

HEBREWS

INTRODUCTION

Authorship. The authorship of the epistle to the Hebrews has been extensively debated, with scholars ascribing it to Paul the apostle, Barnabas, Silas, Luke, Clement of Rome, Apollos, Mark, and others.

Externally, there is the early church rejection of Pauline authorship by the Roman church until near the end of the fourth century.

The early repudiation of Pauline authorship by Rome is offset by their later acceptance of it, an acceptance that demanded the infallible rejection of a prior infallible judgment.

Thus there is a clear sense in which the words can apply to Paul and would, in fact, appear quite gracious as coming from his pen; but by far the most probable explanation is that Paul, or whoever wrote it, was merely identifying himself with his intended readers for the purpose of making a more delicate and persuasive appeal to them. Another passage from this epistle exhibits the very same grace. (6:1, 3)

Now, should it be concluded that the author of Hebrews, speaking in this passage, intended to confess that he himself was lingering upon first principles, having made no effort to go on unto perfection? Such a conclusion would be ridiculous; and, in the same vein of reasoning, it is equally ridiculous to make the author of Hebrews forfeit his title to the authorship merely because he made reference to the historical chain of witnesses that had delivered to that generation of believers the noble truths of the gospel.

What does it prove if scholars find some grater excellence in the letter to the Hebrews, as contrasted with some of Paul's other writings? In the letters to Corinth, Paul was dealing with drunkenness, incest, strife, and faction, in a situation where brethren were going to law with one another before pagan judges; how, pray tell, could the writer's language dealing with things like that be expected to reach the heights of rhetorical excellence the same writer's

language might attain when dealing with such glorious themes as those of the book of Hebrews?

Paul as a Pharisee of the Pharisees who had been a devout and zealous student at the feet of Gamaliel; was a man who knew and felt and loved the Law of Moses, even to the extent of persecuting to death them that he counted its enemies; and it would be precisely from just such a man as Paul that a look like Hebrews would have come.

In Paul alone, of all the persons whose works have come down from that age, can be found the emotional qualities, the breadth of theological understanding, the intimate familiarity with Law of Moses, coupled with the boundless and comprehensive understanding of Christianity, all of which must be ascribed to the author of such a treatise as the book of Hebrews.

Every artist must be allowed his masterpiece; and, in all probability, the epistle to the Hebrews is Paul's!

Again, there is the problem of the omission of Paul's name from both the beginning and the ending of the epistle; but whatever weight attaches to this objection it is greatly diminished by the very plausible and valid reasons that may be seen as the grounds of it. Due to Paul's repudiation of Judaism and the fierce prejudice that existed against him throughout Jewry, it could easily have been that considerations of tact induced Paul to omit his name, in order to prevent stirring up unnecessary bias against the epistle, even before it was read. No such possible and plausible reason may be thought of as explaining why anyone, other than Paul had a good reason for not signing such an epistle? Both this and another equally valid reason were mentioned by Eusebius, who preserved some of the lost writings of Clement and Origen. Brooke Foss Westcott, *op. cit.*, pages lxvi, lxvii quoted Clement thus, "The epistle is Paul's, and it was written to the Hebrews in the Hebrew language; and Luke translated it with zealous care and published it to the Greeks. Further, the ordinary phrase, "Paul an Apostle," was not placed at the head of the epistle for good reason; for, in writing to Hebrews who had formed a prejudice against him and

viewed him with suspicion, he was wise not to repel them at the beginning by setting his name there.”

Thus it appears that the objections to Pauline authorship are not merely so final; and insurmountable as some have insinuated. There is even a discernible movement toward greater acceptance of the view that Paul is the author; and some of the articles in *The Pulpit Commentary* and *Speakers Commentary* are free of that dogmatic rejection of such a possibility which has been so much in style during the current century.

A brief summary of some of the reasons why we believe Paul to have been the author of Hebrews is as follows:

- (1) The Roman church holds Paul as the author, and that in the face of a contrary opinion maintained by them till near the end of the fourth century.
- (2) With the exception of Luke, there appears no other person on the horizon of that ancient era whose known abilities could have produced it.
- (3) The oldest traditions in the East attributed it to Paul, from the first; and their views eventually prevailed in Rome.
- (4) Most importantly, the thoughts are characteristically Pauline.
- (5) The final chapter, except for the omitted signature, is so universally hailed as Paul's thought, that they go so far as to suggest that he personally added that chapter. Who but Paul, in the ancient world, could have commanded the attendance of Timothy upon some projected journey? (Verse 13:23)
- (6) “For you showed sympathy to the prisoners,” (10:34) can hardly apply to anyone except Paul. B. F. Westcott, *op. cit.*, p. 334, affirmed that, “The key word ‘prisoners’ in that verse is used in the New Testament only by the apostle Paul as a reference to himself.”

Our conclusion, then, on this admittedly difficult question is that the instinct that hails this wonderful book as Paul's is at least as dependable as any other

guide available to us, and that it positively does no violence to known facts to write Paul as its author.

Canonicity. The uncertainty regarding Pauline authorship of this epistle is absent from the problem of its place in the sacred canon of the New Testament, nor should the alleged doubts concerning Paul's authorship be construed as any kind of reflection upon the right of this noble book to its place among those writings received as Holy Scripture.

But whatever the view of its authorship, Hebrews has a secure place in the canon, having been so received from the earliest times upon the most solid grounds of evidence.

Concerning every verse of the New Testament, if each one of them received a voice, all together they might speak to the critics in the words of Paul in the dungeon at Philippi, "Sirs, do yourself no harm, we are all here!"

Internal evidence of the authority and canonicity of Hebrews is overwhelming. As far as human ability is able to judge of such things, there can be no doubt at all that when one reads this book, he is confronted with a communication from On High.

Date. Due to the fact that the author of Hebrews refers so extensively to the religious system of the Jews, especially to the services of the ancient tabernacle, leaving the definite impression that such services were at that time still being observed in the Jewish temple, forces one to look to a date prior to the destruction of the temple services in A. D. 70.

The whole argument of Hebrews is to the effect that the types and shadows of the Hebrews is to the effect that the types and shadows of the Hebrew institution were due to be replaced by the more spiritual verities of which those types were but the copies; and, if all those types and shadows had already been swept away, it is hardly conceivable that the author of Hebrews would have overlooked such an opportunity to mention the passing of the old order.

If it is correct to place the date of Hebrews prior to A. D. 70, it is equally certain that it could not have been written long before that time. There are in the

epistle definite references to a time interval between the first great wave of conversions and the date of this epistle.

Sufficient time had elapsed for great persecutions to arise against the church; furthermore, after undergoing such persecutions, the church had seen a sufficient time lapse for some to have become willing to give it all up and return to Judaism, hence the exhortation, “Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.” (10:35)

One other means of pinpointing the time comes from the mention of Timothy (13:22), which would suggest that Hebrews was written near the end of Paul’s ministry. The date could not be much earlier than A. D. 62 or 64, the choice of an exact time depending upon rather arbitrary selection.

The actual date of Hebrews may be assigned, with some degree of certainty, to 64 or 65 if Paul wrote it, and to 67 or 68 if someone else was the author.

Purpose and Destination. The purpose of Hebrews is evident in the work itself. The Christian community addressed by the author had Jewish ancestry and associations, or were themselves converts from Judaism, and were at the time of the epistle in danger of a massive falling away from the faith. A generation had passed, and Christ had not come. The early enthusiasm inevitably generated by a new movement had begun to wane; savage persecutions had been endured; and the disciples were struggling with the problems of sin and ignorance. They had to endure the arrogance and utter scorn of their fellow-countymen, who taunted them with their exclusion from the old rituals, and who, out of hatred for the new faith, had launched a counter-campaign to reinlist the disciples into the fold of Judaism.

Judaism had indeed been founded by God Himself; the glorious services of the temple reached back for a millennium or more; the old covenant had been ordained in the hands of angels; the temple itself was one of the wonders of the world; and its high priest was a powerful and respected figure in the social and political arena of those days.

The community of Christians was struggling with manifold trials. The racial and patriotic pressures toward their return to Judaism, was the undeniable

attractiveness of that which is secular, material, external, sacerdotal, and liturgical, when contrasted with the faith in Christ which is built upon different values, being spiritual, other-worldly, humble, meek and lowly.

Coming, as this epistle did, shortly before the ruin of Jerusalem and the temple, what a powerful influence it must have set in motion in the hearts of the faithful, as it boldly challenged the old order and hailed it as outdated and ready to perish. (8:13)

This prophecy was still fresh in men's minds when it was literally fulfilled by the total destruction of Judaism (in the old frame of reference) by the armies of the Romans in A. D. 70.

The purpose of Hebrews may be summed up in the words of J. Barmby, The Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 21, Hebrews, p. xx, who said, "Its main purport is to show, from the Old Testament Scriptures themselves, that the Mosaic dispensation was from the first only preparatory and prophetic of a higher one to come which was entirely to supersede it, and that Christ had come as the only true High Priest for all mankind, the true fulfillment of all ancient ritual and prophecy, the satisfaction of all human needs, to renounce whom would be renounce salvation."

The purpose of the author of Hebrews coincides exactly with the purpose underlying this study and emphasis on this portion of the New Testament. Like the Hebrews to whom this epistle was originally addressed, believers today face many of the same contrasts and temptations. All about them in the great city stand the impressive cathedrals and other houses of worship that must be accounted among the most wonderful ever constructed on earth. There are established rituals, rooted in the tradition of centuries, manifesting the unquestionable loveliness, beauty, and seductiveness of that which is physically spectacular, especially when contrasted with the simplicity and purity that is toward Christ.

There are everywhere to be seen the brilliant and powerful priests of traditional Christianity, socially excellent, politically powerful, and exhibiting every genius of organizational skill and human allurements. Thus, in the environment of this

vast metropolis, the believer who seeks to maintain the basic simplicity of New Testament faith stands in the same jeopardy as those who first received the epistle to the Hebrews, and being, therefore, as urgently in need of its teachings as were the Christians of the times of Nero. There is no antidote for externalism quite so effective, as the book of Hebrews.

It should never be forgotten, however, that whatever Christians were the first to receive this epistle its message is timeless and eternal. Every Christian of every age who feels the enticement of a spectacular, liturgical, externally oriented religion, and is tempted to defect, may find in the book of Hebrews "the anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast." Perhaps, therefore, it is part of the Divine plan that the book should not be addressed merely to the citizens of some restricted locality but should stand as the eternal message of God to all who struggle with the temptations such as those which beset the original readers.

Outline. Hebrews is written within the framework of a concise logical outline, the subject being the supremacy of Christ and His religion, as compared with antecedent Judaism. Strangely, and to a degree not noted anywhere else in the New Testament, each division bears the equivalent of a topical sentence.

I. Christ Is Better than Angels (1:1-2:18).

Key expression: "Having become as much better than the angels" (1:4).

II. Christ Is Better than Moses (3:1-4-4:13).

Key expression: "Worthy of more glory than Moses" (3:3).

III. Christ is a Better High Priest (4:14-7:10).

Key expression: "Have a great high Priest who has passed through the heavens" (4:14).

IV. Christ is Author of a Better Covenant (7:11-8:13).

Key expression: "The guarantee of a better covenant" (7:22).

V. Christ Provides Better Sacrifices (9:1-10:39).

Key Expression: "With better sacrifices" (9:23).

VI. Christ Provides Better Blessings for His Followers (11:1-40).

Key Expression: Provided something better for us” (11:40).

VII. Christ Expects Better Service of His Disciples (12:1-13:25).

Key Expression: “Much less shall we escape who turn away from Him” (12:25).

The key word in Hebrews, aside from the Word Himself, is “better;” and in this great book one finds the all-sufficient refutation of that attitude Jesus warned against, referring to some who, having drank of the old wine, rejected the new, declaring the old to be better. (Luke 5:39) The central thesis of Hebrews is that the old is not better; the new teaching of Christ is better. The word “better” occurs thirteen times in Hebrews.

Note: THIS IS GOD’S FINAL WORD SPOKEN THROUGH HIS SON!

DIVISION 1

CHAPTERS (1:1-2:18)

CHRIST IS BETTER THAN ANGELS

CHAPTER 1

CHRIST IS PREFERRED ABOVE ANGELS, BOTH IN PERSON AND IN OFFICE

Verse 1

This epistle begins with God and is a grand assumption that God is and that only a fool could deny it; and yet this opening statement goes far beyond the fact of God’s existence, starkly magnificent though the fact appears, and enlightens men with some of the most significant information that it is possible to have concerning God. Thus He is a God who speaks; and, because only a person can speak, this reveals Him as a personal God.

The personality of God is a concept underlying the whole fabric of the Christian faith; and it God at the center; and anything else is fatal. If God is not a person then all religion is a delusion, and faith is bankrupt. What a refreshment of the soul flows from the opening words of Hebrews with their

bold revelation of what is exactly here, in a widespread failure of men to know that God is a person, that so much current religious thought has floundered. True religion demands a personal God who speaks, and even what is more, a God who speaks to man!

God also appears in this reference as the author of the Old Testament, having spoken of old to the prophets, and thus being revealed as the author of Hebrew institutions which He initiated and promulgated by means of Divine communication through the patriarchs and prophets.

In the first sentence of Hebrews, the author made it clear that, far from denying the inspiration and authority of the Old Testament, he intended his message to be a bold confirmation of both, his position being the same as that of Jesus who, when quoting the Old Testament, ascribed the word, not to men, but to God, saying, "For God said . . ." (Matthew 15:4)

Verse 2

The broad premise here is that the same personal God who gave the Old Testament and its derived institutions has likewise given the New Testament and its system.

The old system was communicated through many persons, the new through the Son alone; and a proper understanding of that epic truth will dispel forever any notion that there could be any prophet, leader, or any other type of seer in the Christian dispensation, with a valid message from God. For God to communicate to mankind through any such persons would be a reversion to the old system. As declared in Jude 3, the faith was "once for all delivered!"

THE KING'S SEVEN-FOLD CREDENTIAL

The superiority of Christianity over Judaism is set forth in the opening lines of Hebrews and with an emphasis that makes the superiority overwhelming. The new revelation came, not through servants, as in the prophets, but through the Son and heir of all things. The superiority of the new institution is actually the subject matter of the whole epistle; and that superiority derives totally from the Son who in this chapter is presented as none

other than God Himself, humbled in the incarnation, of course, but only for a little while and for a definite purpose. The credentials of the Son are not few but many; and in verses 2 and 3, no less than seven credentials of His authority are enumerated.

1. “Whom He appointed heir of all things . . .” It was in our Lord’s status as a man that he was appointed heir of all things, since in His character as God, He created all things.

These credentials, if we may so name them, establish the authority of the King of kings, Christ; and the first of these makes Him king by right of inheritance, which is the classical and historical means of establishing kingly authority. As a man, Christ is the firstborn” of all creation, entitling Him as the heir of all things, more especially in view of the additional fact that, in the most exalted sense, He is the “only begotten.”

2. “Through whom also He made the world . . .” This second credential made Christ King by right of creation. What one makes is his; and we are Christ’s, as are the worlds also, by fact of creation by Christ.

This astonishing declaration is supported by other Scriptures. “For in Him all things were created . . . through Him and for Him.” (Colossians 1:16) “All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” (John 1:3)

Isaiah called Him “Counselor” (Isaiah 9:6) thus making our Savior a partner and participant in the immutable counsels of the Eternal before the world was made, a fact implicit in the words of Christ Himself when He prayed, “Glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I ever had with Thee before the world was.” (John 17:5)

Verse 3

Two credentials of the King were noted under verse 2, and the other five are given here.

3. "The radiance of His glory . . ." refers to the personal excellence of Christ, making Him entitled to the kingship of the world by the very qualities of His life and character.
4. "The exact representation of His nature . . ." is somewhat ambiguous in the common versions; and scholars give its meaning variously as, "He is the counterpart or facsimile of the Father." (J. R. Dummelow, Commentary on the Whole Bible, p. 1016). The "Very God of very God." (Thomas Hewitt, Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 52)

This refers to the Divine right of Christ to receive men's worship, adoration, and obedience. Christ is entitled to be honored as King by Divine right and is the only being ever so entitled to rulership; although He is by no means the only one ever to claim it!

5. "Upholds all things by the word of His power . . ." makes Christ to be the sustaining force of the cosmos itself. ("All things have been created through Him and for Him . . . He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." (Colossians 1:16-17)

One who is the sole support and source of every power within His creatures and creations has every right to rule over them and to expect true love and submission to His will.

Perhaps a word is in order regarding the manner of Christ's upholding all things. It is "by the word of His power," hence spiritual by nature; and that spirituality is evident from the very make-up of material things themselves.

6. "When He had made purification of sins" is the credential which makes Christ king by right of purchase. The United States of America governs Alaska, because it was purchased from the Russian government for \$7,000,000.00 in gold. Far greater was the price Christ paid for His human creation, buying them back when they had fallen into sin and were thereby forfeit to Satan. Yes, "You have been bought with a price"! (1 Corinthians 6:20)

And what was it? "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among

which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” (Acts 20:28)

The interdict (restraint) could never be lifted until Jesus paid it all upon the cross.

7. “He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high . . . “ This makes Christ king by right of having taken the kingdom. He has already and altogether taken possession and will continue to reign until He has put all enemies under His feet. (1 Corinthians 15:25)

The representation that Christ has “sat down” is a testimony to the completed nature of His work. Thus, Christ is king by every conceivable right which was ever recognized as proper and legal undergirding of kingly authority, and by all of them at once. Thus, by inheritance, by creation, by personal excellence, by divine right of maintenance, by right of purchase, and by *fait accompli*, Jesus Christ our Lord is The lawful sovereign of all things.

Throughout the farthest reaches of the universe, the natural creations, all of them, suns, satellites, and galaxies, do His will; and what an incredibly strange thing is that, in all the universe, man alone hesitates and refuses to give full obedience, frequently choosing to cast his lot with Satan and the fallen angels, already doomed and sentenced.

Verse 4

The remainder of this chapter, beginning here, extols the supremacy of Christ, as compared with angels. The force of the argument lies in the outlandish burden of importance the Jewish mind placed upon the function of angels in history.

Robert L. Cargill, *Understanding the Book of Hebrews*, p. 10 wrote, by the time of Christ, “The Jews had developed an elaborate system of angelology. They came to think of angels as intermediaries between God and man (and) also believed that there were millions and millions of them. They had many duties. They delivered messages, presided over the destiny of Israel, controlled the movement of stars, manipulated history. There were angels over the sea, the

frost, the dew, the rain, the snow, the hail, the thunder and the lightning. There were angels who were wardens of hell and torturers of the damned. There were destroying angels and angels of punishment.

The author of Hebrews met the issue squarely, identifying Christ as God come in the flesh, and marshaling the Old Testament scriptures themselves to prove His superiority over angels.

As to the actual place of angels in the economy of redemption, there is a further discussion of that at the end of the chapter.

There are no less than seven points of superiority of Christ over angels, catalogued by the nineteenth century scholar Adam Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 682, as follows, “He has a more excellent name than they (1:4-5); the angels of God adore Him (1:6); the angels were created by Him (1:7); even while being a man, He was endowed with greater gifts than they (1:8-9); he is eternal, but they are not (1:10-12); He is more highly exalted (1:13); angels are only servants of God; Christ is the Son of God (1:14).”

The author of Hebrews laid out a proposition in verse 4 to the effect that Christ is greater than angels; and he then proceeded to prove it by reference to seven passages in the Old Testament.

Verse 5

Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14 are the two passages in this verse that are cited, both of which sustain the Sonship of Christ. In modern times, Jewish expositors have tried to remove the Messianic application of Psalm 2:7; but the fact remains that both the author and the readers of Hebrews accepted it as a true prophetic reference to the Messiah.

“Today I have begotten thee . . .” is a statement upon which such things as the so-called “eternal Sonship” and other applications are said to rest. Although widely received, the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ is not supported by this epistle, nor by anything else in Scripture.

By prophecy, Isaiah called Christ “Everlasting Father” (9:6), a patent contradiction of the notion that He was eternally a Son. Christ is called God no less than ten times in the Greek New Testament.

To what, then, do the words “This day have I begotten thee” apply?

An apostle has given the sure and certain answers; for, in the synagogue at Antioch, Paul said, “God has raised Jesus; as also it is written in the second Psalm, Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee.” (Acts 13:33) Thus, the begetting mentioned in this place is the resurrection of Christ. It was the resurrection that established all that Christ said and did, confirming the virgin birth, the incarnation, the miracles, the prophecies, everything. Christ, therefore, in His risen human nature and united with the godhead, also glorified with the title of Son, in such a supremely exalted state, was and is far above all angels.

Verse 6

Christ is here called the “firstborn,” a favorite expression of Paul who referred to Christ as “the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29): and as “the firstborn from the dead” (Colossians 1:18), and as “the firstborn of all creation” (Colossians 1:15). This expression emphasizes the honor and dignity and primacy of Christ.

Of special interest is the word “again” in which it appears that God’s commanding all the angels to worship Christ has special reverence to a second time that Christ is brought into the world; and thus this has been applied to the second coming. Thomas Hewitt, *op. cit.*, p. 56, in Tyndale’s Commentary said, “The reference would seem to be to the second coming of Christ.” However, there is one vast consideration that requires that it be construed as a reference to the resurrection of Christ from the dead; because it is certain that angels now worship Christ and that their doing so does not wait upon some future event like the second coming. Christ’s being raised from the dead was genuinely a coming “again” into the world, His descent into Hades separating between the two times He was in the world.

The big point of this quotation, however, should not be lost sight of; and that is the fact that God has commanded the angels to worship Christ. Great and glorious as angels assuredly are, Christ is infinitely above them.

Verse 7

The pertinent fact of this quotation from Psalms 14:4 is in its reference to the status of angels as servants, that is, ministers of God. Christ's rebuking the winds and the waves was hailed by Richard Trench, *Miracles*, p. 156, "As evidence that the fallen angel, Satan, could at least take advantage of certain disorders in nature, or even cause them."

The superiority of Christ is seen in the elevation of the Creator above the creature, the master above his servant.

Verse 8

This quotation is from Psalm 45:6 and relates to the godhead of Christ.

CHRIST AS GOD

This verse has proved offensive to commentators who apparently resent such a blunt reference to Christ as God. God is not a chair to be sat upon; and no throne could possibly be God! The reluctance of men to allow so forthright a declaration of Christ's deity has been often noted. F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 19, commented on this saying, "That He should be addressed as God has seemed too daring to many commentators who seek to evade it or explain it away."

Hebrews 1:8 must therefore be allowed to take its place as a witness of the eternal power and godhead of Christ. Other passages bearing the same witness are; John 1:1; 20:28; Acts 20:28; Romans 9:5; Philippians 2:6; Colossians 2:9; Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1; and 1 John 5:20.

A more indirect assault upon the plain meaning of this text is the allegation that would make Psalm 45 merely an epithalamium extolling the virtues of King Solomon (of all people)! Solomon does not fit the declaration here. His throne was not forever and ever; he did not love righteousness, but did love a thousand women; and, as for hating iniquity, he was a gross idolater. Christ Himself said, "A greater than Solomon is here!"

Verse 9

This is a continuation of the quotation from Psalm 45:6-7; and it cites the reasons for Christ's exaltation as being founded upon His love of righteousness and corresponding hatred of evil. The anointing seems not to refer to any formal or official ceremony of appointment for Christ but rather to the happiness and joy which flowed unto Him because of His successful encounter and resulting triumph over sin, death, and the devil.

Verses 10-12

This quotation is from Psalm 102:25-27; and the great significance of its use here is in the fact that words originally addressed to Jehovah are unhesitatingly applied to Jesus Christ.

Not merely the fact of creation by the Almighty, but the Divine supervision of the universe and watchful control of all its changes are affirmed here. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 21-22, justified the application of this passage to Christ on the basis of the twin facts that the author had already said (verse 2) that, "It was through the Son the worlds were made (and that) the person to whom these words were spoken is addressed explicitly as "Lord," and it is God who addresses Him thus!"

Christ as the changeless one is the theme of these verses. The universe is constantly changing, however imperceptible those changes appear to the fleeting glance of men. Whatever wreck of matter and crush of worlds the future holds, the work and glory of Christ will not be affected. Of special interest is the comparison of the sidereal creation to a garment, indicating that the starry heavens themselves are but the usable and disposable accessories of the Godhead. They are God's garments and are subject to age and change.

Joseph S. Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator*, p. 53, said this, "The stars are the jewels on His brow; the sky His flowing train; the flowering landscapes, the shining seas, the gorgeous clouds—the fine needlework and wrought gold of His imperial raiment."

In the light of this revelation, how foolish, therefore, must appear such things as sun worship, or the temptation to view the universe as eternal.

Verse 13

The seventh Old Testament quotation is Psalm 110:1, and the complete verse is this, “The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.’” Here is another instance of God’s being both the speaker and the person spoken to; and it is upon the most convincing evidence that this Psalm is considered Messianic, seeing that Christ Himself thus applied it when He pressed the question upon the Pharisees, “Then how does David in the Spirit call Him Lord?” (Matthew 22:43-44)

Added to this, Jesus also identified Himself as the one sitting upon the right hand of power” (Mark 14:62), and Paul declared that, “For He must reign till He has put all His enemies under His feet.” (1 Corinthians 15:25)

This reference to “enemies” is a reminder of the opposing forces of evil, against which the servants of Christ are destined to strive throughout the days of their pilgrimage; and as Exell expressed it, *Ibid.*, p. 60, “Even so with the Church of Christ, in which this day we confess ourselves to have our portion, from the first day of her peregrination in earth till her last entrance into glory, there is a perpetual hatred between the serpent and her Head and between the seed of the serpent and her children, in which strife every one of us particularly have our fight, so that from our mother’s womb till we lie down in the grave our life is a warfare upon earth.”

From that beleaguered citadel of faith in which every child of God is besieged and threatened by the encroachments and frustrations imposed by the evil one, how glorious is the refreshment that comes from a glance heavenward where the Head and Redeemer sits in eternal enthronement, exercising all authority in heaven and upon earth. Not to lose sight of the argument the author made from this passage, how utterly beyond the glory and authority of angels is that of Christ!

Verse 14

The angels have the nature of servants, or “ministers,” as stated here, and thus must ever be accounted inferior to Jesus our Lord; despite this, however, those shining creatures of the unseen world possess a magnificence beyond our imagination; and the service they give to God and their activities on behalf of the saints, so mysteriously mentioned here, are matters of surpassing interest and curiosity. Salvation appears in this verse, not as something men may earn, but as a blessing they shall “inherit,” thus corresponding with the same view prevalent throughout the New Testament.

CONCERNING ANGELS

In view of the attention lavished in this chapter upon angels and their place in the economy of redemption, it is considered appropriate to set forth some of the basic Scriptural teachings concerning them. They are innumerable (12:22); and from such impressions as may be gathered from our Savior’s reference to “legions of angels” (Matthew 26:53) and the use of words like “archangel” (Jude 9), as well as from our Lord’s making the angels of little children to be of the highest rank in heaven (Matthew 18:10), it is inferred that the angelic host are an organized company, or kingdom; and it is possibly from the nature of such an organization that the various words like “seraphim,” “cherubim,” and “archangel” have been derived, these terms standing for the several ranks or powers of the angelic company.

The intimate connection of the angels with the affairs of the kingdom of God is seen in the rejoicing of angels over one sinner that repents (Luke 15:7) and in the promise of Christ to confess His followers before God and His holy angels. (Mark 8:38)

The angels attended Christ’s earthly mission, announced His conception and His birth, strengthened Him in Gethsemane, awaited His call during the passion, rolled away the stone from his grave, announced His resurrection, and escorted Him to glory.

In the second coming, Christ will appear with ten thousand angels (perhaps a symbolical number for an infinite host) (2 Thessalonians 1:7); and to

those angels of His power shall be assigned the task of separating the precious from the vile. (Matthew 13:41, 49)

The love of angels for men, though incapable of comparison with the love of Christ for men, is nevertheless a valid assumption from the above premises; and the loving regard of angels stands as an effective foil of the hatred engendered against men by Satan and his angels.

The verse before us is a flat declaration that angels perform services for them that shall inherit eternal life; and a fair inquiry is, "What services?" The Scriptures reveal the following kinds of service performed on behalf of men by the angels of God:

- (1) They bear away the souls of the righteous in death (Luke 16:22), as in the case of Lazarus.
- (2) They oppose purposes and designs of Satan, not in their own names, but in the name of the Lord. (Jude 6)
- (3) They execute the punitive judgments of God upon the incorrigibly wicked, as in the case of Sennacherib (2 Kings 19:35) and that of Herod. (Acts 12:23)
- (4) They exert influence over the rulers and governments of nations, as in the case of Persia. (Daniel 10:20)
- (5) They aid providentially in bringing the unsaved to hear the redeeming words of the gospel, as in the case of Cornelius. (Acts 10:3)
- (6) They exercise solicitous care over little children, as shown by Jesus' words. (Matthew 18:10)
- (7) They are actively employed in maintaining free course and availability of the word of God, as indicated by a mighty angel's holding in his hand "the little book" open (Revelation 10), a book which must almost certainly be hailed as the New Testament.

Men can know nothing of angels except what God has revealed through the Bible; and, even from the Bible, it is possible to make incorrect deductions; but some things are definitely clear. There are countless millions of angels

whom God created to perform His will throughout a vast theater of operations, cosmic in dimensions, with particular emphasis upon those matters that concern the salvation of men.

