is "the God who is there" goes far beyond "vain repetitions." When we truly mean business, we will seek God diligently. We will pray prayers that God will take seriously, prayers that are commensurate with the importance and urgency of the need, prayers according to God's will, prayers from a pure heart and a right motive. These will be true

prayers of faith because we are absolutely sure that God's promises are sure, and therefore that we will be rewarded in our faith according to the will of God.

It has been said that God always answers prayer. Sometimes He says "yes." Sometimes He says "no." Sometimes He says "wait." And sometimes He says "you've got to be kidding!"

Often we do not receive the answers to our prayers immediately. God has His timing. Sometimes God is working out a whole set of events in the process of answering our prayers. Sometimes God allows us to seek Him regarding a need over a period of time because He is wanting to do something of eternal importance and value in us, and He is using the occasion to bring us closer to Himself so He can accomplish His greater work. When we do receive the answer, we might also receive something far more important in the process--a closer relationship with our heavenly Father.

We are living in a mechanistic culture. We put a quarter in the machine, pull a lever or push a button, and we expect something to happen immediately. But God is not a vending machine. We cannot have an intimate, personal relationship with a vending machine. God loves us and wants us to know Him very deeply and intimately. That takes time and commitment. It means praying beyond the "gimmies." It requires seeking Him diligently. To accomplish this God at times allows us to pray about something for a while before giving it to us.

Hebrews 11:7. By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. (King James Version).

"Noah, it is going to rain."

"What's rain, Lord?"

"It is wet, like the dew that covers the ground, only it comes in drops--billions and billions of them. And it will keep coming until it covers the earth. Build an ark, a big one. Here are the plans . . ."

Now this is when faith goes into action, when a person starts really *living* by faith. Noah had nothing physical to go by: no experience and no history of flooding, no indicators that it was going to happen, no climatological points of reference to suggest that it would or even could happen. Nothing.

Nothing, that is, except the sheer, direct word of God. For faith, that is enough.

What a sight! Over time it must have become the talk of the middle east.

"Have you seen it? It's a monstrosity! It's been umpteen years now, and the crazy old man and his boys are just getting started. Says there's going to be a flood, whatever that is, and God's going to destroy us if we don't repent. Hah!"

Years stretched into decades. Day by day, year by year, the ark slowly took shape, a visible "pulpit" from which Noah continued to preach righteousness to his generation. It was a message that fell on deaf ears and was met only with laughter and jeers.

But Noah pressed on. No "easy believism" here. He lived by faith. He had the word of God Himself, and that was the absolute and all-sufficient foundation of his faith. No wonder he is included among those who were justified by faith.

Oh, yes, after many decades of God's enduring mankind's insolence, the flood finally came. The record of that cataclysm is written both in The Scriptures and in the witness of the geological data. What God said is true. It always is.

Hebrews 11:8-22. By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as he stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city. By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac, and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called, accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from whence also he received him in a figure. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel, and gave commandment concerning his bones. (King James Version).

We are impressed by how much of this chapter is devoted to Abraham and his immediate family. He is perhaps above all the primary Old Covenant example of faith and therefore of justification by faith.

"When he was called, . . . obeyed." All through this chapter we see the essential connection between belief and obedience. Together they become faith, just as the two sides of a coin form the coin.

Here Abraham demonstrates the truth that faith obeys even when it does not see the ultimate outcome of its commitment. It is like driving at night to a city a hundred miles away. The automobile's headlights do not shine the entire distance from the start. But we do not say, "No way! I'm not getting out on that freeway until I see ahead every curve in the road!" We drive in the light of our headlights, and as we do, the light keeps shining ahead of us until we see the sign of the city limits.

So it is with faith. We proceed in the light God gives us. As we do, God continues to illuminate the way before us. Eventually, the "headlights" of faith will bring the New Jerusalem into view and we will be home!

Abraham and his family kept moving. He "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God," and so do we. He finally found it, and so will we.

It was through faith that Sarah received the renewal of the childbearing function of her body, and Isaac was born. I get amused when I put this in a modern setting. Abraham and Sarah walk into a real estate office. Abraham says, "Hello. I'm Abraham, and this is my wife, Sarah. I'm a hundred years old. She's 90 years old. We're looking for a house near a school."

Does faith in God's promises bring results? The descendants of Abraham and Sarah populate Israel and many other parts of the world, including a sizeable part of the population of New York City.

"These all died in the faith, not having received the promises" (see verses 13-16). This does not refer to the earthly promises. It refers to the promises that are now fulfilled under the New Covenant. Remember, Jesus said, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8:56). They "reached out" for the better country, the heavenly, where God prepared for them a heavenly city. That is where they are now, and that is where all who are made righteous by faith will join them and live eternally in the presence of God.

God is not ashamed of them, and He is not ashamed of any and all who put their trust in Him and walk the path of faith. He is not ashamed to call them brothers (Hebrews 2:11).

We come next to the consummate act of Abraham's faith: the "sacrifice" of Isaac (verses 17-19).

"When he was tested." Certainly this was not the first time that Abraham was "tried" (tested). His faith had been tested and proven many times. His life was an on-going process of faith development. This was the ultimate test.