There are two prerogatives not given them. It is not recorded that any of them ever preached the gospel, nor is it indicated that they have the power to reproduce themselves. Worshiping of the angels is forbidden (Colossians 1:18); and they have no mediator function between God and man, that position being reserved to Christ alone. (1Timothy 2:5)

CHAPTER 2

CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY AND TEACHINGS IN REGARD TO ANGELS, SATAN, AND CHRIST AS HIGH PRIEST

Verse 1

C. New, The Pulpit Commentary, Vol 21, Hebrews, p. 67 wrote, "Like the acknowledged epistles of Paul, this is characterized by frequent and brief departures from the general outline of thought." The basis of the exhortation here is that the more is required of them to whom more is given, a principle taught by Christ. (Luke 12:48)

It is possible to drift away from the teachings of Christ because:

- (1) some, being in Him, are still not anchored in Him;
- (2) subtle and powerful tides and currents surge and tug against the soul's safety;
- (3) the believer fails to exercise due care and diligence in the defense and development of his faith; and
- (4) some allow preoccupation with unimportant and secondary things to preempt too much of their time and attention.

The description of apostasy given in this verse is true to life, for men seldom turn boldly and dramatically way from the Lord; but their defection, imperceptible at first, is marked by such a gradual departure that the unwary

soul is blind to it till the haven is lost and the storms of the gulf herald the approach of eternal ruin.

Verse 2

Paul stated it clearly, saying the Law “was ordained through angels in the hands of a mediator” (Galatians 3:19); and Stephen also made reference to it, speaking of them “who received the law as it was ordained by angels, and kept it not. (Acts 7:53)

The argument is that God’s word was a sacred and binding obligation, not to be despised or set at naught, and was sternly enforced by the imposition of drastic penalties for every infraction or neglect.

The Sabbath breaker was stoned; Achan was put to death; Saul was rejected from being king; David was not permitted to build the temple; the prophet who did not obey was slain by a lion; and an entire generation perished in the wilderness because of their murmuring and disbelief.

Verse 3

“Escape?” None is possible where disobedience of the word of God is involved. Penalties of the most awful consequence await the soul which through unbelief, neglect, or disobedience fails to heed God’s message through His Son. (Romans 1:18) The inevitability of sin’s receiving it’s just punishment is founded in the holiness and perfection of God, coupled with the utter abhorrence of evil, the latter attribute of God being little noted by many in this day. Sin will be punished!

Let every man ask himself, “How shall I escape where so many have failed?”

“Neglect.” The neglect of positive good can destroy the soul.

“So great a salvation” is an appropriate designation for the redemption in Christ; and the true greatness of it is apparent because of:

- (1) the greatness of the Savior who achieved it,
- (2) the greatness of the disaster from which it rescues the sinner,
- (3) the greatness of the eternal reward in heaven provided by it,

- (4) the greatness of the Savior's love that underlies it,
- (5) the greatness of the adversary who opposes it,
- (6) the greatness of that multitude who shall receive it, and
- (7) the greatness of those certainties upon which it is grounded.

“Which having at the first been spoken through the Lord,” must be one of the most significant utterances in the whole sum of Divine revelation. It defines Christianity as the message brought by Christ. The true faith was Christ-delivered; and Christ is the only source of the words of life. (John 6:68) The bearing of this exceedingly significant truth upon the religious problems of these times is seen in the fact that such a vast body of man-originated doctrines, human innovations, and traditional ceremonies have been received, all of which have no connection whatever with Christ. Men who accept such things should look to men for their reward, since it is so certain that Christ is not the author of those things.

The great commission made the charter and constitution of faith to be, in the words of Jesus, “Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28: 18-20)

Note: If Christ did not teach it, therefore, it is not part of the Christian religion.

“It was confirmed to us by those who heard . . .” The confirming of the word of Christ, mentioned here, was, in a sense at least, unnecessary; because nothing can add to the truth and dependability of God's word. Such confirmation then must be viewed as a heavenly concession to the decent opinions of mankind, and as respect to the Scriptural admonition to establish everything in the mouth of two or three witnesses. The confirming witnesses of Christ's revelation were:

- (1) the miraculous deeds which accompanied it,
- (2) the witness of the apostles, and
- (3) the various gifts of the Holy Spirit next mentioned.

Verse 4

CONCERNING MIRACLES

The signs, wonders, and powers mentioned in this verse are a plain reference to the miracles by which God throughout history consented to authenticate His message to man.

Overwhelming, therefore, were the confirming miracles establishing the word of the apostles of Christ as being truly that of God Himself.

Why, then, have miracles ceased? Since miracles were a good thing in the first age of the church, why not now? Perhaps the answer lies in a study of God's dealing with ancient Israel, a study that quickly reveals the temporary nature of miracles. When Israel entered Canaan, the manna ceased; the pillar of cloud and fire no longer guarded them; and the nation entered a new era. (Joshua 5:12) The cessation of miracles in Canaan should lead men to expect that they should have ceased after a few years in the early history of the church.

The word of God having been delivered by Christ and sufficiently confirmed by the miracles attending the age of the apostles, there was no further need of miracles.

Gifts of the Holy Spirit are a part of the perpetual inheritance of the church; but, even here, there are limitations defining the present age as distinguished from that of the apostles. In that age, the gift of the Spirit enabled the speaker to communicate in languages he had not learned, guided them in the execution of penalties upon the wicked, protected them from such things as poisonous serpents, enabled them to foretell future events, empowered them to raise even the dead, and to heal all manner of diseases. Christians today have a measure of the Holy Spirit and spend their probation under the precious influence of that Spirit; but it simply does not appear that they are able to do such things as the apostles did.

The Scripture that most fully describes the work and benefit of the Spirit in Christians has no mention at all of any such things described above but dwells upon inner qualities of attitude and character. These are listed as "love, joy,

peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness meekness, self-control.” (Galatians 5:22)

Verses 5-7

Although the great theme continues to be the superiority of Christ, at this point the problem of Christ’s sufferings begins to come into view. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James*, p. 71, wrote, “With this verse humiliation begins, the humiliation of Christ’s sufferings.”

The humiliation of Christ is made to support the thesis of His overwhelming superiority over angels because as Adam was created, even man was superior to angels. Thus Christ, the Second Adam, took up in His human nature where the first Adam left off, but without his sin.

Quoting from Psalm 8:4ff, the author showed from that passage, that men, not angels, are destined to be placed over all the works of God’s hands.

The difficulty of this passage is seen in the author’s argument for the superiority of Christ, while at the same time quoting a passage from the Old Testament that seems to contradict it, “You made him a little lower than the angels.” The key to the expression “a little lower,” actually means “for a little while lower.” The only exception in Christ’s superiority of over angels was therefore in this, that for a very short while He was made lower in order to taste of death for every man.

Throughout all His incarnation, the angels served Christ, attended to His every desire, and were upon call at His request. (Matthew 26:53) Therefore, His being made “for a little while” lower than angels was only that He might die for man’s sin. That death, so absolutely necessary for man’s redemption, involved His actually being made sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21) Surely, therefore, in His humiliation and death, Christ descended to a place lower than angels; but that in no way diminished His superiority over them because it was for such a brief time, and altogether vicarious at that. The word that declares Christ to have been made sin on our behalf begins with the affirmation that He “knew no sin!” The author

of Hebrews makes much of the new order ushered in by Christ. A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, p.344, noted, “The author is discussing this new order introduced by Christ which makes obsolete the old dispensation of rites and symbols.” F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Hebrews*, p. 33, also identified, “The world to come as the new world order inaugurated by the enthronement of Christ at the right hand of God.”

“What is man . . .” This inspiring passage from Psalm 8 dwells upon the paradox of man’s physical insignificance contrasted with his spiritual importance, so great that even God is mindful of him.

“The son of man” is part of a Hebrew parallelism and means the same thing as “man” in the other clause. Before leaving this wonderful passage, it is well to think of the physical littleness of man, small enough as compared even with other creatures in the animal kingdom, but whose whole environment, earth and all, appears only as a speck of dust in a limitless universe. R. C. H. Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 73, wrote that, “Modern skepticism, especially Deism and philosophy, observing man’s insignificance, imagine that, if there is a God at all, He certainly cannot bother with us little creatures.” In the scriptures, however, all that is changed. Man is of eternal consequence, potentially an heir of the blood of Christ and a candidate for everlasting glory; and the reasons for this are clearly outlined.

“Thou hast made him a little lower than God. . .” (Psalm 8:5) J. R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 1017, noted, “The words imply the doctrine of the incarnation of One who was essentially and previously higher than angels.”

It does no violence to speak of man as but a little lower than God; for the Scriptures, in some instances, actually refer to men as “gods.” Psalm 82:6 reads, “I said, “You are gods, and all of you are sons of the Most High.” It was to this very passage that Christ appealed in these words in John 10:34-36: “Has it not been written in your Law, I said, you are gods? If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scriptures cannot be broken) do you say of Him,

whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming' because I said, "I am the Son of God?"

Thus there is truly a sense in which men are gods. The import of this passage challenges men to look beneath the failures, foibles, sins, and wretchedness of men as they appear in their lost and sinful condition and to behold the man perfect and glorious as he was created "in the image of God," and destined for lordship over all God's creation. Mankind in the person of our Lord was returned and uplifted to that exalted state; and yet, through failure to accept Christ and dwell in him, man remains still far short of what the Creator intended.

Robert L. Cargill, *op. cit.*, p. 18, wrote, "Considering the divine origin of man, and the Bible's description of his potential to master the universe, it is exasperating to look around and see his pitiful condition. He should be free but is bound; he is described as king, but is actually a slave. Man is frustrated by circumstance, defeated by temptations, gird about with weakness, and finally humiliated with death."

The author therefore has maintained the supremacy of Christ over angels, in spite of what seemed at first a difficulty, a difficulty posed by the incarnation, especially the passion and death. But the difficulty was cleared up on the basis of these considerations:

- (1) Christ's incarnation was served by angels who ministered to Him throughout all of it.
- (2) His being made lower than angels, as the scriptures said of Him, was but for "a little while," and for the noblest purpose.
- (3) Christ's being made a man is no problem at all, when it is remembered that man himself, when viewed as God made him, is higher than angels, since it is said that man is made in God's image and was given dominion over all things; and it should be remembered that Christ became man in that highest and best sense.

Verse 8

This verse emphasizes the difference between man's potential and what he has actually become. The grave consequences of the fall of Adam, the expulsion from Eden, the cursing of the ground, and the imposition of the penalty of death—all these things have for long ages frustrated the human attainment for the purpose of God in man. Instead of all things being in subjection to Him, man finds that he cannot even control himself; and beyond that there are countless things that he cannot subdue or subject to himself, so much so that unaided humanity must ever despair of any true realization of the royal dominion assigned in Genesis 1. But Jesus Christ came, taking upon Him the form of a servant, providing for the plenary discharge of man's sin, tasting of death for every man, and raising to heaven with man's glorified nature upon Him, and thus on man's behalf achieving that dominion of man intended from the beginning.

Verse 9

Here is the abysmal depth in which, for a little while the Son became lower than the angels. G. Campbell Morgan, *God's Last Word to Man*, p. 33, so well expressed it writing, "The Son was made lower than angels, descending to the level of human nature (especially regarding His passion and death), in order that He might die. From death, angels are exempt; therefore, He passed them by, coming not merely to the level of ideal humanity, but to the level of failing humanity; made lower than the angels that He might taste of death."

This verse has one of the most astounding statements in the Bible, that is, that Christ was crowned with glory and honor in order that He might taste of death for every man. Again from Morgan, *Ibid.*, p. 34, "The amazing and revealing declaration then is that God conferred upon His eternal Son a crown of glory when He gave Him to death for the ransom of the race." Here is set forth the importance and centrality of the death of Christ, not merely for some, but for every man. Christ did not come into this world merely to deliver noble teaching, nor to establish some kind of ideal, but to die on the cross for the sins of the whole world.

Verse 10

The use of the word “became” is in the sense of that which compliments or enhances; and it calls attention to the excellent beauty and perfection in all God’s work, even in the smallest particulars. In all the wondrous annals of the scheme of redemption, there is no ill-fitting or unbecoming thing, but only total loveliness, appropriateness, and aesthetic satisfaction pertaining to everything that God did.

How marvelous are His ways. The cross itself, dark, and terrible as it stands upon the horizon of human history, is clothed with glory and beauty that surpasses the imagination; and seeing this, Christ said. “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.” (John 12:32)

Another word of challenging interest in this verse is “perfect,” which poses a problem; for how can the author speak of Christ being made perfect when He is already perfect?

F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 43, wrote, “The perfect Son of God has become the people’s perfect Savior, opening up their way to God; and in order to become that, He must endure suffering and death. The pathway of perfection which His people must tread must first be trodden by the Pathfinder.”

Verse 11

Since the Son has taken upon Him the form of men, and in that sense is one with them, He is not ashamed to call them brethren, even to the extent of partaking of all their sorrows and sufferings, even death itself.

Sanctification applies to the setting up of a new relationship to God rather than achieving some greater holiness of character and partakes of the meaning of “justification” as used by Paul in Romans and elsewhere.

Adam Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 698, speaking of “sanctified, in this verse wrote, “The word does not merely signify one who sanctifies or makes holy, but one who makes atonement or reconciliation to God; and answers to the Hebrew word *caphar*, to expiate. (Exodus 29:33-36) He that sanctifies is He that makes the atonement; and they who are sanctified are they who received the

atonement, and, being reconciled unto God, become His children through adoption, by grace.”

That Christ is “not ashamed to call them brethren” is a most instructive thought. That the sinless and perfect Savior should not be ashamed of vile and sinful men, and through His great love for them, should consent to partake of all their sufferings, even death, and should even go so far as to receive them as His spiritual body and make of them His bride—that must be hailed as an attitude of loving grace that beggars all description. Nor will Christ ever be ashamed of His brethren but will confess them before God and His holy angels. (Mark 8:38) But if the attitude of Christ toward men is so commendable beyond all human comprehension, how loathsome is the opposite attitude of men who are ashamed of Him?

Verse 12

As proof of Christ’s being unashamed of His brethren, the author here begins a series of three quotations from the Old Testament, this one from Psalm 22, which opens with the words, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me . . .” The author of Psalm 22 is thought to be David who, as a type of Christ, came to his own throne through suffering which was followed by joyful fellowship. The second portion of the Psalm hails the triumph after rejection and sorrow. (Psalm 22:22)

A choice of words by the author of Hebrews gives grounds for a very significant deduction, as pointed out by F. F. Bruce, op. cit., p. 46, who wrote, “Our author used the word *ekklesia* for congregation (the Hebrew of Psalm 22:22 has *qahal*. The employment of this word “brethren” in a Christian context indicates that those whom the Son of God is pleased to call His brethren are the members of His church.” The dramatic meaning of this will not be lost in the good and honest heart.

Verse 13

This quotation from Isaiah 8:17ff shows the Old Testament basis for Christ’s not being ashamed of His brethren, the Messianic import from the

quotation being that the Messiah shall not be glorified alone, but in conjunction with His spiritual “children,” synonymous with “brethren.”

Verse 14

The superiority of mortal men to the animal kingdom is implicit in the word that they are sharers in flesh and blood, indicating some higher element in man’s existence. Authors, Lenski and Milligan agree in this interpretation of “sharers.”

R. C. H. Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 88, wrote, “This implies that ‘flesh and blood’ is not, as in the case of the brute creatures, the whole of their being; their soul or spirit, their real person exists only in fellowship with a physical body.”

R. Milligan, *New Testament Commentary*, p. 98, wrote, “The apostle does not say that the children are flesh and blood, but they have been made partakers of flesh and blood; thereby making a distinction between what constitutes the essential and eternal part of man’s nature, and what is merely accidental, and in which we now live, as in a clay tabernacle.” (2 Corinthians 5:1)

Here is the explanation of the mingled love and pity that humankind has for animals, flesh and blood being the common bond between them, and man’s higher self the impassable gulf that separates them. A sympathetic view of the essential kinship of men and animals is seen in these words of Hal Borland, *Homeland*, p. 115, “And I saw tracks of a rabbit, a fox, two field mice. I heard a cardinal whistle and a jay scream. Warm blood like mine. Flesh, like mice, that quivers with pain. Senses keener than mine.”

“Partook of the same . . .” Christ took a mortal body, partaking of blood and flesh; and this is an essential Christian doctrine. “He who was revealed in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16) was constantly extolled and adored from the earliest Christian times; and the man who would not receive the truth that “Christ came in the flesh” was held to be of the “antichrist.” (1 John 4:3)

The reason for Christ’s partaking of flesh is given in this verse, namely that he through death might bring to naught him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.

Death was the instrument Christ used to bring Satan to naught, and a more unlikely weapon cannot be imagined. That the death of Christ should have appeared to the author of Hebrews, and to Christians generally, as an instrument of world-shaking victory is absolutely astonishing and provides the most convincing inferential evidence of the truth of Christ's resurrection. Think of the death of Christ; He Was rejected, despised, condemned, and tortured to death, not in some out-of-the-way province, but in the very capital of Hebrew hopes and aspirations. Not even His disciples understood what was taking place, and their gloom is seen in the words of His followers who said, "But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel." (Luke 24:21)

Abandoned by His disciples, hated by the leaders of the nation, betrayed by an apostle, Christ did not even defy the government in His dying agony, but spoke mysteriously of God's having "forsaken" Him! Who could have believed that the followers of One who died that kind of death would be hailing it as a cosmic victory over the prince of evil within seven weeks and a day of the event itself?

Satan's weapon, death, was therefore wrested from him and used as the instrument of Satan's own destruction; and just as David took Goliath's own sword and cut off the giant's own head with it, David's greater Son took Satan's weapon of death and destroyed him with it.

That Satan had the power of death means that, by tempting Adam and Eve to sin causing them to fall, he was the means of bringing death upon all mankind; and this may be the reason that Satan is called a "murderer" from the beginning. (John 8:44)

That the purpose of Satan toward the family of men is destructive, and only that, is evident from the examples of his operations, given now and again throughout the Bible. Thus, Satan brought death to Job's family (Job 1:19), entered the heart of Judas, making him a suicide (John 13:27), and accomplished the destruction of the swine as soon as his emissaries were permitted to enter them. (Matthew 8:32)

How can it be said that Christ has brought the devil to naught? Satan was brought to naught in that his sole purpose regarding mankind was absolutely frustrated and eternally defeated. All of Satan's activity against humanity could have had only one objective, the destruction of the entire race, that being the primary objective of his seduction of Eve in Eden.

Christ became a man, paid the penalty due Adam's transgression, and opened up the way of renewal of the lost fellowship with God.

The motivation of Satanic opposition to men would appear to lie in the desire of the evil one to fight back against the Eternal who had cast him out of his former estate and reserved him unto punishment, mankind providing the only known opportunity of Satan for any kind of a counter-movement against God. The seduction of mankind, therefore, should be viewed as a device of Satan in striking at God through God's highest and favored creation, man. God's motivation in permitting Satan's access to man was simply that of providing a test of man's faith and obedience, a test which the first parents miserably failed. Satan's failure was total and complete. He was not able to destroy mankind, but on the other hand found himself used as a means of testing and developing men; and the fact that some, even many, men will be lost must itself be seen as an utter failure of Satan to frustrate God's purpose; for God will doubtless create and redeem the total number of humankind included in the original purpose, regardless of Satan or evil men who follow Satan.

Joseph S. Exell, *op. cit.*, p. 164, expressed thus, "Since Jesus died, the devil and his power are destroyed. Destroyed? Certainly! Not in the sense of being extinct. Still, he assails the Christian warrior, though armed from head to foot; and goes about seeking whom he may devour, and deceives men to ruin. Yet he is destroyed. Are we not all familiar with objects which are destroyed without being actually ended?"

This verse, outlining the victory of Christ over Satan, is actually the introduction of a theme to be treated extensively somewhat later in the epistle; and that is the sacrifice of Christ for the sins of humanity, called the atonement.

Verse 15

The victory over death, as announced here, was prophesied of old, (Isaiah 25:7-8). His victory over death prophesied by Isaiah pinpoints some significant facts with reference to it. Where shall such a victory, be achieved? “In his mountain,” meaning on Mount Zion, Jerusalem, one of the mountains of Moriah, where Abraham offered Isaac, and where our Lord suffered, Golgotha, nowhere else! And at what time shall it be achieved? Isaiah’s mention of the “veil” or “face” of the “covering” suggests that when the victory is achieved, a “veil” will be destroyed. That occurred when the “veil” will be destroyed. That occurred when the veil of the temple was torn into from the top to the bottom, an event conspicuously connected with the death of Christ on the cross. The victory was won by Christ alone.

In the preceding verse where the destruction of Satan did not mean he was annihilated. Likewise here, death is destroyed, and yet men die. How can this be?

Since the sting of death is sin (1 Corinthians 15:55), Christ’s providing the remedy for sin has removed the most dreadful part of the fear of death, which is the fear of punishment afterward. Death with the resurrection to follow is not death in the former sense. It is the sure and certain hope of the resurrection that robs death of so much of its terror; and it is Christ who said, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me, shall never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25)

Robert L. Cargill, op. cit., p. 23, spoke of Christ’s victory over death as follows, “He destroyed the principle of sin, which is the cause of death. It is just the cure for polio we have it, but everyone is not cured; however, the end of it as a dread epidemic is in sight. Jesus annihilated the effects of death in His resurrection. He promises the same victory.”

Verse 16

The meaning of this verse is that Christ took upon Himself the flesh of the seed of Abraham; and the expression, “He gives help” is very illuminating, for it

shows that Christ had an existence before He decided to partake of flesh and blood, and that it was by His own volition that He did so.

Joseph S. Exell, *op. cit.*, p. 162, so understood this, as indicated by, “He gives.” He did not inherit or receive a body. It is not the language that describes the ordinary birth of a common man. How strange it would sound if we were to speak of our children as if they had a thought or volition respecting their nature, and as if they were pleased to take on them such and such a body, when they were born. It describes voluntary action. It was an act contemplated beforehand. It implies not only pre-existence, but power, dignity, and condescension.”

MYSTERY OF FORGIVENESS

Here is a problem. Why did Christ elect to enter the arena of human life as a man and to suffer and die for human redemption, whereas it is revealed that He made no such decision or movement on behalf of the fallen angels who also had sinned? Men have offered learned explanations why such should have been so, alleging that angels sinned with their eyes open, whereas man was deceived, and that angels found the source of temptations within themselves and not from an external source, as in the case of man; but the view here is that it is a part of the mystery “hidden before times eternal” and that it does not lie within the periphery of complete finite understanding.

The forgiveness which God provided for man is absolutely unique, there being no precedent of any such thing in heaven, or upon earth. Where, in all, the universe is there such a thing as forgiveness of sins, apart from Christ our Lord? No forgiveness was provided for the angels when they sinned; none of the laws of God’s natural creation ever forgave either man or beast; no one ever fell off a cliff and received a reprieve from the law of gravity; no dog ever forgave the quarry; no poisonous serpent ever forgave the victim, no hawk ever forgave the prey; and even in the Law of Moses, there was never any such thing as actual forgiveness, since sins were remembered again every year. (10:3)

How utterly unaccountable, therefore, is the heavenly grace exhibited on behalf of sinful man, a grace conveyed at such an awful cost!

The fact of God's willingness to undertake the redemption of men, despite all precedent to the contrary, and without any hesitation at the extravagant price of it, added to the other plain implications of God's word in this chapter, bespeak the most overwhelming encouragement for humankind.

The argument set forth in these verses presents Christ as superior to angels even during His incarnation as a man, a superiority that was not contravened even by Christ's being made "for a little while" lower than the angels that He might taste of death, thus making it plain that man himself (as God created him) is superior to angels. No imagination then, however fertile, can conceive the fullness of their privilege of being a human being crafted in the image of God, immortal except for the fall, destined for dominion over all things, and enjoying such a kinship with the Creator as would make such a thing as the incarnation possible; and furthermore, after having thrown it all away through sin and transgression, receiving the further privilege of forgiveness through Christ and reinstatement as an heir of everlasting glory! Any soul that despises all that God has done for man is surely worthy of the death that God has ordained for them that, "Know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 1:8)

At last, the lost themselves will have no word of defense or complaint but shall concur in speechless acceptance of their judgment; for they shall be like him of whom Jesus said, "He was speechless." (Matthew 22:12)

CHOICE OF ABRAHAM

That Christ entered earthly life as a descendant of Abraham was due primarily to the promise of human redemption made to Abraham by God, to the effect that it would be in Abraham's seed that all the families of men should be blessed. (Genesis 12:3) (Also read chapter 18:19.)

God discerned in Abraham the necessary qualities required for the long process through which redemption would be achieved. In the long centuries afterward, Abraham (in his posterity) surely did what God knew he would do, that is, "command his children after him," an ability which the Gentiles, on the other hand, conspicuously failed to demonstrate. A mention of the seed of

Abraham in this verse is dramatic reference to the fact that the Jews themselves needed the help of that promised “seed” which was Christ, in order to achieve forgiveness.

Verses 17-18

“Therefore, He had to be made . . .” carries with it the idea of indebtedness, as of money owed, and indicates that Christ, having decided to help men, incurred the frightful obligations inherent in such a decision. That Christ was made “in all things” like His brethren should be qualified by the considerations that:

- (1) in His birth,
- (2) in His sinless life, and
- (3) in His death for our sins according to the Scriptures, Christ was utterly different from all others who ever lived. The expression “merciful and faithful high priest” involves a dual relationship, toward God and toward men.

A. T. Robertson, *op. cit.*, p. 351, wrote, “Merciful” is placed before the verb and is thus emphatic; so that we evidently have two predictions: “made merciful” toward his brothers, and a “faithful” high priest toward God.

The merciful nature of Christ’s priesthood contrasted sharply with that of the cold and merciless Sadducees with whom the original readers of this epistle were familiar. R. C. H. Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 94, noted that, “The Sadducee high priests were political and ecclesiastical tools and puppets out of sympathy with the people and chosen by Rome.”

As Thomas Hewitt, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 17, observed, “The word ‘high priest’ occurs here for the first time in Hebrews. It is also the first time that it is directly applied to Jesus Christ in Scripture.”

In fulfillment of the office of high priest, Christ is the reality of that which was typically performed by the Jewish high priest who, on the day of atonement, entered into the holiest place and offered blood for the sins of the people; Christ entered heaven and offered His own blood for the sins of all men; and, just as

the priest slew the victim prior to offering its blood, Christ offered Himself upon the cross, thus combining in Himself the functions of both the victim and the one offering the blood.

We note especially the sympathy of Jesus as indicated by His mercy. Men who have never fallen are likely to be too severe, those who have, too lenient; but Christ, though tempted in all points, did not fall, and is alone capable of making the proper judgment concerning men. How encouraging is the thought that, whatever sorrow or temptation befalls man, Christ has full and perfect knowledge of it. How thankful all men should be for the mercy of the Lord.

“Making propitiation for the sins of the people . . .” focuses attention upon the meaning of “propitiation.” It is not God who needs to change His mind, but men who need to change theirs. The sacrifice of Christ therefore was not to reconcile God to man, but man to God. (1 Corinthians 5:19)

The great love and mercy of God are seen in that He paid it Himself, in the person of His Son upon the cross, thus doing for man that thing which man alone could not in a billion years have done for himself; also making God the one who propitiates and the one propitiated at the same time!

“Being tempted,” as used here, seems to make Christ’s temptations to consist chiefly of His sufferings. He might have thought, “Why bother with it at all? Why go through such an agony as the cross for the sake of saving men who constantly seemed to prove themselves unworthy of it?” Only His great eternal love could have strengthened and steadied Him against aborting His mission of salvation and calling it off.

DIVISION II

3:1-4:13

CHRIST IS BETTER THAN MOSES

CHAPTER 3

CHRIST GREATER THAN MOSES, BOTH CHRIST AND MOSES FAITHFUL, CHRIST TO RECEIVE GREATER GLORY, EXHORTATION AGAINST APOSTASY, WARNING FROM FATE OF ISRAEL

Verse 1

“Holy brethren” is the third term of endearment already used in this epistle to describe God’s people, the other two being “sanctified” and “sons.” (2:11-13) That mortal men should be considered holy is due to the imputation of Christ’s righteousness and to their having received the gift of the Holy Spirit subsequent to their being baptized into Christ. (Acts 2:38)

“Partakers of a heavenly calling” is a reference to the universal and eternal dimensions of the Christian vocation, which is a heaven-centered faith, its emphasis being emphatically upon the things in heaven, rather than upon the things of the earth.

The heavenly nature of this calling is not seen merely in the fact that it came from heaven, for the Jewish system did also. Rather, here is a reference to the spiritual and eternal inheritance of Christians, as contrasted with the mortal and earthly goals of Judaism.

“Consider” is a common word in English, but it is formed from two Latin words, *con* (with) plus *sideris* (stars or constellation). One who takes the time to behold the beauty and majesty of the night sky is literally with the stars in his thoughts and emotions and cannot fail to receive deep impressions of awe, wonder, and appreciation. It is with this very attitude that men are invited to consider Christ.

“Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession . . .” Nowhere else in Scripture is the title of “Apostle” applied to Christ, but it certainly fits the office of our Lord as the official messenger from heaven. The primary meaning of the word “apostle” is, “one sent or commissioned for some important communication.”

An additional implication in the meaning of the word “apostle” is that the person sending is greater in dignity than the one sent; and to make clear just what is meant by its reference to Jesus, the author of Hebrews uses the term “Jesus.” that being the usual Scriptural word where the human nature of our Lord is meant.

It was only in His human nature that the lesser dignity of “Apostle” could be imputed to Christ; because, in his eternal nature, He was equal to God. (Philippians 2:6)

Christ’s representation here as High Priest is a part of the argument for His superiority over Moses, who was not a high priest. Moses was prophet, mediator and king (in a sense); but the office of high priest pertained only to Aaron. Christ was all that Moses was, and more, He was also High Priest.

“Our confession” is not a reference to some formal subscription to any such thing as a creed but is used here to mean the holy religion of Christ.

Verse 2

In 2:17, Jesus had already been mentioned as a merciful and faithful high priest, and it is His “faithfulness” that needed stress here. Note how delicately the inspired writer defers to the deserved honor of Moses, whom he did not belittle or diminish in any way. Both Moses and Jesus were faithful to deliver God’s true message to men, each in his own way, and each in his own capacity.

Verse 3

This singles out the principal superiority of Christ over Moses and affords another glimpse of the deity and godhead of Christ, making Christ the builder of the house in which Moses served.

One cannot pass this verse without regarding the essential unity of God's children in all ages. The Jewish system, no less than the Christian, was Divine in its origin; and many New Testament passages emphasize the connection of Old Testament references with that new Israel which supplanted the old. (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11; Romans 15:4; John 5:39; Acts 17:2-3)

This basic unity of God's heavenly establishment, changed through the covenant, is attested by the deliberate judgment of mankind in binding both the Old and the New Testaments into a single volume to form the Bible. Respect to such a unity does not contradict the fact of progression in the will of God as He moved to abolish the old covenant and establish the new.

Verse 4

The thought expressed is a teleological thunderbolt; it is the ancient and indestructible argument from design, bluntly and clearly stated, first in the truism that every house has a builder, and secondly in the deduction that the far greater house of the whole universe likewise has its builder who can be none other than God.

Christians ought not to be ashamed of the argument from design; for here it is in the word of God itself, commending itself to the unbiased mind, and standing absolutely unchanged by any of the vaunted achievements of science. The most determined atheist, in his most thoughtful hours, cannot escape the persuasive eloquence of that argument from design which demands a Designer.

Verse 5

Moses was not the great lawgiver through any power and ability of himself alone, but that it was in his capacity as God's representative and as a vessel for the conveyance of God's message that his noble work was achieved.

Moses delivered the Christian system embryonically, as well as Judaic.

In the prophecies about Christ, in the minute details of the tabernacle and all its furnishings, and in the definite instructions for all the feasts, sacrifices, and ceremonies of the Judaic system, all so faithfully delivered by Moses, the

entire body of truth delivered by Moses, foretold and eventually proved the redemptive ministry of Christ.

Moses did not merely deliver the Judaic system of religion; but, in a sense that the flower is contained in the bud, he delivered the Christian system also, identified in this verse as “those things afterward to be spoken.”

B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 77, stated “The position of Moses and of the Mosaic dispensation was provisional. Moses not only witnessed to the truths which his legislation plainly declared, but also to the truths which were to be made plain afterward.”

Verse 6

Reiterating the supremacy of Christ, the author, on the basis of a bold deduction, names Christians themselves as components of God’s house, “whose house are we”! The old Israel is no more. The Son having been revealed, men are no longer under a servant, even so true and faithful a servant as Moses. (Romans 2:28; 9:6-8; Galatians 6:15; John 8:39)

Think of the house of God. He laid the foundation of it, even before the world was (1 Corinthians 2:7), provided the blueprints of it in the dispensation of Moses, and extended it upward and outward to include all the families of men in the church of Christ; and finally, He shall present all to Himself in the glorious fulfillment of the everlasting kingdom at the last day. (2 Peter 1:11)

“If we hold fast our confidence . . .” emphasizes the necessity of perseverance in the Christian life, if one is to win the crown.

F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 59, wrote, “The conditional sentences of this epistle are of special attention (3:14; 10:26). Nowhere in the New Testament more than here do we find such repeated insistence of the fact that continuance in the Christian life is the test of reality.”

Bruce might have meant by that comment that a failure to continue means there was no reality to begin with, such being the thesis of Calvinism; but continuity must be viewed as a Divinely imposed condition of salvation, upon the fulfillment of which destiny depends.

Clarence S. Roddy, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 41, declared, “There is no shallow “once saved always saved” here. No superficial being saved and lost, in and out, experience either, but a realization that the evidence of the reality of the grace of God in the life is a constant and living faith regardless of circumstances and inward questions.”

The climate for the proper maintenance of faith is not exclusively produced by, nor does it depend solely upon, external conditions. On the other hand, it must be aided by and controlled by the attitude of the believer himself, who has the power to further and strengthen his own faith by a constant, bold, and optimistic proclamation of it.

W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Hebrews*, p. 41, was aware of this when he wrote, “Weakness is a spiritual peril; and this emphasis on boldness and glorying is a significant reminder that only as we continue courageous and confident can we expect to be firm unto the end. There is an old saying about “whistling to keep up the courage;” and there is no doubt that in things spiritual the secret of courageous and steadfast living is to be bold and to glory constantly in our Christian hope.”

Thus there devolves upon the believer himself a frightful responsibility for the preservation and development of his own faith; and this coincides with the fact that faith, rather than being exclusively intellectual, also rests upon and flows out of moral considerations of the highest order. (John 3:19)

SECOND EXHORTATION

Verse 7

The quotation here is from Psalm 95:7ff and introduces the second series of exhortations designed to bolster the lagging faith of the Hebrew Christians and to warn them against apostasy, the warning being strongly reinforced by the appeal to the analogous falling away which took place in that generation which entered the wilderness after their deliverance from Egypt but were cut off from entering the Promised Land.

The experience of Israel in the wilderness of wanderings was indelibly engraved upon the conscience of all the Jews, especially regarding the failure to enter the Promised Land. The shameful record of which was outlined expressly in their scriptures. (Exodus 17; Numbers 13-14; Deuteronomy 9:10)

“Today, if you hear His voice . . .” is an appeal for action now. The consequences of failure are so supremely tragic, and the tendency to procrastinate so universal, that action is demanded now—today. One steals who presumes upon tomorrow; tomorrow belongs to God; “Behold now is the acceptable time; behold now is the day of salvation.” (2 Corinthians 6:2)

The statement of Paul underlines the fact that life does not come to man a day at a time, but a moment at a time; hence, now is the day of salvation. Why today?

- (1) Men have waited long enough already.
- (2) There may never be a tomorrow for any man.
- (3) The difficulty of obedience is only multiplied and compounded by delay.
- (4) God has commanded obedience now.
- (5) The impulse to respond or obey may diminish or disappear.
- (6) Subsequent obedience (even if it comes) may not be as effectual and fruitful.
- (7) There is no better time than now to do the Father’s will.

“If you hear His voice . . .” raises the question of how God’s voice may be heard today; and following are some suggested answers:

- (1) the voice of God through the Holy Scriptures as read or preached;
- (2) the admonitions of faithful loved ones and friends;
- (3) through conscience which, however depraved, must inevitably retain some vestiges of regard for duty toward God;

- (4) through the message of God as revealed by consideration of the creation in the light of reason:
- (5) through God's providential blessings upon every man; and
- (6) through the spiritual hunger that rises in every heart and which instinctively reaches for a knowledge of God and longs for His approval.

Verse 8

“Do not harden your hearts . . .” is another admonition that affixes the responsibility and blame, for hardness of heart upon the hardened himself. Only in the sense of his permitting it, is it ever correct to believe that God hardens hearts. True, the Old Testament states that God “hardened Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 7:13; but the next verse declares that Pharaoh was stubborn. The same sunshine melts butter and hardens concrete; and the same gospel saves some and destroys others. (2 Corinthians 2:12)

Men's hearts are hardened by continuing in sin, procrastination, and by the gradual atrophy of spiritual perception brought on by the practice of disobedience. Men may go a little at a time, further and further into sin, until finally they become hardened and confirmed in their rebellion against God. Even in such a state, one may, if he will permit it, be softened and healed by the word of God. How may the stony heart be broken? “Is not my word like fire, declares the Lord; and like a hammer that shatters a rock?” (Jeremiah 23:39)

This verse has an interesting example of a couple of Hebrew proper names being translated as common nouns, Meribah and Massah, being rendered “provocation and temptation.” This is due to the fact that the proper names given by Moses to the places where those sad episodes took place came, in time, to have a broader meaning. (Exodus 1:7)

Verse 9

“Forty years,” as mentioned in verses 9 and 17, would seem to be a delicate hint of the fact that when this author wrote, just about the same length of time, that is, forty years, had passed since the resurrection of Christ, and suggesting

that the ancient defection of that generation of Israelites might be typical of what was threatening among the generation addressed in Hebrews.

The word “works” in this place should be rendered in the singular, according to B. F. Westcott, *op. cit.*, p. 81, who wrote, “The Hebrew is singular. The many works of God in the wilderness were all one work, one in essence and aim, whether they were works of deliverance or chastisement. Under this aspect acts of righteous judgment and of mercy were parts of the same counsel of loving discipline.”

Verse 10

“The generation” mentioned in this verse is that of the Israelites who provoked God and were prohibited from entering the promised land. The question rises as to how the defection was applicable to the situation confronting the Christians to whom Hebrews was addressed. To be sure, all things that happened to ancient Israel were ensamples for them that believe (1 Corinthians 10:1-11); but even more is apparently intended here. The whole typical structure of Israel corresponds to many facts and events in Christianity. The death of Christ is called “an exodus” (found in Luke 9:31; Christ is the true Passover sacrificed for His people (1 Corinthians 5:7); He is the lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Peter 1:19); Christians during their probation are said to be like Israel of old, “the church in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38); and, as F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 62, wrote, “Their (the Christians’) baptism is the antitype of Israel’s passage through the Red Sea (1 Corinthians 10:1ff); their sacrificial feeding on Him (Christ) by faith is the antitype of Israel’s nourishment with manna and the water from the Rock (1 Corinthians 10:3ff; Christ, the living rock, is their guide through the wilderness (1 Corinthians 10:4); the heavenly rest that lies before them is the counterpart to the earthly Canaan which was the goal of the Israelites.”

“They always go astray in their heart; and they did not know My ways . . .” These two statements seem, at first, not to belong together; but the reason of their being connected was clearly explained by T. Brooks, *The Biblical Illustrator*, Hebrews, Vol. 1, p. 245, who wrote, The proper remedy for crime is,

therefore, the knowledge of God's ways. But we must not fall into the mistake of supposing that the knowledge of the ways of God signifies the being informed as to the purport of those laws. Here, as in many other parts of Scripture, the word denotes approval by experience, as well as knowledge in the ordinary sense."

The physical death which overtook the lost generation in the wilderness was but a physical penalty for their rebellion against God; and, although they were never allowed to re-acquire the lost advantage in the physical sense of entering Canaan, it may rightfully be supposed that all of them who repented and brought themselves into harmony with God's purpose still retained the hope of eternal life, Moses himself being a prime example of this. Far more dreadful, therefore, was the danger threatening the Hebrew Christians who, if they fell away, stood to suffer the loss of even "all spiritual blessings" that are in Christ.

Verse 11

"As I swore in My wrath . . ." calls attention to God's making an oath; and although mentioned elsewhere by Zacharias (Luke 1:73), Peter (Acts 2:30), and Stephen (Acts 7:17), it is in Hebrews that this fact receives the greatest attention, there being no less than six references to it, the others being 3:18; 4:3; 6:13, 16; and 7:21.

"They shall not enter My rest" refers to the prohibition by which God refused admittance of Israel into Canaan, and immediately loomed in the author's mind as a type of that rest the Hebrew Christians were in danger of forfeiting.

Verse 12

Five definite facts emerge from this verse:

- (1) that it is possible for Christians to fall away from the living God,
- (2) that such a disaster is due to an unbelieving heart,
- (3) that an unbelieving heart is evil (not merely 'smart'),

- (4) God is not a mere influence but a living person, and
- (5) that there are adequate grounds upon which a Christian may avoid falling away.

Psalm 95 is divided into two parts, the first (1-7 being a warning against disobedience; and it is the second portion of the Psalm which the author quoted. The message of the entire Psalm is that men should worship God, but that mere worship, unaccompanied by obedience, will not avail. Apostasy comes under consideration again in 6:1-8, where from its treatment there, it cannot possibly be doubted that the author is warning his readers against a present, real and impending danger, a threat to any Christian who might allow an evil heart of unbelief to develop within him.

Indeed, if there is no such thing as the possibility that a true child of God might fall away and be lost, how could the author of this epistle have introduced such a subject, and how could he have warned them to “take heed” against a non-existent danger?

“An evil, unbelieving heart . . .” contains another intimation of the moral basis of faith. Unbelief does not exist apart from antecedent evil in men’s hearts. Christ said, “And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil.” (John 3:19) Men who have accepted the truth and are actually in the faith of Christ, if they do not live up to the moral requirements of that faith, become alienated from it, grow to despise and hate it, and at last find themselves in rebellion against God.

“The living God” identifies the God of the Christians as the creator, upholder, and governor of the universe; and this expression is used several times in the New Testament. It featured Peter’s noble confession (Matthew 16:16): Caiaphas used it when he administered an oath to Jesus (Matthew 26:63); it was frequently in the writings of Paul (Romans 9:26; 2 Corinthians 3:3; 6:16; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 Timothy 3:15), and the apostle John saw an angel “having the seal of the living God.” (Revelation 7:2)

It is extremely appropriate that the Being within whom the life principle is self-contained, and whose existence is eternally in the present time “I AM WHO I AM”—Exodus 3:14), should be called the living God.

Verse 13

The persons so strongly commanded in this place to “exhort” and the persons to be exhorted can be none other than the Christian membership itself, and that as manifested in their most intimate personal relationships, such as families, congregations, fellow-workers, and close associates of every kind.

Is this commandment heeded today? It is strongly to be feared that it is forsaken. How many families must there be where there is no daily exhortation to faithfulness in Christ! How many men work side by side without ever knowing if a fellow-worker is even a Christian or not and who for months and years never mention either God or religion, except, perhaps, profanely!

Why do not Christians exhort one another daily, as commanded?

- (1) Some perhaps fail through natural timidity, but that is a weakness that should not be allowed to stand.
- (2) Some are ashamed of Christ. Why those long weeks of deathly silence, wherein even some parents speak no loving words of exhortation? No wonder children grow up asking in their hearts, “Do they really believe it?”
- (3) Still others have accepted a notion that it is impolite to speak of Christ, or faith, or religion; and, although it is possible that there are occasions or circumstances in which true politeness might omit the type of exhortation commanded here yet this commandment is directed squarely at members of the family of God, Christians, and is applicable to all of them in the everyday associations of like, like those in the family, in business, and in recreation.
- (4) Broken or mixed families, in a religious sense, are another deterrent.

When unbelieving partners are linked with Christians, the daily exhortations are infinitely more difficult, if not impossible; and the loss of the

spiritual benefit that would normally accrue from them is tragic, first in the life of the Christian partner, and secondly in the lives of the children.

The overwhelming power of the admonition delivered by the Holy Spirit in this paragraph is seen in the rules, or techniques laid down, by which a truly successful Christian life may be achieved and strengthened. Strangely enough, both of these directives lean heavily toward self-help!

First, the man who would wish to continue as a Christian should boldly speak of his faith, glorying in it every day, and seizing every possible chance to extol his love and appreciation of God, the sweetness of service in Christ, and every other joy and benefit of salvation. (Verse 6)

The second of these rules is in verse 13; and it commands the entire Christian community, whether in the family, the congregation, or in other close and intimate contact, to “exhort one another day by day.”

Verse 13

“Lest anyone of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin . . .” The hardening of the heart through sin’s deceit is a danger enhanced by the fact that, “The heart is more deceitful than all else.” (Jeremiah 17:9)

The deceit of sin and also the deceit of the heart combine to visit ruin in men’s lives. Men’s deceitful hearts subconsciously desire to be deceived, thus making the deception far easier and more extensive than otherwise. The deceitfulness of sin extends to every conceivable phases of it.

Sin promises the transgressor happiness, only to plunge him in sorrow. It promises joy, but delivers wretchedness, shame, misery, and remorse. It promises liberty, but binds the sinner with the most disgusting chains of slavery. It promises light, but submerges the soul in outer darkness. It promises knowledge, as in the case of Adam and Eve, but provides with that knowledge a devastating sense of shame, guilt, and bitterness.

Yes, sin deceives. It promises to be nothing serious. It mocks the ship of Alexandria with the gentle zephyrs of the south wind (Acts 27:13), only to smite

with the full fury of Euraquilo (east or northeast wind) when the unwary ship has ventured out of its haven.

Verse 14

Albert Barnes, Notes on the New Testament, p. 88, wrote, “What else can be said so honorable of a man as that he “is a partaker of Christ,” that he shares his feelings here, and that he is to share his honors in a brighter world? Compared with this, what is it to participate with the rich and the gay in their pleasures; what would it be to share in the honors of kings and conquerors?”

The union of Christ and His members provides the entire foundation of their hope. Those who believe and obey Christ and partake of His righteousness, by imputation; receive the judicial discharge from their sins, by means of His sacrifice; and look forward to entering heaven itself by having become members of His spiritual body—church.

Here again, as in verse 6, is given the necessity for believers to continue faithfully and enthusiastically “to the end.” What end? Any end whatsoever! Perhaps the words “to the end” are unspecific on purpose in order to cover a range of meanings such as:

- (1) the end of a particular period of temptation,
- (2) the end of life,
- (3) the end of the world, and
- (4) perhaps even “the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.”
(1 Peter 1:9)

Verse 15

“While it is said, Today . . .” means persevere as long as life lasts, or as long as there is any today. (See verse 8 for additional notes, as this verse is parallel to that verse.)

Verse 16

Here is a solemn warning against trusting in a majority, or what is popular. The author pointedly reminds his readers that the wilderness failure of Israel

was on a national scale, supported by the overwhelming majority, and popularly led by the great princes of Israel. (Numbers 13:3-16)

The statement that “all they” rebelled is hyperbole, exaggeration for the sake of emphasis. It is true that Joshua and Caleb refused to be with the majority and survived to enter Canaan, Albert Barnes, *op. cit.*, p. 91, wrote, “The exception was so small that the apostle had no scruple in saying that they all provoked God by their disobedience.”

The exception was so small that the names of only two have come down through history as repudiating the majority.

THE LOST GENERATION

The tragic case of that lost generation in the wilderness is of epic proportions. They had begun so gloriously, led of God Himself, seeing their enemies humbled by a series of shocking plagues, crossing the Red Sea on dry land, arming themselves from the wreckage of Pharaoh’s drowned army, engaging in the most dramatic instantaneous exodus of all time, overcoming all obstacles, and singing the songs of triumph and victory; how could they have failed after all that? If so fantastic a beginning could be nullified by ultimate defeat, surely the apparent reasons for it should be of the most definite concern for believers in all ages.

And what are those reasons?

- (1) They had a morbid fear of hunger and other looming dangers. The relative security of their lives as slaves seemed preferable to the unknown dangers ahead.
- (2) They exaggerated the dangers that confronted them, saying, “The land that devours its inhabitants.” (Numbers 13:32)
- (3) They failed to manifest that essential self-respect which is an ingredient of all success, saying, “We became like as grasshoppers, in our own sight and so we were in their sight.” (Numbers 13:33) One might call that “the grasshopper complex” and find a great many examples of it today.
- (4) They accepted the majority report brought in by the ten unfaithful

spies. The multitude of Israel looked at the ten instead of the two, blindly following the majority, feeling that wisdom was in that course, and unaware till too late that ignorance, defeat, folly, and death lay with the majority.

Men of the present day are confronted with exactly the same danger. What do the majority say about God, Christ, the church, baptism, the Lord's Supper, Christian living, sobriety, virtue, prayer, and piety?

(5) The most important and all-encompassing reason for their failure was their unbelief, a condition bluntly noted in 3:19 and 4:2, below.

Instead of glorying in their faith and exhorting one another, daily to maintain it, they permitted themselves to drift away from it, until in an evil hour they found themselves in a state of rebellion against God.

Verse 17

The writer continues to focus upon the overwhelming disaster that befell Israel in the wanderings, again mentioning the forty-year duration of the offense, as in verse 9, and stressing the summary judgment of death upon an entire generation. The holy antagonism of God toward all sin is seen in the fact that so extensive and final a penalty was invoked; but also the heavenly mercy and forbearance of God are observed, not only in that forty-year period of His sublime patience with Israel, but in His waiting till they allied of natural causes rather than directly by Divine fiat. That Israel deserved to die instantly for their sin appears in the fact that God was ready thus to punish them but yielded to the intercession of Moses. (Exodus 32:32) It has already been noted that this physical judgment against them did not compromise their right of eternal salvation, based upon their faith, repentance and obedience subsequent to their apostasy. (Verse 8) The Hebrew Christians, by their apostasy, would incur an even more terrible penalty in that they stood to forfeit heaven itself.

Verse 18

The book of Hebrews makes a great thing of obedience, affirming that even Christ was made perfect by it (5:8-9) and that the salvation He authored is "unto

all them that obey Him;” and also marking especially the obedience of so illustrious a person as Abraham. (11:8) In this verse, disobedience is made the basis of God’s denying Israel the right to enter Canaan, the “rest” spoken of being a reference to their dwelling in that good land, rather than a mention of the Sabbath day, the Sabbath day of course, being a rest that they did actually receive and enjoy throughout their whole history.

Unbelief is indeed a sin, damning and destructive enough; but it is followed by overt and willful actions against the laws of God, such actions being of themselves fatal to the receiving of God’s approval, no matter if founded in unbelief, as Israel’s were, or not. One of the great heresies of the Reformation appeared in the doctrine of salvation by “faith alone,” and the attendant notion that the only sin, actually, is “unbelief.” (See Hebrews 11:6 for more information.)

Verse 19

This passage shows that the exclusion of Israel grew out of moral necessity, their unbelief having betrayed them into outright rebellion against God. The application, of course, is that, if God spared not them, neither will He spare Christians guilty of the same conduct.

That lost generation of the Israelites suffered incredible hardships in the wilderness, being subject to the incursions of armed enemies, enduring hunger and thirst and wretchedness, being exposed to the sickening agonies inflicted by poisonous serpents, finding no certain habitation, marching every day of their lives in step with frustration, disease and death, and yet it all could have been different.

God gave them the right to enter Canaan immediately upon their coming out of Egypt, but through unbelief and disobedience they failed to enter. Never, perhaps, in human history is there so clearly outlined a case in which the religious and spiritual failures of a people issued so promptly and irrevocably in their temporal and physical poverty as well, leaving a lesson for all to see.

CHAPTER 4

EXHORTATION CONTINUED, THE CHRISTIANS REST ATTAINED BY FAITH, POWER OF GOD'S WORD, THE GREAT HIGH PRIEST, AND BOLDNESS AT THE THRONE OF GRACE

Verse 1

Why should men fear, especially Christians? Simply because great and eternal rewards are subject to forfeit as long as men are in the flesh, because a powerful and aggressive foe in the person of Satan and his hosts are opposed to us, and necessary labors of life constantly tend to produce that one moment of life in which inattention can lead to everlasting ruin.

The first thirteen verses of this chapter conclude the second exhortation, or warning; and the idea of "a rest" for the people of God, already mentioned in chapter 3:18, is taken up and further elaborated. "Rest" in the usage at this place is a much more varied and extensive thing than merely entering Canaan, for it is a concept that is made to stand for all the spiritual and eternal rewards of faith.

The Christian rest includes rest in Christ, as procured by taking His yoke and leaning of Him (Matthew 11:28-29), rest from the labors of life (Revelation 14:13), and rest with the Lord in heaven throughout all eternity; and although the author of Hebrews might have preached the Christian rest from the standpoint of Christ's teachings and those of the apostles, he elected to base his appeal upon the Old Testament, equally valid, and better designed to woo his readers back from a reversion to Judaism; hence the statement that "there was a promise left," in the sense of being "left open." How so? Five hundred years, almost, after Israel entered Canaan, David in Psalm 95:7-11 spoke of there being a rest for God's people, indicating that their final entry into Canaan was not the full attainment of that rest, and that something much more than that was involved.

It must be supposed that the far greater part of Christians falling away from faith in Christ do so unintentionally. Few indeed ever decide boldly against the Lord and move decisively against Him; but, on the contrary, they allow inattention to spiritual things, carelessness in attending worship, neglect of daily prayer and study of the Word, and encroachments upon their time due

to worldly and pleasure-loving friends to divert their attention first, and later their whole life and conduct from the path of honor and duty. It is hard to imagine a more urgent and persistent warning than the one given here.

Verse 2

This does not mean that the Jews had the same gospel preached unto them that Christians have received, but that just as they received a good word about the promised rest, so have Christians. There is also a plain indication of the source of faith deemed so necessary to salvation, in that it is called a “word of hearing.” Faith comes by hearing God’s word. (Romans 10:16ff) It is God’s word itself, then, that has the power to enter the heart and produce faith.

F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 70, wrote, “The sense is plain enough; the good news had to be assimilated or appropriated by faith, if it was to bring any benefit to the hearers.”

Verse 3

“We who have believed enter that rest . . .” stresses the first and immediate phase of the Christian’s rest and focuses the attention of the believer upon the benefits and joys of that Christian service which are already his and in the process of being enjoyed by him. This verse again strikes at the tragic failure of Israel who, though entering Canaan, did not in fact enter into God’s rest, in the higher and better sense of becoming a holy nation of righteous and devoted worshipers of God, and God had commanded them (Exodus 19:3-6); but on the other hand, they rebelled against God time and again; they rejected the theocracy, demanded a king like the nations around them, worshiped idols, oppressed the poor, and even made their children pass through the fire to Molech!

All this came about in spite of the fact that God was fully prepared to welcome them into such a glorious rest, indeed, had been anticipating it “from the foundation of the world.”

What is meant by “the foundation of the world”? The message these references carry is that God’s plans and purposes for men predate the formation

of the world itself. “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.” (Ephesians 1:4)

This coincides with Paul’s word that, “We speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages, to our glory.” (1 Corinthians 2:7)

Verse 4

Genesis 2:2 is the text in the author’s mind in these words; and the argument is that God’s resting on the seventh day unaccompanied by any subsequent declaration that He has left off resting makes the rest of God still available to them that will receive it, as it has been from the time God finished creation. The rest God promised His people is thus a share of His own rest and pertains to the felicity and serenity that flow from faithful and humble obedience to God’s will.

It should be noted that the “seventh day” of this verse can be nothing other than the seventh day of creation on which God rested and not the Hebrew Sabbath. The rest of God is a far greater and more wonderful thing than any system of merely keeping Sabbaths or even entering Canaan, both of which things the Jews certainly did; but in the procurement of that more noble rest, they failed.

Verse 5

This quotation is again from Psalm 95:11, identifying the rest spoken of here as that of God Himself, following the six days of creation, and to which heavenly rest God has always invited men to come and share. To make this place any kind of an argument for men’s keeping the Sabbath day is to miss the entire argument of the epistle in this portion. The argument is that a rest remains because it was not entered by the Hebrews!

Therefore, it was not entering Canaan, nor keeping the Sabbath day, for they did that. The marvelous rest referred to here can be neither of those things but must be understood as a reference back to the rest of God Himself which is still in progress, a rest the Jews could have entered but did not, and likewise a

rest that many now have the right to enter but may come short of it; hence the warning.

Verse 6

This is a summary of the argument. God desires and has purposed from all eternity that some shall enter into His rest; and, seeing that Israel did not, as proved by David's saying so in Psalm 95, the way is still open for whomsoever will accept the invitation.

Verse 7

The thesis turns on the fact that it was "long afterward" (about 500 years) that David urged the people at that time, "today," to hear God's voice, to refrain from hardening their hearts, and to enter the rest of God.

Verse 8

This means that if Joshua had given the people the rest spoken of here, in that he led them into Canaan, then David would not have held it up as something yet unattained such a long time after that. The words "Jesus" and "Joshua" are one word, just as the names "Juan" and "John" are the same. It is plain enough that not our Lord but the ancient Hebrew captain who succeeded Moses and led the children of Israel into Canaan, is the person meant by the author of Hebrews in this verse. Joshua, due to his name, and the fact that he led Israel into the Promised Land, is viewed as one of the lesser types of the Master.

However, there are more contrasts than similarities between them, as witness the following:

- (1) Joshua in the conquest of Canaan benefited himself and his posterity (Joshua 18:49-50): Christ's ministry benefited not Himself but His followers only. The rest that Jesus made available to His disciples was already His own.
- (2) Joshua did not alone conquer Canaan but was aided extensively by all the Israelites; Christ trod the winepress alone (Isaiah 63:3)

- (3) The conquest of Canaan did not cost Joshua either wounds or death; but Jesus won the eternal land of promise at the cost of suffering and death. (1 Peter 1:18-19)
- (4) Joshua could not totally expel the old inhabitants of Canaan; but the victory of Christ was complete over death, sin, Satan, and the grave.

Verse 9

J. Barmby, Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 21, Hebrews, p. 109, made a concise and interesting comment writing, "The conclusion is now drawn; the true nature of the rest intended being beautifully denoted by the word "Sabbath rest," which refers to the Divine rest from "the foundation of the world," while the offer of it to true believers always, and not to Israelites only, is intimated by the phrase, "the people of God."