Now, remember that God had made a covenant with Abraham. He told him that He would multiply his "seed" as the stars in the heavens and as the grains of sand on the seashore (see

Genesis 15:5; 22:17). Furthermore, this was to happen through Isaac. Isaac was the essential link in the chain.

Then God commanded Abraham to take Isaac and offer him up as a burnt offering! Now, that does not "compute." The two Divine statements are irreconcilable. Had it been almost any one of us, we would have been devastated, our faith shattered.

"How can this be? Has God forgotten His promise? Has He changed His mind and broken His covenant? How can the Almighty, the true and living God, act like the vain gods of the people around us by requiring me to sacrifice my own son? Human sacrifice! No. NO! It cannot be!"

Not Abraham. According to the record, Abraham's faith never wavered. Without hesitation he set out to do what God commanded. We read the record in Genesis 22.

As they approached the mountain, Isaac said, "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" (verse 7). What a question to ask at a time like this. Perhaps it had been on Isaac's mind all the time, and the moment had come when it just had to be asked.

Notice Abraham's reply. "God will provide himself a lamb." *God will provide.*

Let's go back and notice also what Abraham had said to the men who accompanied them: "I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship and return to you" (Genesis 22:5 NASB). *I and the lad.* In other words, *we* are going to worship and sacrifice, and *we* are coming back!

Faith in God is the result of *knowing* God: who He is and what He said. Abraham had some things about the character of God firmly settled in his soul: God is true; God is just; God is faithful; God can and must be trusted, no matter what. Abraham's faith had grown through the years as God had demonstrated His faithfulness in the lesser challenges. Each experience had strengthened Abraham's faith to the point where now he was prepared for the ultimate test.

Abraham knew that if he went ahead and sacrificed Isaac as a burnt offering and all that was left of his son was a pile of ashes and charred bones, Almighty God--the true and faithful God he knew and with whom he had walked all those years--could take that pile of ashes and charred bones and still bring to pass through Isaac every covenant promise He made!

That kind of faith does not grow overnight. It is not attained by being spiritually unstable, wishy-washy, up and down, in fellowship with God one week and out the next. It is the result of holding steady with God and trusting Him through good times and bad. It does not say, "I used to believe until" It says, "I believe . . . period!"

Yes, Abraham had some things about God firmly settled in his soul. *And so must we.* Our faith must rise from what God *does* to who He *is*. Sooner or later every believer will experience testing times when he or she cannot understand why God is allowing certain things to happen. In those times we must affirm who God *is*, even though we cannot figure out what He is doing. If we trust God only so far as we understand what He is doing or allowing to be done, we are not

trusting Him; we are trusting only our understanding of Him. If we are going to have the faith that "follows through," we must trust God beyond the limits of our understanding. That is not faith contrary to reason, but faith beyond the limits of reason. It is confidence that God knows the higher reason.

The roll call of faith goes on to Isaac, to Jacob, to Joseph, to Moses.

Hebrews 11:23-38. By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw *he was* a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment. By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry *land*: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days. By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace. And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of *cruel* mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. (King James Version).

Moses provides an example of another quality of triumphant, "follow-through" faith--a proper sense of real and eternal values.

Many people are deceived into thinking that the world and the flesh have a lot to offer them. That is "peanuts" compared to what was offered to Moses. As the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, he was surrounded with every opportunity to indulge "the pleasures of sin for a season" to the full had he chosen to do so.

And treasures? Egypt had treasures. My wife and I had the opportunity to view the treasures of King Tut's tomb when they were on display in New Orleans. We saw more gold in an hour or so than in our entire lifetime otherwise.

But Moses saw something else. He saw what was eternally valuable. And so he chose to suffer affliction with the people of God. He esteemed reproach for the sake of Christ far more valuable than the treasures in Egypt. In effect, Moses said, "You can keep all the pleasures, the position, the power, the fame, the wealth. I see something far more valuable. Let me suffer with the people of God. Give me reproach for Christ. I see the eternal reward!"

If we are going to have a faith that overcomes, we must have a proper sense of and commitment to real and eternal values. Early in our Christian walk we must settle it in our hearts and minds once and for all that Jesus Christ is worth more than anything, everything, and anybody. If we consider something to be of more importance to us than Jesus Christ--even life itself--we will eventually sell Christ for it. It might be only a "mess of pottage" or thirty pieces of silver. The devil has it in stock and he knows just when to offer it to us.

It is possible to hold two pennies so close to one's eyes that they shut out the view of the ocean and even the heavens. Just so, it is possible for us to allow something that is not worth two cents in the light of eternity to get so close to our spiritual "eyes" that we lose our view of Christ and Heaven itself. It is not the value or the size that matters, but how close it is to our vision. It is "spiritual nearsightedness" of the worst and most destructive kind. We must continue to keep our eyes on "Him who is invisible."

Under the leadership of Moses the Israelites kept the Passover. Under Joshua they marched through the Red Sea on dry ground.