Verse 10

The view here is that it pertains to the rest which any true Christian follower of the Lamb enters upon becoming a Christian. Rest is a universal human longing; and, although in youth the desire for rest might not be so urgently felt, its need and urgency, with increasing rigor appear more and more as life unfolds.

The thought of ceasing from his works, on the part of the Christian, is also intriguing. If God is resting from His works, what is there that man can do? Does he propose to move everything alone? Surely the works of righteousness, that is, human righteousness, cannot avail unto salvation.

This verse also has its application to Christ. He did indeed finish the work of His earthly ministry and entered into that eternal rest to which His followers are invited to come. All who will receive it are invited; and Christ, as representative man, has already entered upon that rest, or into it. The recurring and overwhelming thought of that "rest" so much discussed here is the eternal nature and purity of it, utterly distinguishing it from Canaan, or earthly Sabbaths, which even at best were dim and imperfect symbols of a genuine reality, the rest of God.

Verse 11

Do men actually enter that rest during the present life? The answer appears to be affirmative, but only in the sense of receiving the earnest of it, or in the sense of receiving it as an inheritance to be possessed now but actually entered only in the eternal world.

Disobedience is the great enemy of that final possession of the rest of God; and the ever-present possibility of disobedience and temptations that woo men to disobedience are factors that contravene the complete enjoyment of that rest in this life.

“Lest anyone fall . . .” Adam Clark, Commentary, p. 711, commented on this saying, “(It means) lest he fall from the grace of God, from the gospel and its blessings, and perish everlastingly. This is the meaning of the apostle, who never supposed that a man might not make final shipwreck of faith and of good conscience, as long as he was in the state of probation.”

“Be diligent . . .” stresses the work to be done by the believer. Without in any sense attributing to one’s own efforts any eternal merit, and without supposing such labors to place God under any obligation whatsoever, it is nevertheless one of the conditions of salvation that men labor, work, and strive to enter the narrow way. Many New Testament passages support this thought, such as Luke 13:34, Acts 2:40; Philippians 2:12 and Revelation 20:12.

Verse 12

“The word of God . . .” is to be understood as the Bible, God’s revelation of His truth to men, especially in the sense of His commandments.

That the word of God is “living” is corroborated by other New Testament writers such as Luke (Acts 7:38), Peter (1 Peter 1:23), and others. The word “active,” shows that the word does not lie inert and dead but at all times carries within itself the mighty power of its Divine author.

This verse has a heaping together of powerful terms for the purpose of showing the utmost ability of the word of God to penetrate the complex inward

nature of man, to convict him of sin, to expose his hidden motives, and to judge the very nature of life itself.

Verse 13

James Macknight, *Apostolic Epistles*, p. 526, sees in the words here a reference, “To the state in which the sacrifices called burnt offerings were laid on the altar. They were stripped of their skins, their breasts were ripped open, their bowels were taken out, and their backbone was cleft. This is the import of the original word. They were divided into quarters; so that outwardly and inwardly they were fully exposed to the eye of the priest, in order to a thorough examination (Leviticus 1:5-6); and being found without blemish, they were laid in their natural order upon the altar and burnt.”

The significant warning to Christians lies in the fact that the word of God is able to discover blemishes or taints of character by means of the most thorough and accurate discernment of the entire man, such being the spiritual equivalent of the priest’s minute examination of the ancient sacrifices.

Not one little sin shall ever be able to crawl by the eyes of the Eternal God without receiving its just condemnation and punishment; and that is the overwhelming reason why every man should fly to Christ for refuge and forgiveness.

These words of verse 13 conclude the second great admonition of the book of Hebrews.

DIVISION III

CHRIST IS A BETTER HIGH PRIEST (4:14 -7:10)

Verse 14

The author introduces in this verse the theme of Jesus as the great high priest and proceeds to elaborate the reasons of great superiority over any other. Jesus’ passing “through the heavens” contrasts with Aaron’s merely passing beyond certain enclosures in the tabernacle; nor should men be careful to determine just how many heavens Jesus passed through, if three or seven,

according to the Hebrew speculations about such things; because as a matter of fact, Jesus Christ has ascended far above “all heavens.” (Ephesians 4:10) A little later in this epistle it is said that Christ is made “higher than the heavens.” (7:26)

On the plurality of heavens, F. f. Bruce, op, cit., p. 85, wrote, “The plural “heavens” as regularly used in the New Testament and the Septuagint, reflects the Hebrew word used in the Old Testament, which is always plural. What is emphasized here is His transcendence.”

Throughout Hebrews, the weight of responsibility for faithfulness is made to rest upon the diligence and alertness of the believer himself; and he is repeatedly admonished to hold it fast, to glory in it, and to exhort others constantly to the same effect.

This verse, with the ones preceding and following it, reveals the Christian’s great high priest as doing three things that Aaron could not do. He entered God’s rest, ascended far above the heavens, and came to the very throne of grace itself.

Verse 15

Far from feeling that our great high priest, so far removed above the heavens, is, from so vast a separation, incapable of proper sympathy for suffering and tempted Christians, the believer is invited to see that Jesus the Son of God knows all about human problems, even temptation, and that He is thereby qualified to provide the utmost sympathy and understanding for human weakness.

COULD CHRIST HAVE SINNED?

Regarding the temptation of Christ, the question inevitably appears as to the possibility, even, that Jesus could have sinned; but there seems to be no satisfactory explanation of how any person, even the Son of God, could be tempted to do anything impossible for Him to do. Without the possibility of yielding to sin, how can there, in fact, be any such thing as temptation?

It should be remembered that Christ has taken upon Himself the handicap of human flesh, even the blood of harlots and Gentiles; and, as a man, Christ certainly had the capability of doing wrong if He had elected to do so.

If one may hazard a conjecture as to the greatest temptation of Christ, it was likely an impulse to call the whole thing off, abort His mission of redemption, call for the legions of angels, overwhelm His enemies with destruction, and consign the human race to oblivion, a fate fully deserved; and that just such a temptation did occur is seen in Christ's mention of the twelve legions of angels. (Matthew 26:53) Only His great eternal love for men enabled our Lord to forego such a termination of His heavenly mission.

Men may exclaim, "How could Christ be tempted in all points, since He had no child, did not grow old, never married, was not in business, etc., and therefore did not pass through every situation that produces temptation in men?" All human temptation resolves into three basic principles, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. (1 John 2:16) Christ, of course, was thoroughly tempted and tested in all of three areas and yet without sin.

"The throne of grace" is the throne of God; and certain reflections on that subject are appropriate.

- (1) The existence of such a thing as God's throne reveals that the universe is a controlled and governed entity and that there is a center of power and authority, called "the throne of grace." The universe is therefore, not like a clock left to run down. God is upon the throne.
- (2) The government of all things is personal. Not a computer, but a throne; not blind senseless matter, but a person; not merely law, but the will of One on the throne—that is the concept of universal government explicit in this mention of the throne.
- (3) Such a throne, with its undergirdings of righteousness and justice mentioned in 1:8-9, reveals the antagonism between God and evil, showing that eternal justice will prevail infinitely throughout the whole universe.

(4) That throne's being called here a "throne of grace" makes the control center appear as a source of mercy for fallen and sinful men, being called also "the throne of God and of the Lamb." (Revelation 22:3)

How wonderful, from this vale of sorrow and death and sin and shame, to lift the thoughts of the spirit toward the throne where the Lamb, our sacrifice is seated and clothed with the mantle of total authority!

"Boldly men are commanded to approach the throne of grace. Why? Man's very nature, in the person of Christ, is seated there. He has tasted every temptation, passed through every sorrow. He knows! Out of His loving heart there flows an eternal tide of love, sympathy, and understanding of human kind, suffering the dreadful trials of their probation; and He eagerly anticipates the entry of His beloved children into the joy of their Lord (Matthew 25:23), demanding only that they love Him (John 14:15), and able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him (7:25).

B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 108, gives us an excellent summary of the thought of this text writing, "The minds of the writer and readers are full of the imagery of the Levitical system, and of the ceremonial of the high priestly atonement; and the form of the exhortation suggests the grandeur of the position in which the Christian is placed, as compared with that of the Jew, "Let us therefore," trusting the Divine power and human sympathy of Jesus the Son of God, "draw near," as priests ourselves in fellowship with our High Priest--and not remain standing afar off as the congregation of Israel—"to the throne of grace," no symbolic mercy seat, but the very center of Divine sovereignty and love."

CHAPTER 5

AUTHORITY AND HONOR OF CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD, COMPARISON WITH MELCHIZEDEK, SALVATION TO THEM THAT OBEY, REPROOF OF NEGLIGENCE

Verse 1

In the Jewish system, a tremendous weight of significance and emphasis was placed upon the glorious office of the high priest; and, for the encouragement of Christians tempted to revert to Judaism, it was therefore necessary to show that Christ was and is indeed a great high priest, not merely equal, but vastly superior to any of the high priests of Israel.

The author of Hebrews analyzes the high priesthood of Christ in such a manner as to prove the Christians who had given up the priesthood of Aaron and his successor had, in Christ, received far more than they had lost. In every conceivable comparison, as to rank, character, quality of sacrifice, or whatever the marvelous superiority of Christ is emphatically pointed out.

He begins with the ordinary qualifications of any high priest, namely, that:

- (1) he should be taken from among men,
- (2) appointed by God,
- (3) have tender compassion for those whom he represented,
- (4) possess an adequate sacrifice, and
- (5) refrain from making such an honor unto himself. Then he proceeds to show how, in all of these matters, Christ possessed the most extraordinary qualifications.

Without doubt, the earthly splendor of the Jewish high priest was a factor of seductive influence on Christians, especially those of Jewish background. His rich robes, the extravagantly ornate breastplate, the unique privilege of entering the holy of holies on the day of atonement, his status as judge and president of the Sanhedrin, his dramatic influence as the official representative of the Jewish nation, more especially a time when they had no king—all these things and

many others elevated the Jewish high priest to a position of isolated splendor in the eyes of the people.

“Gifts and sacrifices for sins” has a special reference to the Day of Atonement and to the ceremonial offering of blood, first for the sins of the high priest and then for the sins of all the people.

The separate mention of gifts and sacrifices is a distinction between the no blood offerings and the bloody ones, both classes of which were offered on the Day of Atonement.

Verse 2

The need of compassion on the part of a high priest is stressed here, a qualification sadly lacking in many who held that position. Alexander Jannaeus, one particularly heartless high priest, was singled out by F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 89-90, who said of him, “No man in Israel was less disposed to “bear gently with the ignorant and erring--or anyone else.” He further stated that the “fall of the house of Zadok to the destruction of the temple 240 years later, there were very few priests in Israel who manifested the personal qualities so indispensable to their sacred office.”

Also, the generation that first received Hebrews were close enough to remember the heartless Annas, remembered for his part in the crucifixion of Christ, and who had begun his career as high priest by putting a man to death, for which injustice he was deposed by Rome who had the power to inflict death or be removed from his office.

Regardless of the failure of many high priests to possess the virtue of compassion mentioned here, that virtue should nevertheless be held prerequisite the exercise of any meaningful sacred ministry. No antidote for a proud and vindictive spirit is quite as effective as a penitent consciousness of one’s own sins and shortcomings, an excellent example being Paul who said, “That I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.” (Romans 9:2-3)

Verse 3

Here the author touches on one of the great differences between the high priest of Israel and the Lord Jesus Christ; whereas they were, through infirmity and sins, required to offer blood for themselves, Christ being sinless and undefiled, was laid under no such necessity.

R. Milligan, *New Testament Commentary*, p. 151, pointed out that this acknowledgment of guilt by the Aaronic priests was not confined to such a special occasion as the Day of Atonement but was all-pervasive wrote, “The high priest was required to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. This he did not only on special occasions and for special offenses (Leviticus 4:3-12), but also in all the regular daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly sacrifices that were offered for the sins of the nation; in all these there was an acknowledgment of his own guilt, as well as the guilt of the brethren.”

Although there can be no analogy between the high priesthood of Israel and the office of Christian ministers and teachers, there certainly is, however, the same common bond of the need of forgiveness that unites every teacher of God’s word with the people who hear him.

Verse 4

Only God had the right to appoint such a thing as a high priest who would represent His people before the presence on high; and only God has a right to name a High Priest for all mankind. This verse lays the premise for showing that Christ too was called and appointed by God to the great office which He exercises on behalf of all men.

Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament, Vol. Hebrews*, p. 113, noted the efforts of some to make such a use of the verse saying, “For the uninterrupted succession of popes and their bishops in the church who alone have the authority to ordain for the sacerdotal office; and whomsoever is not thus appointed is, with them, illegitimate. But, he concluded, “The verse has nothing to do with clerical office, with preaching God’s Holy word, or administering the sacraments.”

The office of the Jewish high priest was Divinely scheduled to expire and disappear with the coming of Christ.

Verses 5-6

This is one of the most significant declarations about Christ to be found in all the Bible; and, in all probability, the author of Hebrews was the first ever to understand it and to find in this Psalm 110 the Old Testament prophecy that united in a single person the offices of both king and high priest, that is, in the person of Christ.

One of the great mysteries of the; prophecies of Jesus had always been the apparent contradictions in the Messianic prophecies, some hailing Him as “Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace,” and others, often by the same writer, extolling Him as “a man of sorrows,” “despised and rejected of men,” “a root out of dry ground,” and “acquainted with grief.” It was precisely this apparent contradiction that the Pharisees could not and never did understand.

The author of Hebrews then did a dramatic, unheard of thing. Having already argued from Psalm 110:1-2 for the universal kingship of Christ the Messiah (1:5), at this point in the epistle he returned to that same Psalm 110 to bring in the fourth verse from which he also proclaimed the universal high priesthood of Christ, showing Him to be not of Aaron’s line, but an independent high priest of universal dominion “after the order of Melchizedek.” Thus was revealed, at last, the mystery of how the suffering high priestly Messiah and the kingly Messiah were one and the same person.

Modern religious people would not find that problem an impediment to their believing in Jesus Christ, but it was a powerful deterrent to Christians of Jewish background in the first century.

“You cannot accept Christ as your high priest,” the Pharisees said, “because, since He does not belong to the posterity of Aaron, He is disqualified from being any kind of a priest whatever!” And the only verse in the Bible that clears that up is Psalm 110:4.

The Pharisees should have known this; but it was true of them, as it was of the Sadducees, that they did err “not knowing the Scriptures or the power of God.” (Matthew 22:29)

The author put both references side by side, the first hailing him as king, the second as a great high priest forever. (Psalm 2:7, Psalm 110:4)

“Forever” means that Christ has no successor as high priest, that as long as the sun, moon, and stars endure, and to the remotest generations of men, He is still the great and only high priest. His work will never suffer an interruption nor be diminished in any way till all enemies have been put under His feet, and until the last redeemed sinners have entered the eternal abode.

Verse 7

This verse speaks of the agony in Gethsemane where the godly soul of Jesus recoiled at the disgusting and repugnant death looming ahead of Him on the cross; for surely, the “cup” mentioned there could mean nothing if not the approaching agony.

The “cup” was not the present agony in the garden but the cross itself is explicit in the fact that, after the agony was passed, Jesus still proposed to drink the cup; for, when Peter would have defended Him, He said, “put up the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11)

Thus Christ’s prayer was truly heard; and although the specific petition to remove the cup was not granted, it is declared that angels came and strengthened Him; and here is seen God’s method of answering prayers in some instances, in which He sends not a lighter burden but a stronger heart to bear it. It was thus with Jesus, and many after Him found it even so.

The author in this verse stresses the mercy and sympathetic understanding of Jesus, as testified in the sorrows and agonies through which our Lord passed.

“Who was heard because of His piety . . .” “Piety” here has the meaning of “devotion to religious duties and practices,” or “humble submission.”

Verse 8

In a sense, all men learn obedience by the things which they suffer. Usually men learn obedience through the disastrous consequences of their disobedience; but not so with Christ. From the first He set forth on a course of the most absolute and perfect obedience; and the sufferings which He endured were the consequence of that obedience, as witness His sufferings on the cross.

The savage antagonisms of a sinful and rebellious world against all truth and honor were pointed squarely against Him who knew no sin. His perfect obedience was the cause of bitter hatred against Him and provided the occasion for every blow that fell upon His person. That hatred of Christ was exactly in the pattern of the hatred of Abel, who was murdered by his brother Cain. (1 John 3:12)

Verse 9

Christ's being made perfect should not be understood in the sense that He was not previously perfect but as an emphasis upon the perfection of His qualifications of sympathy, love, mercy and understanding, which were so necessary in a high priest, and which could not be possessed fully by any person except one who had suffered.

"Eternal salvation" brings to mind other things mentioned in this epistle: "eternal redemption" (9:12), "eternal inheritance" (9:15), and "eternal covenant" (13:20). Christ is the source, fountain head, procurer and administrator of redemption.

We cannot leave this verse without stressing the obedience which is so forcibly enjoined. That the disobedient have any prospect whatever of salvation is a delusion and a snare. If the Son, and such a Son, learned obedience through suffering, how much more necessary is it that all of His followers obey Him even at the cost of suffering and death. (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9)

The Scriptural exhortation to obedience is not merely that it shall be until death, but unto death. "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." (Revelation 2:10)

Verse 10

Here the author picks up the thread of argument relative to the high priesthood of Christ, intending to return a few verses later with a further elaboration of it; but characteristically of the author, he interrupts himself to deliver a third of five great exhortations in the epistle. It is precisely this trait which suggests Paul as the author.

“Being designated by God . . .” indicates that Christ’s being made a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek was none of the author’s doing; it had not been conceived by any of Christ’s followers, but it was an act of God Himself; and there it was in the sacred Scriptures, embedded as in a matrix, and only waiting for the fullness of time when the mind of inspiration would illuminate it with a finger of light, as is done in this very passage. The deduction that all were expected to make is quite obvious, namely, that Christ’s high priesthood was no less of God than was that of Aaron, and over and beyond that, was in many remarkable particulars superior to it.

THE THIRD EXHORTATION

The balance of chapter 5 and all of the 6th are given to an extensive exhortation for the purpose of arousing the disciples from their lethargy and setting their feet firmly on the road to spiritual maturity. They had simply not developed as should have been expected; and, although sufficient time had elapsed since their conversion that they should have been by that time able teachers of the word of God, such was far from being true of them. They had made themselves content with a knowledge of the rudimentary things of faith and of the first principles of the gospel and had not gone forward to acquire a genuine mastery of the faith. That elementary character of their faith looms in the writer’s mind, at this point, as an actual impediment to their understanding of the marvelous things he was writing; and before proceeding with such advanced teaching, he takes time out to protest their incompetence to understand it!

Verse 11

To many in our own times, and in all ages, the writer's words are properly said to be "hard to explain." The importance of the communication, however, is so great and the need of the people to understand it is so urgent that, after a rebuke to them, he goes ahead with the argument anyway.

Verse 12

That the knowledge of spiritual teachings may be classified as elementary and advanced is explicit in the words "milk" and "solid food." (Note: The metaphor of "milk" and "solid food" will be noted under verses 13-14.)

It should be noted specifically that there are certain elementary, basic, and foundational truths in the Christian system that should be known and received by all. These things are called the "rudiments" and "first principles." The basic things are projected as vital. The author states that the people need to be taught all that again. "You have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principals of the oracles of God."

Verses 13-14

Peter referred to young Christians as "newborn babes," admonishing them to "long for the pure milk of the word that you may grow in respect to salvation." (2 Peter 2:2) Paul used the same metaphor and extended it saying, "I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed even now you are not yet, for you are still fleshly." (1 Corinthians 3:2-3)

The metaphor of children and full-grown men is also used in Ephesians 4:13-14, where Paul admonished his readers to attain the stature of "full-grown men" and that they should be no longer "children."

From the passage before us, it is plain that spiritual maturity is not simply a matter of time. Many who have been Christians many years may be in the condition of these Hebrew Christians. True spiritual growth is the result of prayer, study, meditation, faithfulness, diligence, exercise, and the successful struggle against temptations.

Matters of right and wrong do not always appear as checkerboard squares of black and white, there being many gray areas where the proper discovery of what is right and wrong can be a far more difficult matter. The great loss to the spiritual infant is that he may be misled, and eventually that becomes certain unless he attains some degree of spiritual maturity.

The church needs full-grown men, men who have triumphed over the flesh, men of deep and loving personality, able to comfort the weak and the discouraged, and prepared to stand against all obstacles whatsoever. The pity of the present age of the church is seen in congregations of spiritual infants, uninstructed in the weightier things of the true faith, and indeed utterly ignorant of them, incapable of recognizing the most arrogant heresies, even those that deny the Lord, and still, after so many years possessing only the most elementary knowledge of Christianity.

CHAPTER 6

FOUNDATION PRINCIPLES, PRESSING ON UNTO PERFECTION, EXHORTATIONS TO FAITH AND PATIENCE, THE HOPE THAT IS SET BEFORE US

Verses 1-2

“Leaving the elementary teaching . . .” is not enjoined in the sense of departing from those fundamental things, but in the sense of progressing beyond them, the overwhelming importance of the things mentioned being inherent in the fact of their being called “first principles” and “a foundation.”

The “perfection” refers to a more extensive and thorough knowledge of Christian principles, as contrasted with the mere acquaintance with the basic fundamentals. The goal of all Christian “endeavor” is absolute perfection, even as God is perfect, for Jesus said, “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48)

Unattainable in the ultimate sense, perfection is nevertheless the goal of Christians. All should strive toward it.

THE SIX FUNDAMENTALS

We are living in an age that has indeed “gone on” to a very fanciful and indefinite kind of perfection so-called, categorically forsaking and denying the very principles outlined here as fundamental. For the generation that first received the letter to the Hebrews, a further stress of the fundamentals was not needed; but for this age, the opposite is true. Fundamental truth of the most basic nature is openly denied or presumptuously ignored by an age that seems to feel that it has outgrown such elementary things as these; and, therefore, we may be thankful indeed for the inspired outline of things which actually constitute fundamental Christian doctrine. Some study will be given to this extremely interesting list of the foundation principles of the Christian religion: Repentance from dead works, Faith toward God, The teaching of baptism, The laying on of hands, The resurrection of the dead, and The eternal judgment.

Objection to the view that the primary steps of Christian obedience, faith, repentance, and baptism, are intended here springs from two things:

- (1) the order of their being mentioned (repentance first), and
- (2) the mention of plural baptisms. We shall notice each of these.

The order of faith and repentance in the steps of obedience does not depend upon any word list, even of the apostles, for it is impossible for them to be reversed. No unbeliever in the history of the world ever repented; and the mention of repentance first in his sequence cannot possibly imply any priority of its appearance in the sinner’s heart.

The use of the plural “baptisms” doubtless sprang from the fact that no less than seven baptisms are mentioned in the New Testament, these being:

- (1) the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11),
- (2) the baptism of fire (Matthew 3:11),
- (3) the baptism of John (Matthew 3:16),
- (4) the baptism unto Moses (1 Corinthians 10:2),
- (5) the baptism of suffering (Luke 15:30),

- (6) the baptism for the dead (1 Corinthians 15:29), and
- (7) the baptism of the great commission. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Verse 1

“Repentance from dead works. . .” “Repentance” is basic to salvation. “From dead works . . .” is a reference to the class of deeds from which the conscience needs to be cleansed.

All works are dead, in the sense intended here, except the ones motivated by faith and love of God. The works of human righteousness, the works of the flesh, the works of moral achievement, and even the works of the Law of Moses must all be included in the “dead works” mentioned here.

“And of faith toward God . . .” Faith as a fundamental is affirmed not only here but in 11:6, and throughout the New Testament. (Mark 16:15-16) It is rather strange that faith which has been elevated to a super-status by most of Protestantism should be revealed here among the simplicities, a rudimentary, fundamental, basic thing, which one is admonished to leave and go on unto perfection!

It would be difficult indeed to over-stress the importance of faith, without which no man can please God.

Verse 2

“Instruction about washings . . .” It is plainly baptism that is to be made in this verse a part of the fundamental teaching of Christianity; and therefore, it simply cannot be that baptism is in any sense an optional, non-essential, elective, or superficial duty, but is a genuine obligation.

As regards faith and baptism, the theology of the Protestant era has exaggerated faith and diminished baptism; but in this index of Christian fundamentals one finds them securely embedded side by side in the foundation of the Christian theology.

Seeing then that the Holy Spirit has made them to be among the coordinates, it must be sinful indeed to disturb the place that either of them has in God’s marvelous system of salvation.

Baptism is the burial in water of a believing, penitent candidate, and the raising up again to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12); only those who believe and repent can receive Christian baptism. The purpose of Baptism is to bring the believer into Christ. (Galatians 3:27; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Romans 6:3)

The necessity of baptism lies in the mandate of Christ who commanded all men of all nations of all times to receive it and submit to it. (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16 Acts 2:38ff)

The responsibility for being baptized rests upon every individual ever born into the world. Baptism is a precondition of forgiveness of sins. (Acts 2:38; 22:16) It is the initiatory rite by which one is admitted to the church which is the body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:13)

Although the Scriptures declare that we are saved by baptism (1 Peter 3:21), it is not baptism alone that saves. Baptism without faith, or without repentance, or without the newness of life following, is no baptism. Baptism is “for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), and for the purpose of being saved (Mark 16:15-16); and it is administered in the sacred name “of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28:18-20) Let every man ask himself if this sacred and holy commandment has anything to do with him!

“The laying on of hands. . .” would seem at first glance to be misplaced in this list, but not at all. Absolutely essential to an understanding of the limitation upon the appearance in the early history of the church of truly inspired men who could do miracles and speak with Divine authority in the church is the knowledge of the fact that such abilities came to those men through the laying on of the apostle’s hands (Acts 8:18), and from no other source whatsoever.

Plenary power of a kind like that delegated to an ambassador is never transferable, but every new holder of it must be commissioned at the original source. Even the sorcerer understood this basic point (Acts 8:18ff); and of the possession of that information by such a person as Simon, after such a brief contact with the faith, proves both the fundamental or elementary nature of the

doctrine, and is basic simplicity as well. It was in view of that knowledge that Simon tried to buy the gift, not from Philip who had baptized him and who also had the power, and who was personally known to Simon, but from Peter, an apostle!

“The resurrection of the dead . . .” is another fundamental, sadly shunted aside in the materialistic age through which men are passing. This old fundamental doctrine should be hauled out of the cellar and presented anew to the secular and unbelieving society! (1 Corinthians 15:19) The whole teaching of Christ was founded squarely on the premise of a resurrection of the bad and good alike, indeed, of all men. (John 5:28-29)

Christianity’s most successful missionary, the apostle Paul, never failed to stress this doctrine. At home or abroad, in villages or in great world cities, his message was always and constantly that of the resurrection of the dead. Without the doctrine of the resurrection, the whole fabric of Christian thought dissolves into emptiness and worthlessness.

“And eternal judgment . . .” This doctrine too, in those days is more honored by its neglect than by its faithful proclamation. The whole concept of an eternal judgment, alas, has dropped out of theological firmament, and from its rightful emphasis by gospel preachers. Why? Is not this also a part of the fundamental sub-structure of Christianity? Of course it is. The doctrine of the eternal judgment is taught in the Old Testament (Daniel 12:2); but it is in the New Testament that the magnificent scope and importance of it most vividly appears. Christ plainly stated that all nations would appear simultaneously before Him in judgment, that He should sit upon the throne of God and separate the wicked from the righteous as the shepherd divides the sheep from the goats. (Matthew 25:13ff) He taught that all nations would appear simultaneously with the current generation in judgment, and that the citizens of Nineveh (Matthew 12:41) and the queen of the south (Matthew 12:42), separated by centuries of time, would appear in judgment with the contemporaries of Jesus. “It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment. (9:27)

And as for the delusion that the second coming of Christ, accompanied by the general resurrection and final judgment will all be realized in some vague spiritual sense such as a glorious era of world peace, social justice, and universal felicity among men forget it. To be sure, all men would delightfully hail such a “judgment day” and such a coming of Christ; but the word of God details the second coming of our Lord in terms of a cataclysmic event of world-wide terror and destruction, an event that will not be, in an sense, “good news” for the great majority of Adam’s race; for the Savior Himself said, “Then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the “SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.” (Matthew 24:30)

Great and terrible as the concept of eternal judgment admittedly is, the most profound necessity for it is evident. Most of the truly difficult problems connected with the life of faith, and with reference to the entire system of Christianity, are directly related to the doctrine of eternal judgment.

Sanity in any true sense turns upon the question of justice in the cosmos. If the righteousness and justice of God do indeed establish His throne and undergird all things, then we are safe; and every one shall receive the reward of the deeds done in the body (2 Corinthians 5:10); if not, then any true security of the soul is a fool’s dream, and man himself is but an infant crying in the night with no language but a cry!

But, if the universe is just; if the righteous shall be rewarded and the wicked punished, an eternal judgment is required, a judgment in which all inequities and injustices shall be corrected, and eternal judgment presided over by infinite justice, wisdom, mercy, and love—in short, the judgment revealed upon every page of the sacred Scriptures or if not revealed, then certainly implied.

The widespread neglect and apparent disbelief of this doctrine suggests that it is true of our generation, as it was of those to whom this epistle was first addressed, that “you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God.” (5:12)

“A foundation,” as applied to these six crucial teachings suggests some facts regarding foundations. No less than four foundations of Christianity are mentioned in the New Testament, and these are:

- (1) the foundation fact that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:13-19; 1 Corinthians 3:11),
- (2) the foundation authority, namely the sayings of Jesus Christ, called by Him “these things of mine” (Matthew 7:24-27), “whatever I have commanded you (Matthew 28:20),
- (3) the foundation personnel, the apostles and prophets of the New Testament (Ephesians 2:19), and
- (4) the foundation teachings as set forth in the place before us.

The multiple nature of the foundation should not be confusing, since foundations, even of almost any building, are comprised of several different things. The eternal city that comes down from God out of heaven is said to have twelve foundations! (Revelations 21:19)

Verse 3

The pledge of the writer, and he graciously includes his readers, is to go on unto perfection, with no attempt on his part to re-teach his addressees on the subject of the fundamentals, the reason for this being that it would do no good anyway. This was true because of the impossibility of rekindling the cold ashes of a dead faith after its life-giving flame had been extinguished. He does, however, devote some little space to an explanation of that reason.

Verses 4-6

It is astonishing to behold the lengths to which men have gone in their writings to diminish the plain import of these words. The Calvinistic concept of the impossibility of apostasy, or the final perseverance of the saints, has always been nothing but a delusion.

All efforts to resolve the matter by the judgment upon apostates to the effect that they were never really converted fail in the light of this passage, where there can be no doubt of the true conversion of them that later fell away.

As F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* p. 122, noted, the passage can be abused in two ways. He wrote, “This warning has both been unduly minimized and unduly exaggerated . . . (as by them that say) the sin in question cannot be committed today . . . The warning of this passage is a real warning against a real danger . . . On the other hand, our author’s meaning can be exaggerated to the point of distortion when he is understood to say that for sins committed after baptism here can be no repentance.”

The most difficult word in this passage is “impossible,” but the practical impossibility still stands; and it appears likely that the state here described as “impossible” of renewal should be identified with the “eternal sin” of Mark 3:29. J. Barmby, *The Pulpit Commentary*, p. 160, noted this saying, “The correspondence between the state here described and the consequence of “the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost” suggests itself at once; our Lord’s words, in speaking of that unpardonable sin, being rightly supposed to point to obduracy in spite of experience of the Holy Spirit’s power.”

AN ETERNAL SIN

A careful reading of Mark 3:28-29 and the context reveals that the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is designated as “an eternal sin,” thus one of a class of sins that are called eternal and which are without forgiveness.

The Thessalonians were warned, “Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 5:19); the pleasure lover was described as “Dead even while she lives (1 Timothy 5:6); willful sin after knowledge of the truth results in there being “there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin” (Hebrews 10:26-27); “There is a sin leading to death” (1 John 5:16 for which there is not even any need or commandment that men should pray; certain Corinthians were spoken of as being in a state of “sleep” (1 Corinthians 11:30; and Peter described a certain condition as being worse than lost (2 Peter 2:20-21); and the only condition that can answer to such a description is one from which recovery is impossible. All of these words of the Holy Spirit, and including the strong words of the Savior (Mark 3:28), speak of a condition from which there is no recovery in this life or in the one to come.

Yet in spite of terrible warnings uttered here, no morbid fear should be allowed to fasten upon the soul as a result. What is spoken of may be simply stated as a spiritual death, having its every-day counterpart in physical or natural death. Once a man is truly dead, life cannot be breathed again into his body, death being final. Just so, once a Christian quenches the sacred Spirit within his soul, that too, is final, the destiny of that soul being then and there finally determined.

What then is the sin that can cause so fatal and final a result? The answer is any sin engaged in, loved, and preferred over fellowship with God. The sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit was the sin judged by Jesus to have been terminal with the Pharisees; but in making it “an eternal sin,” Jesus clearly made room for the view that other sins as well could be just as disastrous. The unpardonable or eternal sin is thus any sin that results in the death of the spiritual life; and therein lies the danger of all sin.

The Christian attitude toward sin should therefore be like that of a mother’s concern over any threatened danger to a child. What mother could be indifferent to a splinter in her child’s knee? She is aware that potentially death is involved; and just so the Christian should move against every sin, no matter how slight, or inconsequential, it might appear. The fear, that some feel in thinking that they might have committed such a sin is unjustified as revealed by the analogy in the natural realm. No person physically dead is concerned about his condition. Thus, no person whose life has already been severed eternally from God could have the slightest possible concern over the matter, least of all any feeling of guilt, remorse, or anxiety. “Dead while living” is the apt description.

Fortunately for all men, the spiritual life is quite persistent and hardy; and it may be that relatively few, even of the most hardened rebels against God, have actually gone so far as to reach the “impossible” state. Peter’s description of the condition, cited above, does not affirm that those “who are entangled” in sins are in that “worse” state, but those who “are again entangled and overcome.”

“O Child of God,” keep, the sacred flame of the Holy Spirit alive within your heart!

“And then have fallen away . . .” questions the true conversion of them that fell. Were they really and truly born again Christians, or were they in some vital manner deficient, either of true faith or of possession of the Holy Spirit?

The more one studies this passage, the more it comes through as absolutely certain that those who, in this instance, are spoken of as falling away, were at first good Christians, genuinely converted, enlightened, partakers of the Holy Spirit, and having tasted of the good word of God and the powers of the age to come!

If such a description as this does not indicate a truly converted Christian, as distinguished from one who is not really so, it would be impossible to imagine just how it could be done at all. All of the repeated warnings of the Holy Scriptures against falling—what are those, if they are not stern words designed to keep men back from real dangers? If not what could be their purpose? “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” (1 Corinthians 10:12)

Despite the obvious truth, the bias of Calvinism is discernible in half of the commentaries one may read on this passage. Hardly any passage in the New Testament, having any bearing on the question, has escaped some subtle distortion or outright contradiction. Thus, it is attempted to make out that Judas was never “truly” an apostle, overlooking the fact that one cannot possibly “fall” from an eminence that he has not attained. Again, Simon the sorcerer is usually represented as not having been actually converted; and to support it, the words of Peter to him are sometimes amended to read, “You are still in the gall of bitterness.” (Acts 8:23), notwithstanding the colossal fact that the word “still” is not in the text; and not even the present tense is in it, as a glance at the Greek margin will show; for Peter’s words were actually, “Thou wilt become gall of bitterness.” And as for the question of Simon’s being saved or not, Christ said, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved;” and the inspired writer of Acts

said “Simon also believed and was baptized. (Acts 8:13) Was he saved? If the word of God is true, he was saved.

Verses 7-8

This is an appeal to the practice of burning thistle-infested fields and is an argument *ad hominem* to support what he had just said of apostates. If men burn the infested and unproductive field, then those persons who allow themselves to become spiritually infected and unproductive are likewise in danger of God’s judgment.

There is a note of tenderness in the delicate reference to the infested field as being “nigh unto” cursing, and not as having fully arrived at such a dreadful state; and this may be interpreted as a tacit admission that none of the Hebrew Christians had actually gone that far, yet the severity of the warning appears in the fact of the field, which is “to be burned,” an analogy to the final overthrow of the wicked.

Verse 9

To prevent any possible discouragement from rising in the hearts of his readers the author here goes out of his way to convince them that he does not classify them in the category of apostates.

“Better things” means that the condition of the readers was held superior to that of them that had fallen away. “Things that accompany salvation” is a hint of certain qualities and attainments on their part, which, far from projecting their apostasy, were evidences of their salvation.

Verse 10

Things done to the Lord’s servants are done to the Lord (Matthew 25:40); and by distinguishing themselves in ministering to the needs of the saints, which they had done and were continuing to do, they were showing their love for God’s name.

From the things said here, it is plain, as R. Milligan, *New Testament Commentary*, Vol. IX, p. 181, pointed out, “The Hebrew brethren had been culpably negligent

In the study of God's word; but notwithstanding this, they had been diligent in the works of benevolence." The warning from this is pointed indeed. Wonderful as works of benevolence assuredly are, pure benevolence, however lavish, is no substitute for faithful adherence to the word and doctrine of Christ.

In the present society, wherein social and charitable programs of every conceivable description are held to be the first priority of Christian faith, it is sobering to observe that the true priority lies with the word and doctrine. This was not a new principle introduced by the author of Hebrews, because all of the apostles held that it was "not fit" that they should forsake the word of God and serve tables." (Acts 6:2)

Verse 11

"Each one of you . . ." stresses God's care of the individual and his concern that each and every one of the believers should continue firmly in the way of truth.

"The full assurance of hope . . ." gives us a glimpse of a subject that will receive a more definite emphasis a little later in the chapter (verse 19).

Verse 12

"That you may not be sluggish . . ." is an exhortation against lethargy and laziness, a trait they had sadly demonstrated in their neglect of studies in the word and teaching of the Master.

"Imitators of those . . ." This refers to the great patriarchs of the Old Testament, of whom the author would speak so extensively in chapter 11, a discussion which is anticipated by his reference to them. Other passages of the New Testament that counsel Christians to be "imitators" are: 1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 1 Thessalonians 2:14 and Ephesians 5:1).

"Faith and patience" are actually twin virtues, because without patience, faith is likely to wither and fall. Jesus said, "By your perseverance you will win your souls." (Luke 21:19)

"Inherit the promises . . ." includes all the wonderful things that God will do for His redeemed; and what will He do? He will forgive men's sins when they

accept and obey Him, bless them providentially in the present life, make all things work together for good on their behalf, provide the earnest of the Holy Spirit within them as a pledge of eternal life, comfort them in sorrows, strengthen them in weakness,, illuminate them in darkness, make the way of escape in their temptations, attend them through the Dark Valley, raise them from the rottenness of the grave itself, cover their sins in judgment, and administer to them an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom! Surely such promises are worth the diligence and patience of faith as enjoined here.

Verses 13-15

Abraham was the most illustrious of the patriarchs and prophets, of whom the author had already said that his readers should imitate them. There seems also to be a special reason for singling out Abraham at this point, due to his importance in what happened with Melchizedek, and which events the author will fully develop a little later in the epistle.

The patience of Abraham was indeed exemplary for several reasons. The promise, it will be remembered (Genesis 12:1ff), envisioned a great posterity for Abraham; but many years passed during which he had no son. Passing over the incident involving Hagar, Abraham waited patiently for that which, according to all human reckoning, was impossible. Then at last, when Isaac was born, and the patriarch's hopes and affections were centered in him, his patience was further tested by the astounding command of God that Isaac should be offered as a sacrifice.

The nearly superhuman response of Abraham to that commandment of God became the occasion for God's confirming the promise with an oath. The statement here that Abraham "obtained" the promise has reference to his receiving in full faith the prospect of its ultimate fulfillment when Isaac was restored to him which is like receiving him back from the dead. (11:19)

Abraham had every reason to believe and know that God's promises, together with all its implications, would most surely be fulfilled. There was a sense in which Abraham did not truly receive the promise (11:39), that is, "all" of

the “promise” nor will he do so until all the faithful of all times receive it all together in the eternal home of the soul.

Verse 16

This appeal to the custom of men requiring judicial oaths, even making it the reason for God’s doing so, would appear to give the most positive assurance that the taking of such oaths is not to be considered sinful. Christ’s command still stands opposed to the vast majority of oaths which men continually swear, most of them utterly needless, and many of them profane as well as needless.

The probable reason why the author of Hebrews stressed God’s oath to Abraham at this place was that he had the purpose of comparing it, a little later, with another oath God took regarding the “priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” Such a comparison would be calculated to bear the greatest weight with Hebrew Christians.

Verses 17-18

The two immutable things respecting a Son, the Messiah; and the second refers to Christ’s priesthood, recorded in Psalm 110:4, “The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, “Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

The mention of God’s oath does not reveal on the part of God any need whatever to make His word more sure through such a human device as an oath, but after a heavenly regard for human opinions and practices in which God accommodated Himself to the customs of men, not for His sake, but for theirs, that men might more fully and completely believe in the word of His power.

“More abundantly” is used in the text here; and the meaning is that God went over and beyond what was necessary, and that His doing so sprang solely from His desire to demonstrate (“being minded to show”) what solid ground supported faith in His eternal designs.

“Who have fled for refuge. . .” refers to Christians who had sought and received refuge in Christ from all their sins and is a reference to the ancient cities of refuge in Canaan which appear in this place as a type of the refuge in

Christ. Joshua 20th chapter records the establishment of six cities of refuge: Kedesh, Shechem, Hebron, Bezer, Ramoth-Gilead, and Golan, three west of the Jordan and three on the east.

Collectively, these cities stand as a type of the church, in which safety from the avenger of blood (Satan) may be received only by entering into and remaining within the sanctuary; and, although the ancient refugee was required to remain within the haven only until death of the high priest, no such termination of residence within the church is allowed, because the Christian's High Priest lives forever.

Verse 19

"Hope" is the great stabilizer, of the human soul; and that hope for the Christian is Christ the Lord, who has entered into that which is beyond the veil, that is, into heaven itself; and this corresponds to the actions of the ancient priest who was typical of Christ in that He went into the holy of holies, behind the veil, in the tabernacle.

The aptness of the figure of an anchor appears in the fact that an anchor is not doing any good at all as long as it is visible. It is only when it disappears in the deep beneath that it stabilizes and protects the ship; how beautiful is the imagery of Christ's also being out of sight from Christians, having disappeared into the unseen world, but who is nevertheless connected with Christians by the strong and effective cable of His love, just as the anchor, though unseen is connected to the ship by a mighty chain.

The absolute necessary disappearance of the anchor, if it is to do any good, also suggests the necessity of Christ's physical separation from His followers which was accomplished when He ascended into the unseen world.

Christ's qualification as high priest was upon a higher level; on earth He could never have been any kind of priest, because He did not belong to the tribe of Levi; therefore, in order for Him to function as the great High Priest of Christians, He of necessity entered that higher, unseen sphere. It is literally and gloriously true that the Christian's hope is in heaven where the Lord has already entered; and, with that hope, all else that really matters is also there. For the

Christian, his treasure is there (Matthew 6:19), his citizenship is there (Philippians 3:20), his name is written there (Luke 10:20); Philippians 4:3) his Lord is there (as here, and in John 14:1-6), and his affections should be there, (Colossians 3:2).

Verse 20

Of great interest is the word “forerunner.” It means that where Christ has gone His disciples shall at last follow, that where He is there they may be; and the priority of His entrance into that upper and better country suggests the services that Christ is there and now performing for them that shall in due time arrive to be with Him. He is their intercessor, their advocate, their hope and redeemer. It is because He has entered that they may enter. James Macknight thought the term “forerunner’ is an illusion “to one sent from a ship to fix its anchor in the place to which it is to be drawn.”

One of the most interesting things said about the use of the word was written by G. Campbell Morgan, *God’s Last Word to Man*, p. 76, who wrote, “It marks a difference between Christ passing within the veil, and everything that had preceded it in the ritual of the Hebrew people. Aaron had entered within the veil once a year, but never as a forerunner. He entered as the representative of those who were left outside; but they were always left outside. No one followed Aaron when he entered within the veil to stand in the presence of the ark and the mercy seat. When Jesus passed within the veil, He entered as a forerunner, which at once suggested that the way was open for others to follow Him.”

Thus is laid the foundation for that more complete comparison of the high priesthood of Jesus with that of Melchizedek is of supreme importance, a thing witnessed and confirmed by the oath of Almighty God Himself, and therefore something to which the strictest attention should be paid.

CHAPTER 7

CHRIST THE ANTITYPE OF MELCHIZEDEK, JESUS' PRIESTHOOD SUPERIOR TO THAT OF THE LEVITES, DESCRIPTION OF JESUS THE PERFECT HIGH PRIEST

Verses 1-3

The inspired author of this epistle reveals that the reference in Psalm 110:4 is not a minor thing at all. On the contrary, it was something God swore to! God Himself, in that reference, made mention of a priest forever "after the order of Melchizedek," and therein lay the key to unravel the mystery of that Messiah whose kingship descended through Judah, but whose priesthood was that of a different order than the one enjoyed by the Levites. In the verses before us, Melchizedek is said to be "like unto the Son of God," and that Christ is after the likeness of Melchizedek (verse 14), indicating clearly that Christ must be understood as the antitype of Melchizedek, making all the things of Melchizedek's life typical of certain things in the life of Jesus Christ. The likeness is noted in the following study.

MELCHIZEDEK AND JESUS

The following likenesses in type and antitype are plain:

- (1) The word "Melchizedek" means "King of Righteousness," thus the very name becomes a title of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- (2) "King of Salem" means "King of Peace." And thus the title of Melchizedek is another appropriate title for our Lord (Isaiah 9:6ff; Psalm 72:7).
- (3) Melchizedek was both king and priest, a double dignity not enjoyed by any illustrious Hebrew, not even Moses, and startlingly typical of Jesus Christ who is both king and high priest.
- (4) Melchizedek received tithes from Abraham, even as Christ receives gift of them that love and follow Him.

- (5) Melchizedek brought forth bread and wine; and although not specifically mentioned here because it was not germane to the argument, the fact itself is a strong suggestion of the Lord's institution of the Lord's Supper.
- (6) He blessed Abraham; Christ blesses His followers.
- (7) Melchizedek's priesthood encompassed service to Gentiles and Jews alike.
- (8) The eighth likeness between Melchizedek and Christ is a little more difficult to understand, because it is not founded on anything that Melchizedek did or said, and not even upon anything that is said about him in the Genesis narrative, this eighth similarity being made to depend upon the meaning and form of the Genesis record, with reference to what is not said.

The statement by the author of Hebrews that Melchizedek had no father, no mother, no genealogy, no beginning of life, and no end of days, simply means that he had none of those things in the Scriptural record, and does not mean that he was actually born in a manner different from other men.

Ancestry? As far as the Scriptures were concerned, he had none. Descendants? Not a word about any of them. Beginning of life? There was no record of his even having been born, being an infant, or youth; he appeared in history once only, in royal, priestly dignity, with not even a hint of how any of this came to exist. There is no record of his death, as there was of Moses, or of Aaron (Numbers 20:22ff); and for all the Scriptures say to the contrary, he still stands after all those centuries in endless glory, a priest of the Most High God, receiving tithes of Abraham, and blessing him.

The author of Hebrews, through inspiration, saw that it was by God's purposeful design that the story of Melchizedek had been so deployed upon the sacred page in isolated splendor, and that purpose was to make Melchizedek's priesthood suggest the endless priesthood of Jesus.

“Like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually . . .” is one of the titles of Melchizedek, that is of the utmost significance to religious thought. This means absolutely that the Jews did not develop, evolve, discover, nor in any sense whatever originate monotheism; for this Melchizedek, who was not a Jew, is in the scriptures positively identified with the Most High God, the same Most High God who put the finer of heavenly light upon him as a type of the Messiah in Psalm 110:4.

“The slaughter of the kings . . .” can be softened a bit by making it read, “the defeat of the kings;” but there is no need for this. The Bible calls things by their right names; hence, sinners are never referred to as the socially immature, nor the poor, as the economically disadvantaged!

“And blessed him . . .” are words that identify Melchizedek as superior in dignity to the great patriarch of all the Hebrews, even Abraham and later the author appeals to the truism that the least is blessed of the greater.

Verse 4

Regarding the tithes that Abraham paid to Melchizedek, Lyle O. Bristol, *Hebrews, a Commentary*, p. 96, wrote, “Not only was the amount determined as one tenth, but the Greek word denotes the quality of the gift, in that it consisted of the best of the plunder. It was the best that was usually offered to the gods in Greek warfare.”

“A tenth part of the spoils . . .” is in line with the principle that the best belongs to God. The Jewish sacrifices were commanded to be “without blemish;” and the great king David was motivated by the principle that it would be wrong to offer to God that which cost him nothing. (2 Samuel 24:24)

Verse 5

Thomas Hewitt, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 118, sheds light on a supposed difficulty arising from the fact that the priests did not take tithes directly from the people, but from the Levites who in turn had taken them from the people; but as he noted, that is going out of the way to find a difficulty. He

wrote: “The usual procedure was for the Levites to take tithes from the people through the Levites who were actually taking the tithes from the people.”

The big point in this verse is crystal clear, namely, that the Levites themselves in the person of their distinguished ancestor, Abraham, had themselves paid tithes to Melchizedek, thus making their priesthood inferior to his. “Loins” is the ancient idiomatic name for the reproductive organs of man, being derived, oddly enough, from “kidneys,” since the kidneys were once thought to be involved in reproduction.

R. Milligan, *New Testament Commentary*, p. 200, summed up the thought regarding the Levites and Melchizedek writing, “Throughout, it is implied that Melchizedek was greater than Levi, hence a fortiori Christ was (greater than Levi), of whom Melchizedek was only a partial type.”

Verses 6-7

The author here is still pressing the greater dignity of Melchizedek; because, in so doing, it proves the greater dignity of Jesus Christ, of whom, after all, Melchizedek was only a type.

“Without any dispute . . .” is similar to an expression of Paul, “without controversy” (1 Timothy 3:16). This is only a way of stating that the truth mentioned is so self-evident, axiomatic, and inherently obvious that it does not need to be proved.

Verse 8

The dying men who received tithes at the time this author wrote were, of course, the Levites, in whose enjoyment of the office there was a continual progression throughout history, as the generations of men rose, faded, and passed away, being succeeded by others.

CONCERNING TITHES

We have already seen that, prior to Judaism, tithing was an established custom with reference to the worship of God and that the custom was honored by no less a person than the patriarchal head of the whole Hebrew nation; but more than this, Abraham is typically the patriarch of Christians as well. Are not

all Christians “Abraham’s seed?” (Galatians 3:29) Then what kind of children of Abraham are those who vow they have no duty to pay tithes? The well-known story of Jacob and his pledge of a tenth of all that he had to God should be understood as a promise on Jacob’s part to honor a duty already in existence, well known to him by reason of the tithes his grandfather Abraham had paid to Melchizedek, and in all likelihood widely understood as a religious duty toward God by all worshipers of God Most High.

On that night when Jacob left his father’s house and saw the vision of the ladder from earth to heaven, he set up a pillar, anointed it, and promised to give a tenth of all he had to God. (Genesis 28:22)

The tithe existed long before Jacob, and his was a vow to honor an existing obligation, long before determined as belonging to God.

Jesus Christ affirmed that, “unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:20) The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, of which Jesus said the righteousness of Christians should exceed it, certainly included the giving of tithes, a fact acknowledged approvingly by Christ. (Matthew 23:23)

It is not proper to believe that giving “merely” a tithe (tenth) fully discharges a Christian’s obligation in this area of duty. A Christian’s duty in many instances doubtless exceeds a tithe.

NOTE: More is said in the New Testament on the subject of giving than is said of faith or baptism, or the Lord’s Supper; and the need of Christians to heed the word of God regarding the need of Christians to heed the word of God regarding giving is urgent and extensive.

Verses 9-10

The words “And, so to speak” should not be construed as softening or compromising the statement that follows.

R. C. Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 220, informs that some commentators have made just such a mistake and warns against it in these words, “The common phrase (although found only here in the New Testament) = “to use the right word,” “to

use a strong expression,” or “to speak out freely.” Any one of these meanings is fitting, for this is exactly what the writer does when he says that Levi was still in the loins of Abraham when Abraham paid the tenth to Melchizedek; he uses the proper expression.”

The burden of the argument in this place is simply that the priesthood of Melchizedek (and therefore of Christ) is greater than the Levitical priesthood; and the proof offered is that the whole Hebrew nation, including of course the Levites, in the person of Abraham, were tithed by Melchizedek whose priesthood has actually never ended. It should be noted that the purpose of the author is to glorify Christ, not Melchizedek. His argument for the continuity of Melchizedek’s priesthood is not that it is an eternal priesthood that was merely extended by Christ; but that it was, by reason of two amazing facts, typical of the truly eternal priesthood of Christ.

These two facts supporting the eternal implication of Melchizedek’s priesthood in Christ, are:

- (1) the Scriptures reveal no end or discontinuation of it, and
- (2) many centuries after Melchizedek’s time, God spoke of Melchizedek’s priesthood as a reality in Psalm 110:4. Since it is shown that Christ is a priest forever, “after the order of Melchizedek,” the superiority of the antitype over the type is evident. For this reason, the superiority of Melchizedek over the Levites, since it was merely typical, is extended and enhanced in Christ.

The Aaronic and Levitical system of priests was not confirmed with an oath on the part of God; but God did swear with an oath that the Messiah should be a priest “forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Psalm 110:4); and that oath, or the announcement of it, coming so many centuries after the Levitical system had been in operation, is proof of the most convincing nature that the priesthood of Melchizedek had not expired but was endless, else God would not have spoken of it so long afterward.

DIVISION IV

CHRIST IS THE SURETY OF A BETTER COVENANT

(7:11-8:13)

Verse 11

The introduction of Aaron's name at this point, connecting it with the Levitical priesthood, is for the purpose of showing that, as far as this argument is concerned, there is no difference between them. It cannot be argued, therefore, that Aaron's priesthood was essentially any different from that of the Levitical priesthood.

This Divine revelation, centuries after the system of Levi and Aaron had been operative, shows that God never did intend to plan that perfection should come through that system. If He had so planned or intended, what was the use of a Messiah arising after the order of a totally different priesthood?

This preoccupation on the part of the author with the interest and concern of his readers in the Levitical priesthood plainly shows that they were Jews by birth, had become Christians, and then were in danger of embracing Judaism.

"Perfection" is incidentally revealed here as the purpose of all mediation between God and men, such perfection being of a kind that would permit men to draw near to God, as will be revealed further a little later in this epistle.

As a matter of fact, the Levitical priesthood was designed, not to permit men to draw near to God, but to keep them at a distance, and to emphasize their unworthiness, by reason of sin, to draw near to God, such design being evident in the sacred areas of the tabernacle that the people could not enter, and in the most sacred area which not even the priests could enter, but only the high priest; and even he could do so only on one day in the year. As F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 144, expressed it, "The Aaronic priesthood was neither designed nor competent to inaugurate the age of fulfillment; that age must be marked by the rise of another priest, whose priesthood was of a different order and character from that of Aaron."

“For if a law had been given which was able to impart life then righteousness would indeed have been based on law.” (Galatians 3:21)

The greatest importance in this verse is the parenthesis: (For on the basis of it the people received the law). This is mentioned to prepare the readers for the tremendous implications of the change of the priesthood. Not merely the priesthood is changed to a new order, but everything, even all, of which the priesthood was the foundation and support.

Thomas Hewitt, *op. cit.*, p. 204, called the priesthood which was changed, “The pillar upon which the Mosaic rests,” and concluded that “with its fall is included the whole constitution, not merely the ceremonial.” R. Milligan, *op. cit.*, p. 204, likewise said, “It was in fact the foundation of the Old Economy, and the whole Law of Moses stood or fell with it.”

The entire system of Moses fell with the change of the priesthood, even the Decalogue. Christ Himself gave the verdict on this in the Sermon on the Mount, in which, time and again, He enumerated one after another of the Ten Commandments, using this formula, “You have heard that the ancients were told . . . you have heard that it was said . . . but I say to you.” (Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28, 33-34.)

Revolted as the thought seems to many, the Decalogue itself has been taken out of the way, nailed to the cross, and superseded by the teachings of Christ.

To understand this as saying that “Since the Decalogue has been taken out of the way, men are free to commit adultery and murder” is ridiculous. Any careful reading of Christ’s words will show that quite the contrary is true. He did replace the commandment, “You shall not kill,” for example, with another; but it is far more strict and binding than the one in Moses’ law. Christ did not merely prohibit murder, but forbid any thought of depreciation toward a fellow being.

Notice what Christ said in Matthew 5:22, “But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever shall

say to his brother, ‘Raca,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the hell of fire.”

Not only are men forbidden to commit adultery, murder, etc., but guilt is imputed where there is the desire or intent of doing such things, and even when there are present the emotions, attitudes, and desires which are antecedent to such sins.

The Sabbath was never extended by Christ and is therefore not binding on the community of Christ’s followers; hence, Christians have never been required to observe the Sabbath day.

Verse 12

“The law” which is here said to be changed cannot be amended to read, “the ceremonial law” or “the priestly law.” It has to stand for everything of which the Levitical system was the center and support, namely, the whole Hebrew system of religion.

All of the law was therefore changed to conform utterly to the will of that great Messiah-Priest-King whose priesthood superseded that of Aaron and the Levites.

The change of the law did not result in the amelioration or diminution of their force, but did result in the shift of their authority to a higher level, that of Christ the Son, as being superior to that of a servant, as was Moses, and in their being redefined on a nobler and higher plane.

Verses 13-14

Here is another emphasis upon the extraordinary change involved in the establishment of the high priesthood of Christ, in that He came from a tribe hitherto absolutely excluded from any participation in such an office.

Both Matthew and Luke traced the ancestry of Jesus back through Judah; and the Christian designation of our Lord as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” (Revelation 5:5), came from the information thus given.

“Descended from Judah . . .” shows that it was of Christ’s initiative and volition that He was born of the tribe of Judah, a thing that could not possibly

be said of a mere human being. As to why Jesus elected to be born of the tribe of Judah, it is perfectly evident that He did so because of the prophecies, notably Genesis 49:8-12.

Verse 15

R. Milligan, *op. cit.*, p. 205, summarizes the various views of scholars as to just what is “more abundantly evident,” as follows,”

- (1) the distinction between the Levitical priesthood and that of the New Testament (Chrysostom),
- (2) the fact that our Lord sprang out of Judah (Ebrard),
- (3) that the Law of Moses is abrogated (Alford),
- (4) that perfection was not attainable through the Levitical priesthood (Delitzsch), and
- (5) that a change of the priesthood involves of necessity a change of the law (Tholuck).”