On it goes, one victory after another by faith in God, in many cases even through suffering and death itself on their march to eternal triumph. They all demonstrate the fact that the just have always lived by faith.

Hebrews 11:39, 40. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. (King James Version).

Because of their faith and their faithfulness they received God's approval, even though that faith awaited its fulfillment by us, that is, by who we are as new covenant believers and what we now have in Christ. What we now have in Christ is what they looked forward to and what now completes them. We now join them in the completed salvation and the promised future blessings in Christ.

Nevertheless, we who are still alive must continue to run the race of faith.

Hebrews 12:1, 2. Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising

the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (New King James Version).

If we read the eleventh chapter of Hebrews and do not read the first two verses of chapter twelve, we have missed the point of the passage. "Therefore" in verse one means "for which reason." In view of everything the eleventh chapter has said, here is the main point, the application, the urgent appeal.

To understand this passage we must picture in our minds the great athletic contests of that day. We are in a large stadium. The place is packed. The air is charged with excitement. This is the day of the big race.

One section is reserved for the veteran athletes: the champions who have run the race, set the records, and are now in the "Hall Of Fame." Nothing inspires a young runner more than to look up, see these victors, and hear them call down: "Come on, boy! I ran that race and you can, too! Give it your best! Give it everything you have!"

In the race of faith who are these victorious champions? We have just been reading about them in chapter 11. They are part of the "cloud of witnesses" that surround us. Specifically, these are witnesses to the fact that faith is the victory that overcomes the world, as we read in 1 John 5:4.

"Let us lay aside every weight." We are told that in those days the runners would practice with weights attached to their ankles. Then, when the real race came, they would remove them. With the weights gone, they felt like flying!

So what are our "weights"? They are anything that hinders our spiritual progress, anything that tarnishes our Christian witness, anything that keeps us from growing in Christ, anything that keeps us from being our best for God. It might not be sinful in itself. However, if it is an impediment to us spiritually, we are directed to lay it aside. This is not a practice run. *This is the real thing!*

Suppose someone goes out for track showing up wearing a pair of hip boots, a heavy jacket and a 40 pound packsack. The coach says, "Are you going to run with these things on?" The would-be runner replies, "Coach, there's nothing in the rule book that says 'You shall not run in the race wearing hip boots, a jacket, and a packsack'." The coach would let him know in no uncertain terms, "There's nothing in the rule book that says you can't wear these things, but you'll never win the race with all that stuff hanging on you!"

"And the sin that so easily ensnares us." Suppose the runners are coming down the home stretch. Every heart is pounding; every muscle is strained to the limit. Suddenly a dog gets loose and is running among the legs of the athletes, threatening to trip up some of them.

"Oh, no!" The groan goes over the entire stadium. This is no time to stumble and fall, to lose time and momentum, to be thrown off the track and possibly injured! Everybody in that stadium wants to grab that pooch and get it out of there.

These are the "besetting" (ensnaring, entangling) sins, the sins that push us "off track," that cause us to stumble and fall. We pick ourselves up, limp in pain, shake it off, confess and repent, ask for forgiveness and restoration, get back on track and try to regain spiritual momentum and make up lost time and progress.

We are commanded to lay this aside. It reminds us of 2 Corinthians 7:1, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (KJV).

We need God's grace; still, grace does not remove our responsibility to make a commitment, to "cleanse ourselves." God is not going to deliver us on any terms that relieves us of the obligation to make a consecration. We cannot bypass the cross.

"Run with patience." The Christian life is a marathon, not a hundred yard dash. We do not win by fits and starts. Discipleship means setting a strong, consistent pace, and following through.

"Looking unto Jesus" (fixing our eyes on Him; looking away from all distractions). We are told that as the runners came down the home stretch, the judge would step forward and stand just beyond the finish line, holding the garland wreath (crown) in his hands. Every runner focused intently on the judge and on the crown. The runners did not care what the crowd was saying or doing. So to speak, they did not care if "Aunt Matilda" was watching, or if some drunk was calling them names and throwing empty beer cans at them. They had one thing in mind: get to that judge and that crown!

When the winner crossed the finish line, the judge stepped up to meet him. As the runner fell exhausted into the arms of the judge, the judge reached up and placed the crown on his head while the stadium burst into cheers.

We who run the race must do the same thing. We must not allow anything or anyone to distract us or discourage us. Watch out for self pity. It is one of our worst enemies. If the devil can get you feeling sorry for yourself, he has pulled you down into defeat. Shake it off. Do not get your eyes on yourself, on people, or on circumstances around you. Keep looking just beyond the finish line. Keep your eyes on Jesus. Nobody has ever lost the race while focusing on Him.

Remember what Paul wrote: ". . . forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high [upward, heavenward] calling of God in Christ Jesus" (KJV).

"The Author and Finisher of our faith." Christ did not start you out and then say, "I hope you make it." He is running with you, setting your pace. He will never leave you nor forsake you. He started you out and He will take you across the finish line.

"Who for the joy that was set before Him" Now we see what that means. Jesus ran the race. The cross was His home stretch. He endured the cross, despising the shame, as He focused on the joy that was set before Him just beyond the finish line.

And what was that joy? It was the joy of saving us, the joy of His resurrection and His ascension to the right hand of God the Father, the joy of going to prepare a place for us, the joy of coming again to receive us to Himself so that where He is we shall be also--with Him forever and ever!

And where is He now? He is now seated "at the right hand of the throne of God." And He says to every victorious believer, "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Revelation 3:21 New King James Version).

Because of the sustaining grace of God, may we all be able to say as Paul did at the end of his race, "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7, 8 KJV).

12

DISCIPLINE FOR OUR DESTINY

Hebrews 12:3-29

Accept The Discipline Of The Lord: Hebrews 12:3-11.

Hebrews 12:3, 4. "For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin." (New King James Version).

The metaphor now changes from the athletic to the military.

Ponder the sufferings and verbal hostility ("contradiction" KJV) that Christ endured and compare ours with His. For most of us the contrast should strengthen our allegiance to our Lord and keep us from the fatal collapse of the soul. This sets the tone and the rest of the chapter reinforces it and expands on it.

These Hebrew believers (and most of us) have not yet resisted the hostility of sinners to the point of having our blood spilled for the faith. Some of the martyrs in chapter eleven did. Far above and beyond them all we focus on Jesus and His blood that was shed not only as a result of the hostility of sinners but primarily for our sins and the sins of the whole world.

Hebrews 12:5, 6. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:

"My son, do not despise the chastening

of the Lord,

Nor be discouraged when you are

rebuked by Him;

For whom the Lord loves He chastens,

And scourges every son whom He

receives." (New King James Version).

We as believers must recognize that there is a divine purpose in our suffering. Our passage quotes Proverbs 3:11 and 12 to support this principle. This is also the recurrent theme of the apostle Peter's first epistle (for example, 1 Peter 4:12-14). This is a good time to review chapter 10, verses 32 -36. God is preparing us for our glorious eternal destiny by building solid character qualities in us; and remember, character is forever.

Our steadfastness under trials and temptations is much deeper than merely "keeping a stiff upper lip." It is the result of our confidence that God is working in and through the situation to produce in us these priceless and eternal character qualities. God does not waste our adversities as believers. If we will hold steady in faith and let God have His way, He will maximize each situation for our good and His glory.

We notice that Proverbs 3:11 and 12 (quoted here in Hebrews) is speaking to us as "sons." One of the divine purposes in believers' trials and tribulations is corrective. Much of what we go through does not come through the "hostility of sinners." We bring much of it on ourselves. We become overly self-confident and perhaps even cocky. We take matters into our own hands and

get ahead of God instead of waiting on Him. We become impulsive and get out of hand, setting ourselves up for a prudent but painful spanking from our loving Heavenly Father.

"With hasty and impatient hands we tangle up the plans the Lord has wrought;

"And when we cry in pain, He says, 'Be still, My child, while I untie the knot'."

--Author unknown.

Let us not despise our Father's chastening but take it very seriously. Learn all we can from it and maximize its benefits for our good and His glory. Again, as in verse three, we are urged not to be discouraged ("faint," collapse) under it. Pray, "Lord, help me to learn what You want me to learn from this so I won't have to go through it again!"

Some of God's "sons" seem to set themselves up for more frequent correction. The story is told of a father back in a more harsh and less enlightened time who disciplined his sons with an old-fashioned razor strap. He kept it hanging on a wall as a sobering reminder. Over it one of the sons hung the motto: "I need thee every hour."

God loves us. He is deeply committed to the way we turn out. For that reason He is very purposeful in His discipline of us. He "scourges" (literally, "whips"--ouch!) every son whom He receives (accepts and welcomes as a son). Sometimes God gently reproves us; at other times it takes a *whipping* to bring us to our senses. The point is this: because the stakes are so high, *the discipline has to go as far as necessary*.

How far it has to go is up to us. God does not want it to go any farther than necessary. "For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men" (Lamentations 3:33 NIV).

According to Romans 8:28-30, God has predestined the elect "to be conformed to the image of His Son." In other words, if you are making your calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10), God is determined that you will be like Jesus, whatever it takes. So it is our choice whether we come the easy way or the hard way. So, let's not make it any tougher on ourselves than necessary.

Hebrews 12:7-11. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (New King James Version).

Believers in Christ are being "fathered." Our endurance is for our discipline, our maturity. The sinner might get by with some things that God will not allow us to get by with. My father never

spanked the neighbors' kids. They might misbehave, but my father never let *me* get by with it. Why? Because he was *my* father, and he was personally and directly concerned about how I turned out. According to verse seven, this is the natural relationship that should exist between every father and son.

Then what about the undisciplined person in verse eight? In this adulterous and sinful generation there are men who "sire" children and then abandon them. Many times the sex act took place without the thought of the resulting child ever entering his mind. We sense the pain of Aldonza in The Man From La Mancha as she cries out concerning her "father": "Mine was a regiment here for an hour, I can't even tell you which side."