Where there are so many learned opinions, one may not be afraid to risk his own judgment. The big thought under consideration here is the abrogation of the entire Hebrew system of religion, which has already been observed under verses 11-12; and the argument, to paraphrase it, is this:

- (1) it is evident that with the rising of a new and greater priest, not out of Levi but out of Judah, the law was abrogated;
- (2) but it is “far more evident” that the law was abrogated, when it is considered that the great new high priest is, in addition to being from an unlawful tribe (Judah) as far as the priesthood is concerned, also from an utterly new and different order, that of Melchizedek.

Thus the words “far more evident” stand as the author’s evaluation of the two supporting premises for his conclusion that the law was changed, making the latter of the two the stronger.

Verses 16-17

The Levitical priests were made after the law of a carnal commandment, being subject to sin and death like all others, nor was there in them any special excellence of character. Contrasted with their appointment is that of Christ which was after the power of an endless life, and that combined with the utmost excellence and perfection of character. The shade of meaning implied by “carnal commandment” seems to be accurately stressed by: F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 148, who wrote, “The law which established the Aaronic priesthood is called a carnal commandment because it is a system of earth-bound rules; it is concerned with the externalities of religion—the physical descent of priests, a material shrine, the animal sacrifices, and so forth.”

The author of Hebrews focuses on a certain word in the great prophecy of Psalm 110:4, to which so much attention has already been directed, and that word is “forever.” But how is it that Christ is a priest “forever”? In exactly the same way that Melchizedek’s priesthood was forever, namely, in a the sense that there is no record of either the beginning or the ending of it. Melchizedek’s priesthood was not said to have begun on such and such a date at this or that place in some formal ceremony; just so, in the Holy Scriptures, men are not allowed to see either the beginning or the ending of Christ’s priesthood. R. Milligan, *op. cit.*, p. 207 rightly discerned this, saying: “The precise time when He (Christ) was fully invested with the royal and sacerdotal honors and prerogatives of the new dispensation is not known to mortals.”

Furthermore, it is the same with the end of His priesthood when He shall deliver up to the Father the kingdom and all that pertains to it (1 Corinthians 15:24ff); but when is that? No man knows.

In all that has been said relative to the abrogation of the Law of Moses and the fact that it made nothing perfect and did not provide true forgiveness, it should not be doubted that worthy and faithful persons of the Old Testament did enjoy peace of conscience, a sense of forgiveness, and a feeling of unity and identity with the purpose of God, as witness such words as, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered; blessed is the man to whom the

Lord imputed not iniquity (Psalm 32:1ff); and, “It is good for me to draw near to God” (Psalm 73:28). How were they able to have such convictions? Exactly as we do, that is, by faith; the difference being this, that in their case it was faith in what God would do, and in our case faith in what God has done.

Verse 18

This turns attention to the very nature of the Levitical system of which that priesthood was the support and center. It was not of caprice that God annulled the old covenant, for it deserved to be annulled because of its weakness and its being unprofitable. God had never considered the Levitical system to be complete, final, or efficacious in itself but, “It was added because of transgression, till the seed should come to whom the promise has been made.” (Galatians 3:19) The law expired, therefore, by limitation, when Jesus was revealed as that “seed”, so long anticipated.

The weakness and the law being unprofitable, refers to the whole system of Moses; and James Macknight, *op. cit.*, p. 539, explained the weakness of it writing, “The weakness of the law in reforming sinners arose from this, that while it required perfect obedience to all its precepts under penalty of death, it gave the Israelites no encouragement to obey, either by promising them the assistance of God’s spirit to enable them to obey, nor by giving them assurance of pardon upon their repentance in case of failure. The only source from which the Israelites derived their hope of these things was the covenant of Abraham.”

In connection with the allegations by some that “the law” here spoken of as “annulled” or the commandment said here to be abrogated was merely the “ceremonial” of Moses’ law, it should be pointed out that the weakness and its being unprofitable of that system were lodged more in the mortal than in the ceremonial element of it. The efficiency and strength of that law, as far as providing and regulating the priesthood is concerned, were absolutely superlative. Paul said that “If a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would have been based on law.” (Galatians 3:21)

In these words Paul plainly indicated that the law went as far as it was possible for any law to go toward making men righteous; and yet it left them

dead; and, therefore, the weakness and unprofitability of it have to be sought in the very portion of it called the moral law, and principally there. And why was it weak? It was because it dealt with overt actions, rather than inward desire.

Verse 19

The great failure of that law was that it could not motivate and inspire men to righteous living, nor reassure and forgive them when they failed, nor spell out the nature of the inheritance above, in any manner comparable to the availability of such blessings in the new covenant. Above everything else, it failed to enable men to draw near to God; and as F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 149, accurately observed, "The whole apparatus of worship associated with that ritual and priesthood was calculated rather to keep men at a distance from God than to bring them near." F. F. Bruce, of course, as many others, limits the failure of the law to that portion of it as associated with the "ritual and priesthood;" but the moral code was just as helpless as the ritual to bring men near to God. In the Sermon on the Mount the Savior dealt with this very thing. (Matthew 5:21, 27, 33)

DRAWING NEAR TO GOD

Not only is it a fact that men may draw near to God, they are commanded to do so. (James 4:8)

- (1) The initiative for such action rests with men; and the importance of this is seen in almost anything from a tennis match or a naval battle, where the initiative determines victory or defeat. It is man's move, not God's. (Matthew 11:29-30; John 7:37; Mark 16:15-16)

There is nothing else that God could be expected to do, other than what He has already done to save men. The propitiation has been provided (Roman 3:24-25); and all men are invited to participate in the salvation thus made possible; "Who so ever will may come!" (Revelation 22:17)

- (2) There are great advantages that come from drawing near to God; for, when men draw near to God, He draws near to them, a phenomenon that is true

even in the natural world, where the reciprocal pull of gravity is conversely the square of the intervening distances between heavenly bodies in space.

- (3) The procedure necessary to be followed by them that would draw near to God is more fully outlined in chapter 10:19-22.

Verses 20-21

The author still focuses on Psalm 110:4, shifting the emphasis to another strategic clause in it, “The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, Thou art a priest forever.” F. R. Milligan, *op. cit.*, p. 210, gives us an exegesis on this that is priceless. He wrote, “When God is said to repent (change), the meaning is that He simply wills a change; and when it is said that He will not repent (change) it means that He will never change. And consequently, there is nothing beyond the priesthood of Christ to which it will ever give place, as a means of accomplishing God’s benevolent purposes in the redemption of mankind.”

God, therefore, will never set aside the priesthood of Christ, as He did that of the Levites, the proof of this being that they were made priests without an oath of God, whereas Christ was made a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, with an oath of God, and with the further promise that God will never repent of it, that is, never change Christ’s priesthood as He did that of the Levites.

Verse 22

How is Jesus the guarantee of a better covenant? The entire gospel of His glorious life, together with all that He did and is doing constitutes that guarantee. By His enduring the cross, rising from the dead, ascending on high, sitting down upon the very throne of God, and interceding for the redeemed—by these and many other things, Christ is the guarantee of the absolute truth and dependability of all that Christians have received concerning the “New Covenant” and its inherent blessings.

The New Covenant applies to all of the gospel with its ordinances, institutions, warnings, promises, hopes, and benefits, and the gospel which exceeds and goes beyond that of the Old Covenant.

Verses 23-24

The most obvious weakness of the Levitical system is seen in the totality of them who ascended to the office of high priest under its regulations. Each in turn could serve only so long as he lived; and when death overtook him, he was succeeded by another.

Upon the fall of Jerusalem, in A. D. 70, Phannias became the last of the Jewish high priests, being the 81st and suggesting that, since number 81 is the sacred number three, squared and squared again, the fullness of God's intentions for that whole system was at last achieved in Phannias.

Implicit also in such a changeable priesthood, due to death, was its ineffectiveness. Beloved associations and emotions associated with one holder of the office did not pertain to his successor. Evil and corrupt men occupied even the office of the high priest and changed the very house of God into a "den of thieves and robbers" in the time of our Lord's ministry.

Due to human nature and the imperfections of the system, there were many occasions of grief and sorrow associated with it.

When poor Hannah with her heartbroken prayers might have expected the encouragement of Eli, the high priest, she received instead his castigation along with an imputation of drunkenness (1 Samuel 1:14); how many other such scandalous examples of unfeeling incompetence of the high priests there must have been, only God knows.

How different it is with Christ, our High Priest. He never dies but lives forever at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens; He is perfect, sinless, and undefiled; and through His human experience, He is one who can feel, understand, and sympathize with mortals who have fallen through temptation and sin. Christ is shown here to be actively engaged in heaven itself on behalf of Christians, interceding for them and able to save to the uttermost them that

come unto God by Him. The ground of this argument is that Christ lives forever and is able without limitation to redeem and help His worshipers.

His intercession is coupled with infinite love and understanding of human sins and weakness, since it is grounded upon the Savior's personal testing through His human experience. The fact is that Jesus felt, even more overwhelmingly than men, the power of temptation, as explained by B. F. Westcott, *op. cit.*, p. 193, who wrote, "Sympathy with temptation does not require the experience of sin. On the contrary, his sympathy will be fullest who has known the extremist power of temptation because he has conquered. He who yields to temptation has not known its uttermost "force."

Regarding Christ's intercession, F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 155, warned, "He is not to be thought of as standing before the Father with outstretched arms, like the figure in the mosaics of the catacombs, and with strong crying and tears pleading our cause in the presence of a reluctant God; but as a King-Priest asking what he will from a Father who always hears and grants His request."

Verse 25

"Able to save forever . . ." as applied to the salvation Christ bestows, means completely" which may be extended to mean that Christ saves from the guilt of sin, now, and from the presence, power, and penalty of sin in heaven.

Verse 26

Here is the ultimate superiority of Christ, His sinless and perfect character; all the other arguments are true, but this is the climax. The use of the words "became us" is a reference to our human sense of what is fitting and appropriate and indicates that, even from a human point of view, Christ is not lacking in any quality that is either needed or desirable in His incomparable office as our High Priest.

"Separated from sinners" means that Christ is no longer vexed by the presence of evil men; He has ascended where they cannot go. The Levitical priest dwelt apart in a separate house for a week prior to the Day of Atonement;

and there may be a reference here to the fact that Christ is separated from sinners, not for merely a week but for all eternity.

Christ will confront sinners only once more on the great and dreadful Day of Judgment when the two classes of sinners, embracing all mankind, shall appear before Him for the assignment of their respective destinies.

“Made higher than the heavens . . .” is interesting because of its difference from the expression in Mark 16:19, where it is said that Jesus was received “up into heaven,” and from that in Ephesians 4:1, where it is affirmed that Christ ascended “far above all heavens.” There could be no difference in the places to which it is said that Jesus has gone. They are one. “Into heaven” means into the presence of God; and “far above all heavens” means far above and beyond all the limitations of sense.

Verse 27

Some commentators see a difficulty in this verse because of its reference to the priest’s daily offering for his own sins, whereas it appears that this was done only by the high priest on the Day of Atonement.

R. C. H. Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 244, wrote, “These critics do not have much ground to stand on, for it can readily be observed that the writer says, “once a year” (9:7) “year by year” (10:1); and that he knows Leviticus 16:2 (“not at all times”), and Leviticus 16:29, also has “once a year,” (verse 34).

Christ “if” He had been sinful, He would therefore have had to offer “daily” for His own sins and the sins of others; but, since He is not sinful, He “need not daily” to offer, etc. To have done so would have made Him like those priests, which He is not.

The daily sacrifices of the Levitical system was as much founded on the constant, daily sins of the Levites as it was on the sins of the people; and, in that view, every sacrifice, day by day, was made with a view to the sins of the Levites, and then for the sins of all the people as well. These were needed every day because the people sinned every day, the priests being no exception.

Those multiple daily sacrifices are here contrasted with the sacrifices offered by Christ, which was not for His sins but for the sins of others; and which was not offered repeatedly at daily, yearly, or other intervals, but “once for all,” finally, and forever. Another difference is seen in the place of the offering, theirs being in an earthly temple, Christ’s being in heaven itself.

Significantly, Christ’s blood was shed on earth but offered in heaven, thus fulfilling the type of the lamb’s being slain in the outer court and his blood being offered within the holy of holies.

“Once for all” is the translation of the Greek word *hapax*, which means “once, without need or possibility of repetition.” It means “once, finally.” This word is of immense significance and is used in several key statements in the New Testament.

- (1) Christ has been manifested in human form once for all. (Hebrews 9:26)
- (2) He suffered for man’s sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, once for all. (1 Peter 3:18)
- (3) Christ died once for all. (Hebrews 9:28)
- (4) The faith was once for all delivered to the saints. (Jude 3)
- (5) Christ offered His blood in heaven once for all. (Hebrews 9:12, 26)
- (6) It is appointed for man to die once for all. (Hebrews 9:27)
- (7) Once for all God will shake the earth and the heavens, that is, remove them. (Hebrews 12:27)

In the verse at hand, the finality and completeness of Christ’s offering His blood in heaven for men is contrasted with the repeated daily sacrifices of the Levitical priests. The doctrinal import of this is extremely important, because here is the sure authority for rejecting any such things as a sacrifice of the mass, or the sacrifice of anything else that a human worshiper might have to offer. Not any gift that men have or might acquire could avail; nor can men offer the blood of Christ (what a presumption!), seeing that Christ Himself has already done so “once for all,” and that in a place where alone it could do any good, and where none can enter except Christ, that is, in heaven.

Verse 28

It is still paramount in the author's mind that the oath by which God swore to bring a Messiah Priest after the order of Melchizedek came such a long, long time after the law had been in operation; thus he reiterates here, "which was after the law."

The verse is a recapitulation of what had already been said—that the Levitical priests were weak, mortal, sinful men; but that the Son of God, the glorious high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek is perfected for evermore.

CHAPTER 8

THE ENTHRONED HIGH PRIEST ON HIGH, MINISTERING THE HEAVENLY SANCTUARY, ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN, FIRST COVENANT IMPERFECT, JEREMIAH'S PROPHECY OF THE NEW COVENANT

Verses 1-2

C. Jerden, *The Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 21, Hebrews I, p. 212, wrote, "This passage does not present a recapitulations of topics already considered; it emphasizes as the crowning topic in connection with our Lord's priesthood, the fact that He has been made higher than the heavens."

Two words in these verses challenge our attention because of the paradox, verse 1 presenting our Lord as "seated," whereas verse 2 hails Him as a "minister of the sanctuary," that is, "a servant." Both seated and serving, therefore our Lord is contrasted with the temporal high priests who found no chair within the Holy of Holies, thus never being seated, and never permitted to remain except for a short period of time. The seated and serving Christ, on the other hand, abides forever in perfect and eternal control of the ministry on behalf of man which does not require that He busy Himself with this or that, but which service

has already been essentially completed, requiring only His presence upon the throne of God to assure its perfect administration and efficacy.

THE TEMPLE IN HEAVEN

The reference in this place to existence of a heavenly temple or tabernacle requires that any notion of a literal or actual temple or court in some particular locale beyond the earth's atmosphere is refuted. It is the conviction of this writer that such language is used by the Holy Spirit in order to bring down to the level of human comprehension those heavenly realities which are not capable of any complete finite understanding, and that the eloquent words used in the sacred text are accommodated by man's weakness and limitations, and that the marvelous realities thus described are fantastically beyond and total human knowledge of them, the very power and ability of language itself, as a means of communication, being helpless to transmit anything more than a typical; or suggestive outline of the things that are in the heavens. Therefore, with the deepest reverence and humility, men should strive in these matters to think God's thoughts after Him, and not to crush the knowledge of that upper and better world into the strait-jacket of its revealing metaphor.

The whole earth is seen as God's temple in Psalm 29, and a mighty thunderstorm in the wilderness is envisioned as actually taking place within the temple. "And in His temple everything says, 'Glory!'" The LORD sits as King at the flood, Yes, the LORD sits as King forever." (Psalm 29:9-10)

Micaiah saw a vision of the Almighty hold court in heaven, "I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right and on his left." (1 Kings 22:19)

Isaiah's vision of God's throne (Isaiah 6:iff) located it within the temple and stressed the service of the seraphims, mentioning the Lord's train, the smoke of incense, and the live coals on the altar.

Ezekiel beheld God's throne above the firmament the appearance of a sapphire stone, and as the appearance of fires, and as of the brightness of the rainbow, a very high eminence, being invariably above even the heads of the cherubim's. (Ezekiel 1:26-28; 10:1)

Psalm 11:4 has, “The Lord is in His holy temple; the Lord’s throne is in heaven.”

Micah saw the Lord’s “holy temple” as far above the earth from which the Lord would come down and tread “upon the high places of the earth” (Micah 1:2-3).

Habakkuk has the renowned call to worship, “But the Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him.” (Habakkuk 2:20) From all these and many other references, should it be concluded that there is literally a temple in heaven? No. These revelations symbolize and typify facts and realities beyond any intellectual group. “I saw no temple in it: for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb is its temple.” (Revelation 21:22)

“We have such a high priest . . .” refers to our Lord whose character and office have already been shown to be so far above that of any other. An excellent summary of the superiority of our high priest is that of Garbett, Biblical Illustrator, Vol. I, Hebrews p. 616, who wrote the following.

In human priests, if the most extravagant claims were admitted, it would yet be true that the dignity is only in the office, and not in men. But when we turn to the true High Priest, how different it is. Here is not only the glory of the office, but the glory of the Person, infinitely qualified in His deity to stand between the justice of God and the whole human race.

He is no mere dying man like an earthly high priest, but clothed with “the power of an endless life.”

He was not made after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the oath of God Himself, “a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”

He hath not entered into the tabernacle made with hands, with the blood of bulls and goats, but with His own blood He entered once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.”

He is not one among many, like earthly high priests, but is alone in His own single, unequalled majesty, the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

He does not fill a delegated office, like earthly priests, but fulfills His own office and that so perfectly that He is able to save them that come unto God by Him.”

He needs not daily, as earthly priests, to seek forgiveness for His own sins, but is “holy, harmless, and undefiled, and separate from sinners.”

He does not minister afar off from God, like earthly priests, but is already “made higher than the heavens,” and at the right hand of His Father pleads evermore for us.

He needs not to repeat His daily offerings, as earthly priests, but has made atonement once, “when He offered up himself.”

He has no infirmity, like earthly priests, but is the Son of God, Himself God, blessed for evermore—omnipotent, omnipresent, infinite! Who perfect as He? and what wonder that, thus perfect, He should govern as well as atone?—not only priest, but King—nay, bearing on His head the triple crown of glory—Prophet, Priest, King.

At this point, the author of Hebrews had overwhelmingly proved that any of the Jewish Christians, tempted to revert to Judaism, had received in such a high priest as Jesus far more than they had given up through renunciation of Judaism. He does not stop here, however, but goes ahead with an analysis of certain other contrasts between Jesus and the Levitical high priest.

Verse 3

F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 164, noted, “That the tense and mood of the Greek verb “to offer” in this clause also exclude the idea of a continual offering.”

Verse 4

Jesus could not have been a priest on earth because He did not belong to the priestly family, not even to the tribe from which that family descended. Christ’s priesthood was of a different order altogether, being after the order of Melchizedek. The importance of this is in the bearing it has on the purpose for which the Son of God came into the world.

Dr. James D. Bales, Hebrews Sermonized, p. 48, noted that, “Christ could not possibly have been crowned king on earth during His personal ministry, since the law could not have been taken away prior to His death. (Colossians 2:14; Ephesians 2:13-16) Bales also indicated the true reason why Jesus came, not to be a priest, not to reign as a literal king on a throne on earth: “But to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” (9:26-27)

Verse 5

ALL THINGS ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN

“All things according to the pattern” must be hailed as one of the most significant statements in Hebrews.

If God required Moses to proceed exactly according to the pattern God showed him, it is also required of worshipers today that they do all things according to the pattern God has revealed. There was a pattern and that God required the strictest adherence to it in the things Moses made.

Note: One of the great delusions of modern worshipers is the fallacy that there is no pattern, actually, and that it makes no difference what men do religiously, just so they are sincere in it; but this text reveals God as a pattern-minded God.

If God makes a mosquito or an eclipse of the sun, the Divine pattern is always followed. God never created a round snowflake, nor a cubical planet, nor a quadramaculatus mosquito without four spots on his wings. The tiniest bird is constructed according to an invariable pattern.

If God takes such care in His making of birds, or of working honey bees, not one of which was ever discovered without a sting, how could it ever be thought true that God does not care about how men shall worship Him?

Even of those types and shadows made by Moses, God was jealous of the strict adherence to the Divine pattern; and a part of the wickedness of Ahaz, king of Israel, was his rejection of the Divine pattern of the altar and fashioning one like the pagan altar in Damascus. (2 Kings 16:10-11)

Applying the principle of a Divine pattern to the realities of the new covenant, one can be certain that there is a plan of salvation, even if it is not called that in the New Testament. That “plan of salvation” can be discovered by studying the examples of conversion recorded in the book of Acts; and from this, it appears that every person converted under the preaching of the apostles and inspired evangelists, without exception,

- (1) heard the word of God,
- (2) believed on the Lord Jesus Christ,
- (3) confessed the Savior’s name before men,
- (4) repented of their sins,
- (5) were baptized into Christ,
- (6) became members of the body of Christ, and

(7) received the Holy Spirit, continuing steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine and in the breaking of bread and in prayers. If there is any other way to be saved from alien sins, the scriptures have no record of it.

Regarding the worship, is there a pattern of scriptural worship? Of course there is. The New Testament declares that God must be worshiped “in Spirit and in truth” (John 4:24): that teaching human commandments for doctrine constitutes “vain worship” (Mark 7:7); that “God is not worshiped with men’s hands” (Acts 17:24-25); that man shall not “add unto these things” (Revelation 22:18); that one who “abides not in the teaching of Christ has not God” (2 John 9); that men “make the commandment of no effect” by their traditions (Matthew 15:6); and that all Christians should learn “not to go beyond the things which are written” (1 Corinthians 4:6).

If such Scriptures as these do not provide warning against departure from God’s pattern of worship, it is hard to imagine how a warning could be stated. But what is the pattern? God is to be worshiped:

- (1) through prayers (acts 2:46; 2; Thessalonians 5:17; 1 Corinthians 14:15),
- (2) through observance of the Lord’s Supper (Acts 20:7; 2:46; 1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 8:7-14),

(3) in reading, studying, teaching and preaching God's word (Acts 2:46; 20:7; 2 Timothy 4:2), and

(4) by the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19; 1 Corinthians 14:15).

There is a clearly revealed pattern for every component of Christian worship, as for example, the singing. Not even all singing is acceptable, for God requires only psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Unscriptural songs do not meet the requirements; and, as for instrumental music, it was never a part of the worship of Christians until centuries after Christ. The Lord's Supper also was designed with regard to a heavenly pattern. Two so-called emblems are not many, but only two, bread and fruit of the vine; and the primitive church observed it not every day, but upon a fixed day.

Thus from the shadow of the first century comes the certain word that the Christians met on a fixed day or "appointed day," just like they still do; and the New Testament reveals that day to have been on the first day of the week. (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2)

There is also a pattern of Christian living, a pattern to be observed in giving of one's means to support the gospel, a pattern of prayers, which must be "in the name of Christ," a pattern of praying, and a pattern of decency and decorum for public worship, and even instructions for ushers at public assemblies of the church! (James 2:1-3) It is the life-work of every Christian to learn and follow the pattern of heavenly things in the religion of Christ.

Verses 6-7

Particularly interesting in these two verses is the mention of two, and only two, covenants, designated "the first" and "the second." How God made a covenant with Noah, two covenants with Abraham, a covenant of salt, a covenant of the everlasting priesthood; but the "first covenant" of these verses is none of these covenants.

The "first covenant" is so great and extensive that it overshadows all such lesser covenants. That first covenant was made with the house of Israel and the

house of Judah (Jeremiah 31:31ff), the mention of the house of Judah being significant to distinguish that first covenant from anything pertaining exclusively to the priesthood, the covenant of the priesthood having been made with the house of Levi, not with the house of Judah. The first covenant may be further identified in that it was the covenant that had the Ten Commandments. (Deuteronomy 4:13)

The first covenant was identified by Jeremiah 31:31ff), as the one made when God took Israel by hand to lead them out of Egypt; and God's instructions to Moses regarding the Ten Commandments specifically identified the tablets of stone (on which the Ten commandments were ascribed) as basic components of the first covenant. (Exodus 34:2, 28)

Summarizing these marks of identification of the "first covenant," the one which was annulled, we have the following:

- (1) It was the one made with Israel and Judah.
- (2) It was the one that had the Decalogue as a basic component.
- (3) It was the one made at the time of Israel's coming out of Egypt.
- (4) It was the one said by God Himself to be with Moses (with "thee"), as well as with Israel. (Exodus 24:27)

Therefore, "the first covenant," as used in these verses, means the whole religious system of the Jews, the Decalogue, the priesthood, the sacrifices, the tabernacle ritual, the temple services (as later developed), the statutes, and the judgments, and the commandments, and embracing the entire ceremonial and moral constitution of Judaism.

The thesis of the author of Hebrews in the verses before us is that a second, or new, covenant has superseded and replaced the first, or old, covenant. This was accomplished when Jesus Christ appeared, suffered, died, rose from the dead, ascended on high, and gathered up in Himself all that was of any value in the old covenant, making His teachings alone to be the basis of eternal redemption. Whatever moral precepts of the Old Testament were brought over into the New Testament (and there were many of these, such as prohibitions

against murder, adultery, thief, covetousness, etc.) those precepts now derive their authority from Christ, not Moses. Just so, those things of the Old Testament that did not find their place in the new institution, such as Sabbath keeping, animal sacrifice, burning of incense, etc., are therefore now void of any authority at all and are to be totally rejected.

The author of Hebrews at this point defends himself against a reaction of shock in the minds of his readers at so bold and forthright a proposition that the entire old covenant had been abolished; and he does this by an appeal to Jeremiah's famous prophecy which had foretold this very thing.

The author will now quote Jeremiah's prophecy; but before taking up a discussion of it, one other matter should be noted, and that is the implication of fault in the old covenant. How could it have been at fault, seeing God Himself had given it? Its fault lay in the temporary character of it, the law being "added because of transgression till the seed should come" (Galatians 3:19ff), and never being intended as a permanent solution of man's spiritual problems. Just as a contractor first builds a scaffold around a building to be erected, removing the scaffolding when the building is completed; just so, God erected the law as a scaffold, which, from the first, was designed to be removed as soon as "the seed" which is Christ should appear.

Verses 8-9

This is from Jeremiah 31:31ff and is quoted by the author as Scriptural proof that the abrogation of the old covenant is nothing which should shock his readers, since God long ago had prophesied in this very place that it would be abrogated and replaced with a new covenant.

Two basic reasons why the old covenant was abolished are:

- (1) God promised that He would make a new one, which He would not have done if the old one had been faultless.
- (2) Israel themselves had broken the old covenant by not continuing in it; and it is pertinent to observe that it was preponderantly the "moral" part of the covenant that Israel had so wantonly violated.

It would require a volume to recount the extent of Israel's rebellion, stubbornness, idolatry, murder, adultery, and wickedness of every description, and their unwillingness to honor the covenant God had given them.

Israel certainly failed to keep the covenant. "For they continued not in My covenant, and I regarded them not, says the Lord." Sinful as Israel was, God did not dissolve His marriage with them except on the basis of His own death in the person of Christ.

Verses 10-12

The more spiritual nature of the new covenant is stressed, being founded upon the spirit rather than upon the letter; but perhaps the most astounding thing in the prophecy is the statement that there will be no need to teach men, saying, "Know the Lord," since all will already know Him. How can such a thing be? Only by the requirement that one must know the Lord before he can enter His kingdom, can these words be true. This focuses attention upon the vast difference between the old and new covenants with regard to the manner of entering them.

Men were physically born into the old covenant, circumcised the eighth day, and thus grew up as members of the religious community; and, as a result, all manner of irreligious and unconverted persons were legally associated with the old Israel. Thus it can never be in the new covenant. Infant membership in the new covenant is impossible, for one must know the Lord before he can enter the kingdom. (John 1:12-13)

Only in the light of what is required before a person can become a child of God, and which requirement totally excludes infants and all others not of accountable age, do the words of Jeremiah's remarkable prophecy become clear.

Verse 13

"Is ready to disappear . . ." affords the strongest possible evidence that Hebrews was written before the destruction of Jerusalem and the cessation of the temple services; for if those events had already happened, it would be absolutely unaccountable how the author could have made such a statement as

this. What a remarkable proof of his inspiration came in the sudden, total, and summary removal of all the salient features of the old economy when Jerusalem was destroyed so soon after these words were written.

Our author said that it was “ready to disappear” and within a span of five years, all that impressive ceremonial was utterly wiped away from the face of the earth, never to appear again!

DIVISION V

CHRIST PROVIDES BETTER SACRIFICES (9:1-10:39)

CHAPTER 9

DESCRIPTION OF THE RITES AND SACRIFICES OF THE LAW, THEIR INFERIORITY TO THE DIGNITY AND PERFECTION OF CHRIST AND HIS BLOOD AND SACRIFICE

Verse 1

The sanctuary mentioned here is doubtless the tabernacle constructed and erected in the wilderness by Moses upon instruction of God; and the fact that the more ancient tabernacle, rather than the Herodian temple, comes to view here should not be viewed as an indication that the temple was not then standing, or that the recipients of this epistle were not Jewish.