A man who begets a child and then abandons his offspring rejects his paternal relationship and responsibility. He is not concerned about how it is raised. It is the mother who struggles with the task of being both father and mother with the help of God (Psalm 68:5), family, church, community, and state. The onus of illegitimacy is not on the child but on the parents, particularly on the abandoning parent.

How does this apply to God? Isn't He the Father of all human beings? All believers in Christ receive our Father's discipline. Then what about the people who live their lives without divine discipline?

First, in one sense God is the Father of all human beings (Malachi 2:10; Acts 17:29; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Hebrews 12:9). This applies to His relationship to us as Creator/Sustainer and His relationship to us as Ruler/Judge. It is important to keep the two relationships distinct from each other. For example: if a judge's son is convicted of a felony, and his father is the only judge qualified to pass the required sentence in the case, that judge must fulfill his legal and ethical duty however painful it is to him as a father. If he refused to do so, he would fail to do his duty as a judge and also violate his personal integrity by placing his fatherly affection above the public interest.

Likewise, our loving heavenly Father is also our Judge, and the only qualified Judge. Verse 9 declares that God is the Father of our human spirit, and only if we abandon our wicked rebellion against Him will we live.

In the spiritual and moral sense, not all human beings are children of God. Jesus said to the Pharisees, "You are of your father, the devil" (John 8:44). Only when we come into a right relationship with God do we receive "the Spirit of adoption" and become truly children of God (John 1:12; Romans 8:14-17; 2 Corinthians 6:17, 18).

So then, the person who rejects God as his or her Father places himself/herself outside of the discipline of discipleship. In effect, that person is saying, "I have no heavenly Father to obey or from whom I have any desire to learn anything." God will oppose that person for his or her good and make the way of transgression hard with a view to bringing that person to repentance and

faith; however, that is not the same as the nurturing discipline of a usually obedient child by its Father in a covenant relationship.

Verses 9 and 10 continue the analogy between discipline by earthly fathers and discipline by our heavenly Father. We recall the discipline that our earthly fathers gave us. Some of it was fair and just; some of it was not. Some was too severe; some was not severe enough. They made mistakes. Some of their discipline was done to vent their anger; some of it was done in cool reason. However imperfectly it might have been carried out, two things were certain: it was temporary (we grew up), and it was effective. *We gave them reverence*. That was the pay-off. That was the ultimate benefit to us.

Now, our heavenly Father *always* disciplines us for our good. His discipline is specific and precisely what we need. It is always fair and exact both in its kind and in its degree. It is never too much or too little. Earthly fathers make mistakes; God never does.

And it has its purpose: *His holiness in us*. The character of God defines the discipline, and His character is always demonstrated in the discipline.

Verse 11 assures us that, although divine discipline is unpleasant and even painful, it certainly is productive. It is a bitter root that produces sweet fruit, "the peaceable fruit of righteousness." Righteousness is the product; peace is its nature. This peace consists in moral harmony with God; it is conformity to His character and therefore results in a deep and sweet fellowship with Him. An example of this is the harmony that exists between an earthly father and his happily obedient son.

An undisciplined person has no peace and gives others no peace. So Proverbs 29:17 instructs us: "Correct your son, and he will give you rest; yes, he will give delight to your soul" (NKJV).

"The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17 KJV).

Renew Your Spiritual Vitality (Hebrews 12:12-17).

The discourse on our discipline leads to this obligation. It is our obligation in view of the purpose of the discipline--to prepare us for our destiny. This is the "big leagues." Believers are in the "Super Bowl" of life. How should we respond? Verses 12-14 issue three commands.

Hebrews 12:12-14. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. (King James Version).

These commands contain an echo of Isaiah 35:3 and Job 4:3, 4. They are in the dramatically imperative mood: "Up with the drooping hands and steady those wobbly knees! Walk straight

and make straight tracks! Pursue peace and holiness!" Without holiness no one will see the Lord.

Walk straight in daily life. Make straight and plain tracks for others to follow. We are not walking the path of Biblical discipleship alone. Some are walking with us; others are following us. We are responsible not only for ourselves but also for how our walk affects theirs. Let us not create an uneven path that would cause others to twist already injured or weakened spiritual "legs." Many people have a "limp" in their spiritual walk. Let us show them the healing path.

And how do we make straight paths? No one who puts his hand to the plow and keeps looking back will make a straight furrow (Luke 9:62). The only way to make straight and true tracks is to set the right goal, keep our eyes on it, and pursue it diligently.

Our eternal destiny is the goal; lock the heart and mind onto it; pursue peace and holiness because the "highway of holiness" (Isaiah 35:8) is the only route to it.

The holiness mentioned here is God's holiness. It is the path of moral, spiritual harmony and fellowship with God.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God" (Matthew 5:8, 9 KJV).

The unholy and the selfish will never "see" God at the end of their road. Neither will they enjoy the pleasant, scenic "highway of holiness" that leads to Heaven.

Pay attention (Hebrews 12:15-17).

Hebrews 12:15-17. Looking diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears." (New King James Version).

We are to pay attention to ourselves and also to other believers, watching over our souls and theirs, helping to keep one another on the path of righteousness. There is no room for a presumptuous unconditional security that takes the destiny for granted no matter how we live. This entire chapter is charged with the dynamics of diligence. Although the security is there, it is conditional. We still must run the race and make our "calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10).

These verses contain three "lests" or "thats."

Do not let anyone fall short of the grace of God. Christ's sheep must continue to hear His voice and follow Him to continue in His fellowship, which is eternal life.

Do not let any root of bitterness sprout up and grow (see Deuteronomy 29:18). What happens to us and what people do to us will either make us bitter or make us better. God is able to make all things work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28) if we will let them. But if we do not receive His grace and allow God to make things work together for our good, we will allow ourselves and others we influence to become stained with bitterness, that fatal poison of the soul.

Do not allow ourselves to fall into moral failure or a secular disregard for what is holy and worthy. Two widely accepted but wrong-headed mindsets are at work here. The one assumes that sexual sins are not the most serious; the other assumes that "spiritual" matters are intangible and therefore have no practical value. The first is in direct conflict with The Scriptures (see 2 Peter 2:9, 10) and the realities of human experience; the other results in the loss of the soul, both here and hereafter.

The profane (unholy) person has no regard for his or her eternal destiny and therefore places no value on the high destiny and privilege of sonship. The Biblical example is Esau, who for the sake of immediate and momentary gratification sold his birthright for a bowl of stew. Later he lost his blessing also. After he had foolishly forfeited everything of high value, he tried in vain to reverse the results of his attitude and actions. Though he regretted the results of what he had done, he still remained a "profane person" at heart.

The lesson for us: if we sell our birthright, we will forfeit the blessing.

Two Mountains (Hebrews 12:18-24).

Hebrews 12:18-24. For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore (For they could not endure what was commanded: *"And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or thrust through with an arrow."* And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, *"I am exceedingly afraid and trembling."*) But you have come to mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel." (New King James Version).

The first mountain is Mount Sinai (verses 18-21). It is the mountain of terror, the mountain that makes us retreat because of our sins. The other is Mount Zion (verses 22-24). It is the mountain that attracts us. It represents the heavenly Jerusalem, the glories of our destiny, our eternal fellowship with God and with the redeemed, and all that we have both now and forever through the redemption that is in Christ. Galatians 4:21-31 describes another similar contrasting analogy.

We as believers in Christ are not standing at Mount Sinai. We have been set free from it, having died to the law (Romans 7:1-4). We are now standing at Mount Zion. We are alive in Christ, and this new standing, this new relationship, accomplished for us and in us what the Old Covenant could not accomplish. This passage is an appeal to our higher status in Christ by grace under the New Covenant. It pictures our intimate, awe-inspiring, glorious fellowship with: angels, saints, the Father, the Son, and the past faithful now perfected (see Hebrews 11:40). It is all ours through "the blood that speaks better things than that of Abel." The blood of Abel cried out from the ground for justice and resulted in Cain's expulsion; the blood of Christ speaks from Heaven and heralds forgiveness that results in acceptance.

Even though as believers we are still on earth, our citizenship is in Heaven (Philippians 3:20).

Heed The Heavenly Voice (Hebrews 12:25-29).

Hebrews 12:25-29. See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "*Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.*" Now this, "*Yet once more,*" indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire. (New King James Version).

The chapter concludes with this final warning, prophetic application, and practical appeal.

Verse 19 says that those who heard the commanding voice at Sinai begged that "the word should not be spoken to them anymore" (see Exodus 20:19). They refused to hear the word of the Law and therefore did not escape the consequences of their refusal. Now, God has spoken to us by His Son (Hebrews 1:1, 2). The word of God has been spoken to us in the gospel. If we turn away from Christ, the living Word, God's supreme "speaking," how much more certain it will be that we shall not escape the consequences of *our* refusal.

How powerful is God's voice? At Sinai it shook the mountain and the surrounding terrain. But once more in the future consummation of the age it will shake "not only the earth, but also heaven" (a direct quotation from Haggai 2:6 and 21). The key words here are "yet once more." This is the final shaking that signifies the complete removal of the present physical order.

This passage has great eschatological (end time) significance. It is the key to every Biblical prophecy regarding the future shaking of the earth (and heaven).

The urgent message for us is this: hold on to the unshakable and immovable kingdom, as it is the only thing that cannot be shaken, the only permanent reality; God's grace is given to us to keep us serving Him in a way that is well-pleasing to Him, with alert awe and reverence.

God is not to be treated lightly. Heaven and Hell are not to be treated lightly. God's eternal purpose and our destiny in it as believers are not to be treated lightly. Why? Because our God, Who has spoken the marvelous wonders of His grace in Jesus Christ, is the same God Who spoke at Sinai and Who will speak yet once more at the consummation of this age. And He is a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24).

Remember, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31).

13

LIVING THE NEW COVENANT IN LOVE

Hebrews 13:1-25

In Chapter 12:28 we read that God's all-sufficient grace is available to all who will receive it. His grace is available so that we will serve God in a well-pleasing manner. This final chapter describes how we are to live. In verses 1-17 we see that love is the natural order, the natural course, of New Covenant living. Some of the instructions are moral, some are practical, some are spiritual. They are all part of living the New Covenant in love.