Beginning here is a detailed and extensive contrast between that worldly sanctuary, whether the tabernacle or the temple, which was the center of the Jewish religious institution, with the heavenly counterpart of it which is the grand theater of the redemptive ministry of Jesus.

“Divine worship” is an implication that God is recognized as the author of all those things in the “sanctuary of this world.”

Verse 2

The “outer” or “first” tabernacle in this verse is identified by the articles of furniture in it as the holy place. In it there were the golden candlestick on the

south, the table of show-bread on the north, and the golden altar of incense near the curtain, or veil. (Exodus 40:22, 24, 26) Such is the importance of these objects, as being the pattern of great spiritual realities which they typified, that some particular attention is due each of them.

THE GOLDEN CANDLESTICK

History, through the overruling providence of God has preserved a likeness of the golden candlestick that was in the Herodian temple destroyed by Vespasian and Titus in 70 A.D. The candlestick, along with other treasures, was looted and carried in the triumphal procession in Rome; and, when the Arch of Titus was constructed to memorialize the victory, both the table of the showbread and the candlestick were detailed in the carvings decorating the arch and may still be seen there in the excavated ruins of ancient Rome.

The golden candlestick was the only source of light in the holy place, symbolizing the truth that the only light of the church is the word of God, thus making the candlestick also a symbol of the Bible, or type of it.

Zechariah's question of the meaning of the seven golden candlesticks (Zechariah 4:1-6) evoked this response from the angel, "This is the word of the Lord;" and although limited as "unto Zerubbabel" in that reference, there can be little doubt that it stands for all the word of the Lord in the whole Bible; and, as such, it is a fantastically accurate and instructive type of it.

It's seven branches stand for the seven divisions of the Bible:

- (1) the law of Moses,
- (2) and the prophets,
- (3) and the psalms" (Luke 24:44 in the Old Testament); and the other four divisions ,
- (4) the gospels,
- (5) the book of Acts,
- (6) the epistles, and

(7) Revelation, in the New Testament, the later four divisions being implicit by the inherent nature of the books themselves, and from the revelation of three Old Testament divisions enunciated by the Lord Himself.

A glance at the candlestick shows that its two longest arms, on the right and the left, make the longest projection in the things represented, the left branch (Torah) going all the way back to creation, and the right (Revelation) reaching all the way to the judgment and eternity.

The candlestick required constant care, twice a day, or oftener, when the lamps were trimmed and supplied with oil; the same being eloquently typical of the constant care, meditation, reading and study of the Bible. The Old Testament looks forward to the gospel; the New Testament looks back.

THE TABLE OF SHOWBREAD

On the north side of the holy place, the table of showbread balanced the golden candlestick on the south side, and itself was typical of momentous truth in the new covenant. Twelve loaves of bread were kept fresh on the table and were arranged in two rows, suggesting the providence of God in the provisions made for His people, the two rows reminding one of the two Israels, the fleshly Israel and the spiritual Israel. This table is likewise not without its reference to the table in the kingdom of Christ. (Luke 22:29-30)

How strange indeed that Christ, the true vine, and the "fruit of the vine" so sacred to His disciples should thus have been so gloriously depicted upon that ancient table of showbread. The bread also, as exhibited on that table, has its counterpart in the bread of the Lord's Supper, itself symbolical of that bread which came down from God out of heaven, the bread of life, of which, if a man eat, he shall never die; and God shall raise him up at the last day.

THE GOLDEN ALTAR

From Exodus 40:22, 24, 26, the placement of the golden altar appears to have been near the veil through which the high priest entered the most holy place; and from the fact of its being an altar of incense, it should be understood

as a type or symbol of the prayers of God's people (Revelation 5:3) the incense representing the prayers, and the altar the institution of prayer itself. Many of the pioneer preachers of the Restoration made a great deal of the symbolism in the location of the altar within the holy place typifying the church, and not in the court typifying the world, thus making prayer to be a special privilege of the Christian within the church. Prayer is the privilege within, not without, the covenant relationship with God.

Verse 3

The only access to that holy of holies was through the veil, a description of which is afforded by Exodus 26:31ff. It was this veil which was parted in two from the top to the bottom at the time of our Lord's crucifixion. (Matthew 27:51)

THE VEIL OF THE TEMPLE

The three colors of this veil (Exodus 26:31ff), blue above, scarlet beneath, and purple between, formed by the perfect blending of the other colors, suggest the doctrine of the Trinity, and particularly the person of Christ whose heavenly nature (the blue) was perfectly blended with His earthly nature (the scarlet) to form the perfect co-mingling of the two (the purple) in His person as the unique God-man. The spiritual and heavenly nature of the things typified by the veil is typified by the embroidered cherubim upon it. According to the Scriptures, that ancient veil stands typical of a number of things.

1. It is a symbol of the mysteries of the Old Testament, Paul said of Israel, in (2 Corinthians 3:14-16).
2. It is a symbol of death and Christ's triumph over death, Isaiah said in Isaiah chapter 25:7-8. In this passage, death is plainly called the veil that is spread over all nations, thus the description of that veil symbolizes the triumph of Christ over death; and, previously to that the veil stood for centuries as a type of death itself, appropriately attested by its strategic location between the sanctuary (the church) and the Most Holy Place (heaven). (Hebrews 6:19)

3. The veil also typified the flesh of Christ, or His person, and the fact of His person's being rent, at the very moment of the Lord's death for our sins. It is therefore "through" the veil, that is to say his flesh, "that one draws near to God." (Hebrews 10:19-22)
4. There is a double symbolism in the veil as a type of the law of Moses, being the pivotal instrument in the entire system, and also upon the annulment that fell on the law when Christ died and the veil was torn in two. (Colossians 2:14)
5. It was a symbol of the chief function of the law of Moses which was actually one of concealment, specifically, the concealment of the ministrations of the high priest on the day of atonement, and is therefore typical of the office of the Jewish high priest, and in its being torn, a symbol of the removal of that office. (1 Timothy 2:5-6)
6. The veil was symbolical of the separation between God and man, it being the prime function of the veil, as of the whole Mosaic institution, to keep men away from God and to emphasize the unbridgeable gulf that separated them; again, the double symbolism is continued in the rending of the veil being made, in the New Testament, to be the opening up of, the new and living way, through Christ for men to draw near to God. (Hebrews 10:20)
7. Most emphatically, the veil is a symbol of the equality among God's children. The old covenant had its lesser priests, and high priest, who alone might enter the holiest place of all; but all such distinctions are removed in Christ's kingdom. "You are all brothers," Jesus said in Matthew 23:8). To be sure, the veil did not symbolize such and equality till after it was torn, being prior to that time, a symbol of their inequality. The most important thing anyone can know about that veil is that it was torn asunder by God Himself.

That old veil was destroyed by the hand of God when Christ was crucified. Let no man, therefore, hide behind a veil to hear another's confession, or to pass sentence, or to prescribe penalties, or perform any function whatever.

Verse 4

None of the articles described here was ever found in the Herodian temple; and it was perhaps for this very reason that the author of Hebrews elected to draw his illustrations from the tabernacle, rather than from the temple; therefore, the emphasis here on the tabernacle, not the temple, does not mean that the temple had been destroyed when Hebrews was written.

THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

Taking a cubit as eighteen inches, the ark of the covenant was a gold box, 45 inches long, 27 inches wide, and 27 inches deep; and in addition to its extravagant cost, its principal glory rested in its location within the Holy of Holies, and in its contents mentioned above, which included the sacred tablets on which God inscribed the Ten Commandments.

Having a golden crown about its top and inlaid within and without with pure gold, it was indeed a fitting receptacle of the sacred tablets on which God inscribed the Ten Commandments.

The golden pot holding the manna and Aaron's rod that budded were not said in the Pentateuch to have been placed in the ark of the covenant; but no objection can be lodged against the statement in Hebrews to that effect, because such a keeping place would have been perfectly in line with God's instructions that they were to be "Laid up before the Lord" (Exodus 16:33), and "before the testimony." (Numbers 17:10)

"And the tables of the covenant . . ." effectively identify the covenant spoken of in Hebrews as the Ten Commandments covenant. Jeremiah's great prophecy of the new covenant, more fully discussed in chapter 8, plainly identified the old covenant as the one God made with Israel and Moses at the time of the exodus from Egypt, the one containing the Ten Commandments, and the one which Israel did not keep.

Verse 5

Perhaps it would be well to borrow a little time to glance at the surprisingly marvelous symbolism of the mercy-seat.

THE MERCY SEAT

We have already noted the heavenly emphasis upon the Ark of the Covenant and the preference that pertained to it, as to location, cost, contents, etc., and it can only be imagined, therefore, what must have been the astonishment of Moses when he was instructed to make a mercy-seat (Exodus 25:17ff) of the same lateral dimensions, to adorn it with intricately carved figures of cherubim facing each other with wings arched upward and forward, posing in an attitude of worship, and peering intently downward into the mercy-seat, and to place it above and on top of the ark of the covenant!

There, in the location of that mercy-seat was revealed the key fact of all God's dealings with the race of Adam, namely, that by God's eternal will, His mercy stands enthroned even above His law; and no more significant truth was ever made apparent under the types and symbols of that old covenant. Generations of men beheld the wonder of God's mercy-seat above God's law; but neither men nor angels understood it, nor could they understand it, till Christ ascended Golgotha. That this typical elevation of mercy above law in the economy of God was a matter of wondering amazement even to the angels is depicted in the symbol itself, in the attitude of the cherubim, peering intently downward and straining their eyes, so to speak, to behold what the mystery was. It was probably of that very thing that Peter spoke in these words, "which things the angels desire to look into." (1 Peter 1:12)

Every mortal man, prone to sin, mired in the inevitable guilt associated with all human life, and conscious of his own helplessness to save himself—every man should thank God for the Father's mercy, forever elevated even above His law, and for the salvation provided in that mercy through the blood of the Savior.

Verse 6

The use of the present tense in this verse shows that the services being performed by the priests were still going on, which would mean that the Herodian temple was yet standing and certainly dating Hebrews prior to 70 A. D.

Here is a partial list of services performed by the priests:

- (1) They lighted the lamps every evening and trimmed them every morning. (Exodus 27:21; 30:8)
- (2) Each Sabbath day they renewed the loaves on the table of showbread. (Leviticus 24:5)

(3) They burned twice daily the incense on the golden altar, this coinciding with the morning and evening sacrifices, and with the trimming and lighting of the lamps. (Exodus 30:7-8; Luke 1:10) All of these actions took place in the holy place.

Verses 7-8

“The second” designates the Holy of Holies, into which only the high priest could enter, and during which entry no lesser priest could even stand in the sanctuary without, making it impossible to catch even a glimpse of that which was done within; and the high priest himself, far from having a continual access within the veil, could enter only under the strictest rules and that upon only one day in the whole year, the Day of Atonement.

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

Leviticus chapter 16 details the duties of the high priest in making the atonement. He appeared before the door of the tabernacle with no less than four sacrifices, a young bullock for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering, both of these to be offered for the high priest and his family; and then there were two he-goats for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering, these being for the whole of Israel. The high priest wore special linen garments for the occasion; and once used the garments could not be taken out of the sanctuary. He could not attire himself in those holy garments until he had washed himself in water.

First, he slew the bullock and proceeded to offer its blood within the veil as an atonement for his own sins; but, before doing so, he took live coals from off the altar of incense near the veil, in a golden censor, having with him a handful of the finely beaten sweet incense which he burned in the censor in such a way as to cover up the mercy-seat with smoke. Then he took of the blood of the

bullock and sprinkled it seven times upon the eastward portion of the mercy-seat. The atonement for himself and his house thus made the high priest then killed one of the he-goats, selected somewhat earlier by lot, and used its blood to sprinkle on the mercy-seat in the same way he had sprinkled the bullock's blood; and this made the atonement for the errors and sins of the people.

The remaining live he-goat, called the "scapegoat," was next used in one of the most amazing ceremonies of the old institution. The high priest laid his hands on the goat's head and confessed the sins of all Israel, after which the goat was driven off into some uninhabited place, thus "bearing away" the sins of the people.

After this, the high priest re-entered the sanctuary, took off the sacred linen clothes, dressed himself in his own priestly regalia, after another ceremonial washing, and then came out of the tabernacle and offered the two rams as burnt offerings. The contaminating power of sin was dramatically symbolized in the special arrangement observed when the custodian of the scapegoat, after letting him go, bathed himself and washed his clothes before re-entering the camp. Also, the flesh of the bullock and the goat, after their blood was sprinkled, was carried without the camp and burned, not even the hide being saved; and the persons charged with such details could not return to the camp without bathing and washing their clothes.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THOSE SERVICES

The great significance of all that elaborate ceremony and its supporting services is simply this: the way into the holy place had not been revealed as long as the tabernacle services continued. The use of "tabernacle" here does not exclude the temple. R. Milligan, *Commentary on the New Testament*, Vol. I, p. 250, wrote, "It is plain enough that 'the tabernacle' is used here symbolically for the whole system of Jewish worship."

God was the author of all those rites, ceremonies, and institutions of the old covenant, and that God had a purpose in their design, a purpose here revealed. The purpose was to show dramatically the darkness of the Jewish institution. The people, even though they were God's chosen people, could not

enter even the sanctuary, to say nothing of the Most Holy Place where God's presence was symbolized. Only a relatively few priests could enter, and even they were excluded from entering within the veil, where only one of them, the high priest alone, might enter under the most limited circumstances, and only on one day a year. And even when the high priest entered, the mercy-seat was first covered with smoke of incense, showing that the high priest, except as through smoke that screened his unworthiness from the Lord. Let it be remembered that the Holy of Holies was a type of heaven, eternal redemption, and fellowship with God, and it will appear how far short of redemption were those types and shadows of it in the old institution.

This cannot mean that the ancient worthy patriarchs were not saved; it is freely conceded that they were saved; but the how of such salvation could not be known as long as the old system stood. Christ opened up, "a new and living way . . . through the veil, that is to say His flesh." (Hebrews 10:20)

Verses 9-10

The great weakness of the old covenant was its carnality. To be sure, the worshiper who offered the proper sacrifices, washed himself ceremonially upon required occasions, observed the regulations as to meats and drinks, etc., could have been, and was, admitted into the commonwealth of God during that period; but none of those fleshly, carnal ordinances did anything at all to cleanse the conscience of sinners. The blood of bulls and goats, the sprinkling of altars, the ashes of a red heifer, the burning of incense, the washings, the changing of clothes, none of those things made the lightest change in men's hearts. That was the moral weakness of the old covenant.

Time would not allow in such a work as this a thorough study of all the rites and ceremonies of Judaism, but most of them, even the washings, are illustrated by the Day of Atonement ritual described above.

"Until a time of reformation . . ." designates the times of the Messiah and the new covenant. Christ referred to those times as "the times of regeneration," (Matthew 19:28) and Peter called them "times of refreshing." (Acts 3:19)

Verse 11

“But when Christ appeared as a high priest . . .” shows that the author of Hebrews considered the public ministry of Christ with His passion, death, and resurrection to be the termination of the old order, and not His birth, a truth attested by Christ’s fulfilling the law meticulously during His earthly sojourn.

“Good things to come . . .” is made to read “of the good things that have come”

In the Revised Standard Version; and even The Revised Version gives the alternative reading from certain old manuscripts; but there is no problem, because it is true either way. As A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures of the New Testament*, Vol. V, p. 398, wrote, “It is a nice question which is the true text. Both aspects are true, for Christ is a high priest of good things that have already come as well as of the glorious future hope.”

“He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation. . .” it's easily understood as far as the last two clauses are concerned, since they clearly refer to the spiritual and more heavenly nature of the perfect tabernacle; but it is a little more difficult to determine what the antitypical realities are in Christ, as compared with the ancient high priest.

The Jewish high priest first offered the bullock outside the sanctuary; the Lord also offered Himself outside the city, or camp of Israel. The Jewish high priest then passed through the sanctuary and offered the blood within the veil. Christ also conformed to this pattern, with the additional fact that He was both the victim and the one offering the victim.

Christ then passed through the sanctuary and into heaven itself (corresponding to that which is within the veil) and there offered His own blood.

The sanctuary is a type of the church of Christ; and the church, of course, is the spiritual body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:27)

We agree with R. Milligan, *Ibid*, to the effect that whatever the upper and greater tabernacle is, through which Jesus passed, “It manifestly includes the church of Christ.”

Verse 12

Two points of superiority in the high priesthood of Christ are stressed here, these being:

- (1) that by a more perfect medium, His own blood contrasted with the blood of animals, and
- (2) that in a more exalted place of the offering, in heaven itself, Christ offered His own blood, not repeatedly, but once for all.

Verse 13

The use of blood of bulls and goats on the Day of Atonement has already been discussed, and for the ritual with the ashes of a red heifer, see Numbers 19th chapter. These were used for ceremonial cleansing from such defilements as were incurred by touching a dead body. The heifer on which no yoke had come was required to be without blemish, and after the ceremonies was burned without the camp.

The argument here is that Christ’s offering is superior to that of the old covenant by the same measure which values the blood of a man more than that of an animal; yes, even more, in that Christ was not merely a man, but the holy and perfect God-man Himself.

There are other points of superiority. Whereas animals were sacrificed without their consent, Christ consented to be the victim for man’s sins. Animals were offered by others; Christ offered Himself.

The blood of animals was chosen and offered upon the volition and choice of men, whereas the offering of Christ was by the fiat of the eternal Spirit that was in Christ.

Those animal sacrifices did perform their intended function by sanctifying unto the cleansing of the flesh; and if that was true, so he reasons, how much more shall the blood of Christ avail to the achievement of a clean conscience

toward God. Particular attention is now directed to the conscience and how it may be cleansed.

Verse 14

CONCERNING THE CONSCIENCE

It is the glorious superiority of the new covenant that God has provided a way by which man's conscience can be truly cleansed, and the basis of that cleansing is shown in this verse. It is by means of the blood of Christ.

Let it be remembered that the sole means of obtaining a clean conscience is found in the blood of Christ and that there can be no cleaning apart from that blood.

- (1) Take the view that Christ's blood is in His body. To find contact with the blood, one would therefore have to enter the body of Christ; and how can this be done? Three times the Sacred Scriptures declare that men are baptized into Christ, that is, into His body. (Romans 6:3; I Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27)
- (2) Or take the view that Christ's blood was in His death, that being the occasion of its being shed. How does one enter the death of Christ?

The scriptural answer is, "All we who were baptized into Christ were baptized into His death." (Romans 6:3) In view of these things, who can doubt that Christian baptism is in some wondrous way related to the believer's contact with the blood of Christ with its consequent cleansing of the conscience? If such is not the case, how could the apostle Peter have related baptism to the cleansing of the conscience in the manner of these words, "Baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 3:21)

A good conscience becomes a reality upon one's obeying the gospel of Christ through faith, repentance, baptism, and rising to walk in newness of life.

It may be added here as a deduction of our own, that wherever there is knowledge of the Lord's commandment that all men, of all times, of all nations,

should be baptized, there never lived a man, and there never will live a man, who can go before God with a good conscience until he has been baptized.

Verse 15

This shows that the real value of the old types and shadows lay in the perfect realization of them through Christ, their redemption, no less than ours, depending solely upon His atoning death.

No sin, in all the history of humanity, was ever forgiven except upon the basis of Christ's atonement; and this is so mountainous a truth that God was said by Paul to have justified His "passing over the sins previous committed" through the means of setting forth His Son to be a propitiation in His blood through faith. (Romans 3:25)

The author shows here that Christ made an atoning death for the forgiveness of the sins under the old order, thus actually accomplishing their forgiveness, a thing which the old law could not achieve. This being done, the author continues, God is free to usher in the new covenant as prophesied by Jeremiah 31:31ff. The absolute cancellation of the old covenant is implicit in this truth concerning Christ. Since not even the noblest under the law could ever possess true forgiveness apart from Christ, it logically follows that "Jesus only" is the basis of all further drawing near to God.

Verses 16-17

THE COVENANT (WILL) OF CHRIST

The use of the word "covenant" in these verses is the source of an incidental revelation for which men may be truly thankful. It furnishes an independent view of the entire concept of eternal life in Christ, a view which makes the eternal inheritance to be, in a sense, on parity with receiving a bequest from some person who has left it in his will for another. Such is the import of the word "covenant" as used here. The terms of any will become binding only upon the death of the person making it; and they do not limit or impede in any way the free use of the testator's property before his death. This sublime fact is precisely the reason why no person may claim forgiveness of his

sins through a mere act of faith, as did a certain woman (Luke 7:50), or like the thief on the cross, for an example. The testator had not then died; and the conditions under which it was prescribed how all men might inherit were not announced as yet.

If men would inherit through Christ, who is the heir of all things, let them discover what His plenary representatives, the apostles of Christ, announced after His death as the binding terms of the covenant, and obey them, meet those conditions; nor should they rely upon isolated and individual instances of Christ's redemptive favor in which, prior to His death, salvation was conferred upon persons such as the thief on the cross and the certain woman already mentioned. To make such prior examples (prior to His death) any solid basis for determining how men are saved now, after Christ's death, is a very hurtful error.

Verse 18

If it should appear to any person that the writer's insistence upon the death of Christ as a prerequisite of eternal life was anything strange or ill-advised, let him take note of the fact that even in the old covenant, there was no binding system until everything had been dedicated through blood. Such would seem to be the meaning of this verse.

Verses 19-22

The obstinate problem the author was dealing with in these verses was the prejudice of Jewish Christians who found the cross of Christ an offense and who were inclined to stumble at the death of Christ. This mention of all that blood and sprinkling is for the purpose of showing that all of the ancient typical institutions called for blood-shedding, not occasionally, but continually, such things being suggestive and typical of the death of Christ. R. C. H. Lenski, *Ibid.*, p. 307, wrote, "Since there was so much use of blood in connection with the Mosaic testament and all that pertains to that testament, how can any of the readers find fault with Christ's death and blood in connection with the New Testament? They should do the very opposite: appreciate the fact that Christ's death and blood are infinitely more precious than all the Mosaic sacrifices."

Verse 23

This verse concludes an argument to the effect that Christ's sacrifice is infinitely more wonderful and efficacious than any or all of the Mosaic sacrifices.

F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 218, commented on this verse saying, "Our author does not deny that such ritual cleansing was real and effective as far as it went. What he does deny is that cleansing of this kind should be of any use for the removal of inward and spiritual defilement. The various installations that were cleansed and fitted for the worship of God by the blood of animal sacrifices were but copies of the spiritual realities; where the spiritual themselves are concerned, a superior sacrifice and more effective cleansing must be forth-coming. It has frequently been asked in what sense the "heavenly things" required to be cleansed; but our author has provided the answer in the context. What required to be cleansed; was the defiled consciences of men and women; this is a cleansing which belongs to the spiritual sphere."

Verse 24

Here the infinite superiority of Christ is related to the place where the offering of blood took place, not in some carnal, earthly, man-made holy place, but in heaven itself in the very presence of God. The result was a universalization of the benefits thus produced, making them available to all men.

Verses 25-26

"Should offer Himself often . . ." The Greek word *hapax* means, "once for all." The glory of Christ's sacrifice as set forth here consists of the complete, final, and irrevocable nature of the offering. It was not a repeated thing as were the offerings and sacrifices under Judaism but was "once for all" accomplished. This eliminates any notion that the church should have something to offer or sacrifice, in such a thing as the mass, for example; for the one and only efficacious sacrifice has already been offered in heaven, where alone it could do any good and by the only One capable of doing it, Jesus the Lord.

Implicit in this place is also the revelation of the true purpose of Jesus' coming into this world. It was not to begin an earthly kingdom, nor to erect an earthly throne, nor to restore a literal kingdom to Israel, but to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

God's offering of Himself in the person of His Son upon the cross is the *sine qua non* of all human forgiveness and salvation.

Verses 27-28

R. Milligan, op. cit., p. 266, wrote, "The true character of every individual is determined on his exit from this world; and that his destiny is then virtually determined. And just so it is in the case of Christ, as our author now proceeds to show."

On the appointment of death for all men, it may be remembered that there is nothing accidental relative to the universal sentence of death upon humankind. True, accidental death may occur for an individual; but all men are certain to die at last.

"Having been offered . . ." God indeed did lay upon Him the iniquity of us all. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him. We did esteem Him stricken of God and afflicted.

The Jewish hierarchy humiliated Him and crowned Him with every conceivable insult; they inflicted Him; He was despised and rejected of men and thus died for the sins of many. But after death, there quickly appeared the judgment of God upon Christ. He rose from the dead. Christ was elevated to the right hand of the Majesty on high.

"Shall appear a second time . . ." is a reference to the second advent of Christ when He shall appear in flaming fire taking vengeance upon them that know not God and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:7-8).

Yes, Christ shall be seen on earth again, not as a humble sufferer, but as the mighty judge before whom all men must give an account.

The expression, “Those who eagerly wait for Him” is a directive that Christians should “wait it out,” never be discouraged, and endure to the end.

“Not to bear sin . . .” suggests many things, among them being that our Lord shall not be grieved and distressed by the vicious deeds of the ungodly, that He shall have finally disposed of the sins of His disciples, having abolished them forever, even from God’s remembrance, and that the very presence of sin or sinners shall have no further existence before His face.

CHAPTER 10

RECAPITULATION OF PREVIOUS ARGUMENT AND RESTATEMENT IN STRONGER TERMS, SANCTIFIED BY THE BODY OF CHRIST ONCE FOR ALL, THE FOURTH EXHORTATION

Verse 1

“The law” as boldly used here indicates that it is not merely certain types of offerings and sacrifices, or selected regulations concerning priests, nor some limited portion of the old covenant that was abrogated by Christ, but the entire system.

“A shadow, not the very form of things. . .” brings into sharp contrast the old and new covenants, the old being likened to a shadow, and the new to the very image of the heavenly things.

We might even affirm that the true forgiveness available in Christ, along with the privileges of faith, and including all the attendant promises, hopes, and blessings of the Christian faith, actually are the realities typified by the shadows of the old covenant; and yet, significantly, the sacred text falls far short of any such declaration, the marvelous benefits and blessings of the new institution themselves being here hailed as “the very image” of still grater realities yet to be realized and revealed in heaven.

The magnificent endowments of the faith in Christ are more than sufficient for all the needs and desires of life in man’s present condition, and, therefore, it

is with the deepest wonder and admiration that one reads the words of (1 Corinthians 13:9-12).

“Can never . . . make perfect those who draw near” is the conclusion dependent on the truth that the law and all of its provisions had the status of a mere shadow. They were only typical, carnal, earthly, material, and mortal devices, having no efficacy at all, except as they directed the minds of the worshipers to the holy and heavenly things prefigured.

“Those who draw near . . .” brings before us the whole purpose and intent of holy religion, that of restoring man’s lost fellowship with his Creator.

Verse 2

The problem in this verse lies in the question of why it is implied that efficacious sacrifices able to perfect the worshipers, if they had existed, would have ceased.

B. F. Westcott, *op. cit.*, p. 305, wrote, “The inefficiency of the sacrifices is proved by their repetition. If it be said that repeated sacrifices dealt only with the later sin, the answer is that we have to deal with sin and not with sins only; to be assured that our true relationship with God has been re-established. A sacrifice which offers this for humanity, and we need no less, cannot be repeated.”

R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James*, p. 235, said, “If any person should sin and be disturbed in conscience, all he would need to do would be to turn in repentance to that final sacrifice as we now return to Christ’s sacrifice. A final sacrifice would not need to be repeated for any person’s sin.”

True as the above scholarly views appear, however, there is another sense in which the sacred text may be understood. R. Milligan, *New Testament Commentary*, p. 267, noted, “If these bloody sacrifices had been really efficacious in taking away the sins of the people, there would, of course, have been no need of repeating them with reference to the same sins.”

Milligan goes on to show that there was a repetition of the sacrifices over and over, with regard to the same sins. He wrote, “Besides these special offerings, others were offered daily (Exodus 29:38ff), weekly (Numbers 28:9-10), monthly (28:11-15), and yearly at each of the three great festivals. (Leviticus 28) But nevertheless, on the tenth day of the seventh month, all the sins of the past year were again called into remembrance and the atonement was made.”

Milligan further pointed out that even the sacred services of the great Day of Atonement failed to prevent the same sins from being remembered again, as proved by the ceremony of the scapegoat which “bore away” the sins of the people, a thing that would not have been required if the sins had truly been forgiven or no longer existed.

Verse 3

Behold the contrast between the old law and the new, in the matter of their most sacred ceremonies and sacrifices on the Day of Atonement, which were directed to the remembrance of sins for which daily, weekly, monthly and seasonal sacrifices had already been offered. On the other hand, look at the contrast in the new covenant where the glorious function of the solemn observance of the Lord’s Supper is not to call to mind the sins of the worshipers but to remember Christ, His death, His truly efficacious atonement, and His love for the redeemed. Remember sins; remember Christ! What a difference!

The New Testament worshiper comes into divine service not to recall his sins but to remember the Lord who said, “Do this in remembrance of Me.”

Verse 4

“For it is impossible . . .” Common sense alone is the proof of the statement that the blood of animals cannot take away sin, but it is reaffirmed by the word of inspiration. James Macknight, *Apostolical Epistles*, p. 554, wrote, “Micah formerly taught the Jews the same doctrine, and even insinuated to them that the heathens, being sensible of the impossibility of making atonement for sins by shedding the blood of beasts, had recourse to human sacrifices, in the imagination that they were more meritorious.” (Micah 6:7)

Not the least of the reasons why animal sacrifices could be of no avail, lies in the fact that animals never belonged to man in the first place. The Lord said, “For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills.” (Psalm 50:10)

It was thus manifestly erroneous for man to think that by sacrificing some of his fellow creatures of a lower order than himself, and which like himself the property of God, he could make an true expiation of his sins.