Love Is The Natural Course Of New Covenant Living.

Hebrews 13:1-4. Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body. Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled; but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge. (King James Version).

Let brotherly love continue. It is the natural course. Let it flow. Remove all hindrances and pollutants from the stream.

Love is expressed in hospitality (verse 2). In practicing hospitality some have entertained angels without realizing it (as in Genesis 18 and 19). Jesus said that they who showed hospitality to "the least of these my brethren" were in a real sense showing it to Him (Matthew 25:35).

Ancient inns were disreputable. Believers were (and still are) encouraged to host fellow-believers in a way that love requires them to do. Romans 12:13 urges us to be "given to hospitality." And in his first epistle (2:9) the apostle Peter likewise instructs us to "use hospitality without grudging (complaining)."

Love is expressed also in our kindness to those in prison, particularly fellow-believers who are imprisoned for the faith (verse 3). Jesus mentioned this when He spoke to the sheep on His right hand (Matthew 25:36). When they came to those who were in prison, in effect they came to Him.

Jesus identifies with every believer in every circumstance of life, feeling their pain and suffering with them. When we show Christian love to one another in practical ways, empathizing with them and suffering with them, we are actually showing it to Christ. We are experiencing His compassion toward them. We are feeling with them and with Him.

Love is expressed to one another in moral purity (verse 4; see also 12:16). God created marriage, confined human sex to it, and set solid protective boundaries around it. We deceive ourselves if we regard adultery and fornication as "lesser sins" (see 2 Peter 2:9, 10). Love will not cheat on each other sexually (See 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7). And that means also that an unmarried Christian will not cheat on his or her future spouse.

Hebrews 13:5, 6. Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we may boldly say:

"The Lord is my helper;

I will not fear.

What can man do to me?" (New King James Version).

Love is expressed in a proper attitude toward material possessions. Let the way we live be free from covetousness and the stresses it brings. "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Timothy 6:6). Contentment is not laziness or a lack of ambition. A person can be hard working and still enjoy contentment. Contentment is a sense of sufficiency with what one has, even while working diligently toward reasonable economic goals. The believer's contentment rests on the assurance that God will "no way" leave us nor forsake us, coupled with the confidence that God will protect and defend us from those who would seek our harm or loss (Psalm 118:6; see also Genesis 28:15; Deuteronomy 31:6, 8; Joshua 1:5; 1 Chronicles 28:20). The word "helper" in verse 6 is *boethos*, the same as in Hebrews 2:18.

Hebrews 13:7-9. Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Do not be carried about with various and strange

doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established with grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them. (New King James Version).

This section has to do with our stability in the truth. In verse seven we are told to remember our spiritual leaders, both past and present. We are to observe carefully the successful outcome of their faithful lifestyle, and then copy their faith and reproduce in ourselves the same lifestyle and successful outcome.

Verse eight connects with verse seven and introduces what follows. Past spiritual leaders are gone; Jesus remains the same. Jesus is changeless; therefore our faith is also changeless. Our faith conforms to Him, and He does not change. Jesus will not fit into people's molds. He is the same *yesterday* (when He was on earth in the flesh), *today* (as our faithful High Priest in Heaven), and *forever* (as our coming King).

Therefore (verse nine), stay with Jesus Christ and do not be carried about (carried away, led astray) by the confusing variety of novel doctrines and religious movements that have introduced themselves. Do not mix strange and novel additions with Christ. Establish and strengthen your heart by grace, not by what and when to eat, and what and when not to eat. Such rules and regulations are irrelevant to our spiritual life and have been of no spiritual benefit to people who make them part of their "religion" or "spirituality." Food strengthens the body; grace strengthens the heart.

Hebrews 13:10-14. We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. (King James Version).

Our altar; our Sacrifice. This follows from what is said in verse 9. It is an important passage. According to Exodus 29:14; Leviticus 4:11, 12 and 16:27, the body of the bullock of the sin offering was not to be eaten. The priests could not eat it. It was to be carried outside of the camp and burned.

Jesus Christ is our "once-for-all" sin-offering, who "bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). He is now the perfect sin-offering, the only sin-offering that is acceptable to God. The Jewish priests who continued to offer the old sin offering could not eat of that; and so long as they continued to reject the Messiah, they could not receive the saving benefit of His sacrifice.

Our "altar" is spiritual, not material. Jesus said to the Jews, "The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:51 KJV). The Jews then got into a heated argument among themselves about how Jesus could give them His flesh to eat. Jesus then stated that unless they ate His flesh and drank His blood, they had no life in them. They who eat

His flesh and drink His blood have eternal life (see John 6:52-58). Even His disciples were murmuring and complaining about what He had just said (verses 60, 61).

It was then that Jesus stated clearly that He was not telling them to eat His literal body and drink His literal blood. He said, "What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (verses 62, 63 NKJV).

So then, Jesus said that we appropriate His sacrifice for our sins by faith, not by literally eating His flesh. Christ Himself is the very life of the believer, and His life is received personally by faith alone.

The notion of transubstantiation (or consubstantiation)--that in the Eucharist (the Lord's Supper) the host (bread) mystically becomes the actual body of Christ and the fruit of the vine mystically becomes the actual blood of Christ--is completely ruled out by the Divine command that *the sin offering is not to be eaten*. The error arose because people in the Church misunderstood what Jesus said, just as the Jews also misunderstood His meaning.

If the bread and wine Jesus referred to at the Last Supper were literally His body and His blood, there would have been no need for Him to go to the cross and there offer His body and have His blood shed. It would have been right there already in His hands.

Believers in Christ have no fleshly sacrifice to eat. The Communion of the Lord's Supper is a memorial. The elements represent His body and His blood. The reality is not in the elements themselves. God's grace is not something we swallow. Christ and His saving work are the reality the elements point to; and He is received by faith, not by magic.

Stay with Christ, even if it means reproach and separation. Moses chose the reproach of Christ, counting it greater riches than the treasures in Egypt (11:26). Jesus despised the shame of the cross (12:2).

The author reminds the Jewish believers (and us) that Jesus suffered outside of old Jerusalem--outside, condemned, cast out, just as the sin offerings had been--and that we must go out and join Him there and share the reproach He suffered. Once outside of the old Jerusalem--the Old Covenant system--we cannot, we must not, go back. We have completely and forever identified with Jesus Christ. From now on we are "strangers and pilgrims." Like Abraham (11:10), we are looking for a city that has foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God!

Hebrews 13:15, 16. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. (King James Version).

Under the New Covenant we as believers no longer offer animal sacrifices. Through Jesus Christ we now offer two kinds of sacrifices: (1) the sacrifice of continual praise, and (2) the

sacrifices involved in service to others and sharing with them. These sacrifices are well-pleasing to God.

Hebrews 13:17. Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief, for that is unprofitable for you. (King James Version).

Again, as in verses 7-9, we are instructed to follow and obey godly spiritual leadership. Some day they will be required to give an account for our souls. Such high accountability on the part of godly leadership requires an equal responsibility on the part of the followers. If the pastors are accountable for their part in this relationship, the followers also are accountable for their part. So, do not break the heart of your pastor by running off after false teachers and false teaching. Help make your pastor's final report to Christ a happy one, at least so far as you are concerned.

Prayer Requested.

Hebrews 13:18, 19. Pray for us, for we trust that we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly. But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner. (King James Version).

As we do not know for sure who was the human author of the Epistle To The Hebrews, we do not know the person who was speaking of himself in these verses. Was it Paul? Barnabas? Apollos? At least the original readers of the epistle must have known, and the author knew that they knew who he was. Also, they must have known of his personal circumstances. All of that is clearly implied in his request for their prayers.

And what about those tantalizing words, "we" and "us," in verse 18? Does "restored" imply sickness? or imprisonment? Only those in Heaven know for sure. The real point here is the importance of praying for one another, including ministers. (Check out Romans 15:30-32; Ephesians 6:18-30; 1 Thessalonians 5:25; 2 Thessalonians 3:1, 2).

The Benediction.

Hebrews 13:20, 21. Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (King James Version).

The benediction begins by referring to God as the God of peace--peace with God and peace among one another. The Everlasting Covenant was prophesied through Isaiah (Isaiah 55:3 and Jeremiah 31:31-34: 32:40). It has been a major theme of this epistle.

Every covenant was based on a blood sacrifice. No blood--no covenant. The Everlasting Covenant is based on the blood of Jesus Christ. How does this relate to Christ's resurrection?

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was God's testimony that the sacrifice of Christ's blood was fully accepted. If it had not been, there would have been no resurrection.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11), the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4), and the Great Shepherd. The Eternal Covenant was sealed by the blood of the Shepherd Himself, given freely for His sheep.

The word, "perfect," in verse 21 means to equip. God works in us through Jesus Christ by His Spirit.

The Final Appeal.

Hebrews 13:22. And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words. (New King James Version).

Here the author is referring to the entire epistle. Though he refers to it as a brief letter, it certainly is pure concentrated truth (no additives!). Mix with a lot of serious study and meditation. Stir well with prayer. It is completely digestible and fully nourishing.

Know. Greet. Grace.

Hebrews 13:23-25. Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly. Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. Grace be with you all. Amen. (New King James Version).

Here we have two more tantalizing references: Timothy and Italy. Although we do know that Paul was imprisoned in Rome, this reference to Italy does not in itself provide conclusive evidence that Paul was the human author. If Paul did write the epistle, that would explain the reference to Italy.

The reference to Timothy fixes the time of the writing of the Epistle to Timothy's life and ministry.

The final request is to greet their spiritual leaders. We have already seen the importance that is given to spiritual leaders and to the necessity to follow their leadership and example. This is important at all times, and particularly so during times of danger to the church. During the Roman imperial persecutions, believers were often urged: "stay with your bishop!" Many of those leading pastors gave their lives both for the defense of the faith and for the defense of their churches. Their faithfulness gave courage to others to stay true to Christ. May we all be encouraged by such examples, both ancient and contemporary.

Grace!