Verses 5-6

“When He comes into the world . . .” is a reference to the incarnation of Christ, making Him the true author of the words of David in the Psalm 40:6-8, and regarding that these words be understood as spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ and not by David.

R. C. H. Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 331, was doubtless correct in his understanding of this remarkable prophecy when he wrote, “The great force which these lines of the psalm and this true analysis of what they say has for the readers lies in the fact that David has written these lines in the psalm; they are in the Holy Scriptures, are a part of all that David the type says for the antitype, the Messiah. The lines are the voice of the Messiah Himself speaking to God hundreds of years before this Messiah “appeared” (verse 26) and did God’s will.”

“Sacrifice and offering . . . in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sins.” These two pairs of words regarding the Jewish sacrifices, and again to B. F. Westcott, *op. cit.*, p. 309, we are indebted for this instructive note, “The two pairs of words give a complete view of the Jewish sacrifices. The first two describe them according to their material, the animal offering and the meal offering. The second pair given in the burnt offering and sin offering, representative types of the two great classes of offerings.”

Verse 7

“In the roll of the book it is written of Me” seems like a strange expression; but as Adam Clarke, *Commentary*, Vol. VI, p. 754, wrote, “Anciently, books were written on skins rolled up. Among the Romans, these were called

volunina, from *volvo*, I roll; and the Pentateuch, in the Jewish synagogues, is still written in this way. There are two wooden rollers; on the one they roll on; on the other they roll off.”

Adam Clarke, *Ibid.*, also pinpointed the identification of just which book is meant, in these words: “The book mentioned here must be the Pentateuch, for in David’s time no other part of Divine revelation had been committed to writing. This whole book speaks about Christ, and His accomplishing the will of God, not only in Genesis 3:15, but in all the sacrifices and sacrificial rites mentioned in the law.”

The statement of the Messiah in presenting Himself to do God’s will, before His incarnation and at the time God purposed the redemptive act on behalf of men is as follows, “Lo, I come to do they will, O God.” All kinds of offerings and sacrifices failed to please God, or to give Him any pleasure, and failing in totality to remove man’s sin and restore his broken fellowship with God, Christ in this place appears as the great Volunteer who would undertake the task. Even He would not be able to do it with such things as animal sacrifices, but would need “a body,” a body prepared of God and made available to the Messiah through the seed of David; thus the principle is established that absolutely nothing else than the death of man for the sins of man could prevail; and no ordinary sinful man would suffice for such a purpose. Nothing less than the perfect and sinless Son of God could avail, to make the atonement.

Thus the dramatic and world-shaking significance of Christ’s voluntary assumption of so dreadful and necessary a task on man’s behalf is seen in the words, “Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God.”

Verse 8

The parenthetical expression: “Which are offered according to the Law” is for the purpose of alerting the reader to the fact that it is not merely some special kind of sacrifice, nor all of them together, which falls under the abrogation about to be mentioned; but rather it is the law itself, the whole and entire law, which was but a shadow anyway, that must fall under the sweeping

annulment of Christ who repealed the whole ancient constitution in order to found another.

Verse 9

In this verse it is plain why the parenthesis was introduced in the verse above; it was to show that “the first” does not apply to sacrifices, offerings, or the ceremonial part of the Jewish institution, nor to the law concerning priests, but to the first “law,” that entire covenant with the ten commandments and everything else that pertained to it.

Verse 10

The principal here is that Christ as man’s representative obeyed God perfectly, doing His will completely, as promised by the words, “I came to do Your will.” In Christ, therefore, man stands before God as obedient. The perfect compliance with Divine law as required by the Eternal has thus been provided in the person of Christ whose marvelous obedience is on behalf of all men. Through man’s acceptance of the truth of the gospel, and upon his being baptized into Christ, the person doing so is thereby accounted a part of the spiritual body of Christ and becomes a beneficiary of the perfect obedience of the Son of God.

How are we sanctified, or made holy? B. F. Westcott, *op. cit.*, p. 312, answered the question thus, “The clause contains an answer to the question that naturally arises, “How are we sanctified in the will of God?” That will was realized in the perfect life of the Son of man, in which each man as a member of humanity finds the realization of his own destiny.”

Verses 11-12

These, and through verse 18, are the final summation and shout of victory. Christ is all and in all. Nothing in the old institution is any better than a feeble shadow of the riches and glory in Christ; and a few choice comparisons are reserved for this concluding thrust of the author’s overwhelming presentation.

The old priests stood as servants; Jesus sits enthroned. They repeated over and over the same rites; Jesus made one perfect offering forever. They served;

Christ reigns. They could not procure forgiveness; Christ removes our sins even from the memory of God! They offered enough blood during the long centuries of Judaism to have washed away a city; but the blood of Christ is more efficacious than an ocean of such blood.

R. Milligan, *op. cit.*, p. 273, quotes Menkin's contrasts of the respective attitudes of sitting and standing. "The priest of the Old Testament stands timid and uneasy in the Holy Place, anxiously performing his awful service there, and hastening to depart when the service is done, as from a place where he has no free access, and can never feel at home; whereas Christ sits down in everlasting rest and blessedness at the right hand of the Majesty in the Holy of Holies, His work accomplished, and He Himself awaiting His reward."

Christ has not ceased from all work; because He intercedes, reigns, sustains all things by the word of His power, and administers the whole creation from the throne of God. Despite this, there is a sense in which, Christ's work was done when He ascended on high; it was the work of providing atonement for man's redemption. Again from R. Milligan, *Ibid.* who wrote, "Not that He has ceased to work for the redemption of mankind, for He must reign, and that too, with infinite power and energy, until the last enemy, death, shall be destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:25-26; Revelation 19:11-21). But His sacrificial work was done."

THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

The fantastic burden of importance which this epistle places upon the blood of Christ as the means, and only means, of human redemption, calls for a more detailed exploration on this subject at this juncture in Hebrews.

In New Mexico and Colorado, one of the most spectacular and beautiful mountain ranges on earth is called the "*Sangre de Cristo Range*," that is, "the Blood of Christ Range."

For one who truly understands and appreciates the blood by which we are sanctified, the commemorative naming of every good and beautiful thing on earth could not do sufficient honor to the blood of Christ. Spiritual dwarfs in our own secular age may not properly appreciate the blood of the covenant; but

make no mistake about this, “without the shedding of blood there is no remission in our own dispensation, or in that.

R. C. H. Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 333, wrote, “This is the climax. The whole will of God and the whole sacrifice of (Christ’s) death is the removal of our sins. Freed of these, heaven is ours. Without Christ’s expiation there is no remission and deliverance from sin. This is the heart of all Scripture. Those who remove this heart because they regard it as “the old blood theology” have left only a hopeless corpse.”

It is a mystery, of course, how the blood of Christ saves us; and there are doubtless many who do not understand it. Perhaps, in a sense, no one can fully understand all that is in it.

The blood of one man, if only a man, would be insufficient to save any man not even the man who might offer it. It was who Christ WAS AND IS that makes all the difference. As a member of the Godhead, Christ’s death was of sufficient consequence to save all on our poor earth or a million other worlds all together.

The identity of Christ also resolves the other quibble. It was not so much a question of God’s laying all the sins upon Christ (although this He did); but it was a matter of God’s laying the sum total of all human wickedness upon His own great heart in the person of Christ. Remember that “God was in Christ” reconciling the world unto Himself. (1 Corinthians 5:19)

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

Men may object; they may rip all reference to the blood from their hymn-books and banish the mention of it from sophisticated pulpits; but if such is done, the sentence of God’s rejection falls upon them that do it, even as Christ said of others who rejected Him, “Behold your house is being left to you desolate.” (Matthew 23:38)

Verse 13

Bruce and Clarke saw in these words a warning to the readers of this epistle.

F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 240, wrote, "There may be an implied warning here to his readers not to let themselves be numbered among the enemies of the exalted Christ, but rather to be reckoned among his friends and companions by preserving their fidelity to the end."

A. Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 755, wrote, "There is also here an oblique reference to the destruction of the Jews, which was then at hand; for Christ was about to "take away the first with an overwhelming flood of desolations."

The message trumpeted by this verse is not merely that Christ is preparing to reign but that He is already doing so. Those who fondly wait and expect that Christ shall come back to earth literally and take vengeance upon His enemies overlook the fact that this is being done now. How? The very sins that men commit destroy them; and although that cannot be the manner of death's ultimate destruction, it certainly applies to all of Christ's other enemies. Christ needs only to wait till the rebellious and sinful course of man has spent itself like a burnt-out rocket. And, when God's patience has ended, and the last precious fruit of earth shall have been gathered, Christ will loose Satan for a little season (Revelation 20:3ff); and that disaster shall give the human race experiential knowledge of just what the service of Satan actually means. The consummation of all things shall speedily follow.

Verse 14

This summation clincher, as to the superiority of Christ's sacrifice, exploits the fact that He needed only one offering to accomplish everything that millions of offerings under the law could not do, namely, provide forgiveness of sins.

"Those who are sanctified . . ." are not to be identified as those who have by means of personal devotion, prayer, and study, achieved some more than ordinary holiness, but as encompassing all the redeemed of all the ages who,

through Christ alone, have received all that is necessary to be set apart unto eternal life.

Verse 15

This verse is invaluable for the light it sheds on the witness of the Holy Spirit. W. H. Griffith Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 128, accurately read the implications of this verse writing, "Here again, with great significance, the Holy Spirit is mentioned. Not only is He the source and author of the Divine message in Psalm 3:7, and of the true meaning of the tabernacle (9:8); but He is shown to be witnessing through the statements of Scripture to the reality and power of the new covenant. This is the true witness of the Spirit, not something dependent upon our own variable emotions, but that which is objective to us, and fixed, the Word of God."

Thomas, *Ibid.*, also noted in this context the various functions assigned to several members of the Godhead, in these words, "We have the three-fold revelation of God in this passage, a very definite spiritual and practical exemplification of the Holy Trinity, in the will of God (verse 9), the work of Christ (verse 12), and the witness of the Spirit, (verse 15)."

Verses 16-17

The author still has in mind the extensive prophecy of the new covenant by Jeremiah which he more fully quoted in chapter 8, where he used it to show that God had foretold the abrogation of the old covenant and had from the first intended to abolish it. Westcott said, "The consequences of sin are threefold: debt which requires forgiveness, bondage which requires redemption, and alienation which requires reconciliation." All of these, forgiveness, redemption, and reconciliation are found in Jesus Christ. The most precious words in the Bible, perhaps, with reference to the hope of eternal life are these, "And their iniquities I will remember no more." How sacred is this promise. Sins which men themselves cannot forget, God will forget! Don Earl Boatman, *Helps from Hebrews*, p. 310, wrote, "Remember no more" is a contrast to "remembrance year by year." Man remembers, but God forgets when He forgives."

Verse 18

Remission of sins having been provided through Christ, by means of one final and complete offering already accomplished all the Jewish offerings simply do not legally exist anymore. They are not. “There is no more offering for sin,” as required by the old law. It has forever been changed and repealed.

R. C. H. Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 311, was struck with the cosmic sweep and power of such words as “remission” and “redemption.” Here are some of his words, “The remission of sins means, literally, “the sending away” of sins. (This means to send away the sins of a sinner as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12), as a cloud is blotted out and vanishes (Isaiah 44:22), to the bottom of the sea (Micah 7:19), thus blotting out the sins even from memory.” When God sends away “these” namely our sins and violations of His law, so that even His memory does not recall them, they are gone indeed. But the Spirit testifies that God actually does this.”

THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS

The importance of understanding the final and complete nature of the heavenly offering of the blood of Christ for human sins is so great, and any denial of such a sublime truth, even though unintentional, is of such terrible consequence to mankind that we are led to inquire here as to the validity of the commonly held view that Christ’s blood is daily sacrificed in such a thing as the mass.

A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures of the New Testament*, p. 409, wrote, “One wonders how priests who claim that ‘mass’ is the sacrifice of Christ’s body repeated explain this verse!” does one even find it mentioned.

We here register the words of the inimitable James Macknight on this subject as they were quoted in the words of Adam Clarke’s great commentary, *op. cit.*, p. 755. “If (says Dr. Macknight) after remission is granted to the sinner, there is no need of any more sacrifice for sins; and if Christ, by offering Himself once has perfected forever the sanctified (verse 14), the sacrifice of the mass, as it is called, about which the Roman clergy employ themselves so incessantly, and to which the papists trust for the pardon of their sins, has no foundation in

Scripture. Nay, it is an evident impiety, as it proceeds upon the supposition that the offering of the body of Christ “once” is not sufficient to procure the pardon of sin, but must be frequently repeated. If they reply that their mass is only the representation and commemoration of a sacrifice of Christ, they give up the cause and renounce an article of their faith, established by the council of Trent, which in session xxii, canons 1, 3, declared “the sacrifice of the mass” to be a true and propitiatory sacrifice for sin. I say, give up the cause, for the representation and commemoration of a sacrifice is not a sacrifice. Further it cannot be affirmed that the body of Christ is offered in the mass, unless it can be said that, as often as it is offered, “Christ has suffered death;” for the apostle says expressly (Hebrews 9:25-26) that if Christ offered Himself often, “He must have suffered since the foundation of the world.”

Note: To This paragraph Adam Clarke appended the challenge, “Let him disprove this who can!”

Here in Hebrews we view the end of the most elaborate and impressive argument ever directed to human intelligence extolling the glorious superiority of Christ and His redeeming mission for mankind. Without doubt the author was guided by the Holy Spirit, since unaided human mind could never have discovered it. Like Lenski, we feel the burning words of this message and marvel at their power. Some of the words, especially, are charged with unbelievable emotion and eloquence for all who fully understand them.

Throughout the New Testament, those words which certify man’s salvation—how beautiful they are, how rich with the tenderness of God, how far beyond all mortal merit. Wonderful indeed are the words that teach men of the love of Christ; and, in the long and terrible night of this world’s darkness and despair, how grandly do those words go marching in the gloom of human sin and transgression, ransomed, redeemed, propitiated, bought with a price, saved by the blood of Jesus.

The remainder of Hebrews is given over principally to exhortation’ and this concludes the grate burden of theological discussion. The words of, B. F. Westcott. *op. cit.*, p. 317, are a fitting summation of this section. He wrote, “The

prophetic words show that under the new covenant no place is left for the Levitical sacrifices. The Christian can therefore dispense with them without any loss. To be forced to give up their shadowy consolation is to be led to realize more practically the work of Christ. This is the last, the decisive word of the argument.”

It is not merely the “Levitical sacrifices” to be dispensed with, but the entire system. Christ took away the first that He might establish the second; and what is not in the second, simply is not.

THE FOURTH EXHORTATION

Verse 19

The basis of the appeal here is for the further consideration that the great High Priest has offered a perfect and totally efficacious sacrifice of His own blood before the very presence of God and has opened up a way into that same holy presence, nor merely for Himself, who has already entered there, but for us as well.

Christians are here spoken of as entering “into the Holy Place;” and this is based upon the typical nature of the court and sanctuaries of the old order. The court was a type of the world, the Holy Place a type of the church, and the Most Holy Place a type of heaven.

Verse 20

“A new and living way . . .” properly denotes the means of access through Christ by believers into the very presence of God.

It was a new way because:

- (1) only recently, in the historical sense, had it been made available;
- (2) it was an essential feature of the new covenant;
- (3) it is never subject to change or decay, being thus eternally new.

It is a living way because:

- (1) it is through the eternally living Savior that access exists, not through the blood of dead animals;

- (2) it leads to newness of life for them that travel in it (Romans 6:4): and
- (3) it provides a way of living that culminates at last in eternal life, contrasting with all other ways which may be described as dead, dead-end streets that lead only to the grave.

“Through the veil, that is to say, “His flesh” is a reference to the typical nature of the veil that separated the sanctuary from the most holy place, plainly said here to typify the flesh of Christ.

One needs to take note of the difficulty fancied by some commentators with reference to how the veil can represent the flesh of Christ, since the veil concealed the presence of God and Christ in the flesh reveals that presence. It cannot be true that Jesus’ incarnation conceals the knowledge of God, it being the precise intention of the incarnation to reveal God, not to conceal Him.

It was not merely the veil that represented Christ, but the rent veil! The sundered veil did not obscure or conceal anything. The perfect support of this understanding of the matter lies in the very verse before us. That typical veil which concealed for such a long time the way into the Holy of Holies at last parted asunder; and it thereby became in that miraculous event the perfect type of the rending of the flesh of Jesus, through which the way into heaven itself is opened up and revealed to men.

Verse 21

The house of God in this verse is the church of the living God, as an apostle declared, “That you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God.” (1Timothy 3:15)

Verse 22

The drawing near enjoined in these words is drawing near to God, the very concept of such a thing suggesting what a wonderful privilege is involved. God is not like some head of a mere earthly state but is the eternal and all-powerful Ruler of Creation.

The verse at hand reveals the divinely imposed preconditions to be fulfilled by them that would draw near to God. The importance of these findings demands that specific attention be given to each one of them.

“With a sincere heart . . .” shows that no insincere person or hypocrite can ever really draw near to God. Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8)

Success is promised the obedient. “You will seek the Lord your God and you will find Him if you search for him with all your heart and all your soul.” (Deuteronomy 4:29) In the parable of the sower, the seed which produced the good fruit was that which fell upon the good ground, the honest and good heart. Only the honest and good heart without deceit or hypocrisy can approach God; none others need apply.

“In the fullness of faith” is another precondition of redemption, drawing near to God. “Fullness of faith” means true and wholehearted faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and with full confidence in His power and godhead. Although it is a fact that men are saved “by faith,” there are many degrees of faith, such as little faith, weak faith, vain faith, and dead faith. One should make sure that he has enough faith to be saved. The doctrine which has stripped the heart out of most modern religion is that old standby of the Protestant Reformation which announced justification by faith alone.

Such a doctrine is a perversion of Scripture, an addition to Scripture, and a flat contradiction of Scriptures. (James 2:24) The faith that saves is a working obedient, loving, living faith; and a faith that is none of these things can never save. It is not believing, merely, but believing with all the heart that is needed.

The Christian confession from earliest times was never made without regard to this emphasis, as attested when Phillip required of the eunuch, “If you believe with all your heart, you may” (Acts 8:37)

“Having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience . . .” is a reference to penitent acceptance of Christ’s sacrifice through knowledge and contemplation of it and also an humble willingness to accept as our own what Christ has provided. The comparison is between the sprinkling of blood upon

ancient worshipers in the old covenant, which blood was actually sprinkled upon their bodies but their hearts, by the blood of Jesus. The Scriptural heart, of course, is the mind, as implicit in the words of Christ to the Pharisees, “Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts?” (Mark 2:8)

“And our body washed with pure water . . .” is beyond all doubt a reference to Christian baptism, making it, therefore, a precondition of salvation, or drawing near to God.

R. Milligan, *op. cit.*, p. 282, gives us a summary on this that is helpful. He wrote, “Nearly all eminent scholars are now agreed that here is a manifest reference to the ordinance called Christian baptism. Alford says that, “There can be no reasonable doubt that this clause refers directly to Christian baptism. The bath of water (Ephesians 5:26), and the bath of regeneration (Titus 3:5), are analogous expressions; and the express mention of body here, as distinguished from hearts before, stamps this interpretation with certainty.”

To deny such an obvious meaning would be to pose an impossible alternative; because in the entire Christian religion, there is absolutely nothing else, other than baptism to which this could have a possible reference. In keeping with the analogy are Paul’s instructions from Ananias to, “Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name.” (Acts 22:16)

All of the instructions, or preconditions, for drawing near to God as set forth here stand for that portion of the plan of salvation which brings men to Christ; which to be sure is not the whole duty, but the beginning. All of the duties, responsibilities, and requirements of the Christian life are to be received and discharged in faith as long as one is under the probation of life.

This verse tells how to be enrolled as a Christian. How? Draw near to God

- (1) with a true heart,
- (2) in full assurance of faith,
- (3) having the heart sprinkled from an evil conscience, and
- (4) the body washed with pure water.

Verse 23

The confession mentioned here must be understood as a reference to the whole body of Christian faith and teaching as revealed in the Sacred Scriptures. The ground of confidence for men is not in their own merit or ability but in the faithfulness of the Savior who has promised eternal life to them that love and obey Him.

Verse 24

In a sense, the sentiment of this verse is a recurring theme in Hebrews. The apostles taught that if one member of the body suffers, or is honored, all the other are likewise affected. (1 Corinthians 12:26ff) Christian living is here directly related to the appreciation and encouragement of the faith of one's fellow Christians, as well as of one's self; and, in a sense all succeed or fail together. The utmost tenderness and concern should be felt for every one of the Lord's disciples; and the greatest diligence should be exercised in the cultivation of this community fellowship. Mutual love among the brethren and mutual participation in the common joys and sorrows of the entire membership, and mutual encouragement in every good work are basic principles of the kingdom of heaven.

Verse 25

CONCERNING THE ASSEMBLY

"Our own assembling together . . ." is a reference to the Lord's Day worship of the church, the regular Sunday services of congregations of believers, as set in motion by the apostles, honored by disciples in all ages, and fully recognized as a sacred obligation for all Christians by the author of Hebrews who penned this formal commandment regarding church attendance.

Pliny, a secular writer about 112 A. D., made a report to the emperor Trajan in which he unconsciously bore witness to certain vital aspects of Christianity. Of special interest was the witness he bore to the tenacity maintained by the Christians in regard to their assemblies. They attended the regular worship services in spite of every hindrance.

As Pliny said, “On an appointed day, they had been accustomed to meet before daybreak.” He went ahead to relate that their services were nothing of a scandalous or improper kind, that they partook of a meal of the most harmless and ordinary variety, that each sang a hymn to Christ as God, and that they bound themselves with a promise not to commit fornications or theft or any other crime.

The establishment and beginning of the church on Pentecost occurred on just such a first day of the week when the disciples were gathered together. Such reference as, “Let every one of you lay by him in store on the first day of the week,” (1 Corinthians 16:2), and “When the disciples came together on the first day of the week to break bread” (Acts 20:7), and “If there come into your assemblies a man with a gold ring, etc.” (James 2:2-4) constitute the most positive and certain proof that regular assemblies were held by the church on the first day of the week. The assemblies were of a public nature, open to the man with the gold ring, no less than to the poor. The second of the passages cited shows that the assembly was built around the Lord’s Supper, the observance of which was the purpose of coming together.

Perhaps there is nothing so much needed in current America as a return to the old fashioned virtue of church attendance. Our beloved nation was founded by a generation of church-goers; and, although the Puritans and the settlers at Jamestown have been made to appear rather ridiculous in contemporary literature, being hailed as dull, hypocritical, and intolerant; it is nevertheless true that such a caricature is false. They were not dull or uninteresting.

Our greatest institutions are the fruits of their church-going; and when any generation shall forsake the house of prayer and worship, that generation is dangerously near to losing those institutions inherited through the piety of others.

The falsehood that men can worship God anywhere they are is refuted by the fact that they don’t! When men do not attend worship, they do not give, nor pray, nor sing God’s praise, nor observe the Lord’s Supper, nor study the Sacred

Scriptures, all of which things are related to the public worship and have practically no existence apart from it.

Let men heed the commandment in this verse that they should not forsake the assembly of the church. Reasons why men forsake the assembly are rationally explained, ardently by them that wish to defect, and established with all kinds of charges, excuses, allegations, and insinuations against the church; but the only true reason for disobeying this basic commandment is simply unbelief, or the carelessness and sin which lead to unbelief.

“But encouraging one another . . .” again brings into view the *esprit de corps* so vital to spiritual growth and attainment. The necessity for constant encouragement and exhortation of the believing community is emphasized.

“And all the more as you see the day drawing near . . .” has been variously interpreted as the Lord’s Day, or first day of the week, the day of death, the day of judgment, or the day of destruction of Jerusalem.

There are very definite and concise teachings in the Scriptures which represent the final judgment as an event far removed from that generation. Jesus plainly indicated that a very long period would intervene before His second coming (Matthew 24:48; 25:19); Paul warned that before the judgment, “the falling away must come first” (2 Thessalonians 2:3); and yet there was surely a conscious ambiguity in the words of the Holy Spirit in all references to the final judgment, the apparent reason for this being, according to Richard Trench, *Miracles*, p. 256: “It is a necessary element of the doctrine of the second coming of Christ, that it should be possible at any time, that no generation should consider it improbable in theirs.”

Thus, any allegation that the holy writers were mistaken or ignorant with regard to the coming of that final day is, as R. C. H. Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 355, wrote, “Groundless, as is every fear that the New Testament writers were mistaken as to the day of judgment. Jesus told the apostles that no man is to know even “times or periods” (Acts 1:7), to say nothing of the exact day; that He Himself (in His humiliation) did not know the day; but that we must ever see the signs of its

approach, ever ready for its arrival, in constant expectation of it. All the New Testament writers speak accordingly; we do the same today.”

The conclusion, therefore, seems safe that the “day approaching” of this verse refers to the fall of the Holy City when Christ would “take away the first” that He might establish the new covenant; and the Holy Spirit influenced the writer of Hebrews in the choice of words that certainly included the destruction of Jerusalem, no less than the greater final event is typified.

Verse 26

This is a return to the warning uttered in chapter 6 regarding the final and total apostasy of persons who were once true Christians, concerning whom it was affirmed that it “is impossible” to renew them. Here, the reason for that impossibility is stated in the fact that the rejection of Christ’s one sacrifice can only result in the sinner’s being left with none at all, “There remains no more sacrifice!”

It would be a mistake to construe every strong-hearted and presumptuous sin as “an eternal sin,” although the danger that might become so should never be overlooked. The impossibility of apostasy, euphemistically called the final perseverance of the saints, is not a teaching of the New Testament; and the acceptance of such a doctrine can quite easily lead to a presumptuous arrogance, that issues in eternal death.

Adam Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 757, wrote some words that are appropriate, “The case is that of a deliberate apostate—one who has utterly rejected Christ and His atonement, and renounced the whole gospel system. It has nothing to do with backsliders in our common use of that term. A man may be overtaken in a fault, or he may deliberately go into sin, and yet neither renounce the gospel, nor deny the Lord that bought him. His case is dreary and dangerous, but it is not hopeless; no case is hopeless except that of the deliberate apostate, who rejects the whole gospel system, after having been saved by grace, or convinced of the truth of the gospel. To him there remains no more sacrifice for sin; for there was but one, Jesus, and this he has utterly rejected.”

Verse 27

This verse sharply focuses on the fearful and inevitable results of rejecting the sacrifice for man's sins (available in the vicarious death of Jesus Christ), that result being the judgment with its eternal fires of punishment awaiting the wicked.

The word (devour) has the interesting connotation of "eating up" offenders! This is a subject men do not like to dwell upon; and some present-day Christians seem very sensitive to the plain teachings of the word of God on such a thing as "fire" for the wicked; but the burden of Scriptural emphasis on this subject is far too great to be ignored or cast aside. Fire destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24); Korah and his company were consumed by fire (Numbers 16:35); and it was by fire that God answered the prayers of Elijah (1 Kings 18:38). Strangely, God Himself is described a moment later in this epistle as a "consuming fire" (verse 27; Christ will appear the second time "in consuming fire" (2 Thessalonians 1:8) and Peter consigned the present world to destruction by fire, contrasting it sharply with the final destruction of the world by the flood in Noah's day (2 Peter 3:14-18). John the Baptist did not hesitate to speak of the chaff which was to be burned up "with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:10), and even our Savior made frequent mention of it (Matthew 25:41).

The utter horror of such a destiny seems to be in the mind of the author here who speaks of "fearful expectation." A guilty conscience to feel and a wrathful God to fear combine to remove every thought of tranquility from the mind of the wicked.

"The adversaries" mentioned here are a grim reminder of the struggles identified with man's probation. Paul knew the meaning of "many adversaries" (2 Corinthians 16:9); and every wayfarer on the road to eternity is often made aware of those elemental antagonisms that rise on every hand and from the most unexpected sources, to harass, to discourage, and to prevent if possible the attainment of eternal life.

Verse 28

There was the case of the man stoned for picking up sticks on the Sabbath (Numbers 15:36), to name only one; and the use of the present tense in “dies” indicates that the penalty was yet being invoked at the time Hebrews was written.

Annas the high priest was deposed by the Romans for putting a man to death as a lawbreaker; and it was precisely their readiness to execute such penalties that caused Rome to forbid their right to put men to death. It was that which forced them to seek the permission of the procurator to put Jesus to death. The words “without compassion” show the general concurrence of the Hebrew people in the enforcement of the law, their usual opinion being that the offender deserved no pity.

Verse 29

There are two directions one’s thoughts may take in reference to this verse. The extremely powerful language used to describe the apostate has led some to suppose that only the most shameful and incorrigibly wicked are included in the author’s thoughts. Thus W. H. Griffith Thomas *op. cit.*, p. 136, affirms that, “It is obvious that this is no case of ordinary backsliding, but, as in chapter 6, of willful and persistent apostasy.”

There may be another intention of these holy words, namely, to show what dreadful guilt attaches to such ordinary lapses as forsaking the assembly or neglect of the Lord’s Supper.

It may very likely be intended that persistent and habitual neglect of such sacred duties may be accurately described as trampling the Son of God under foot and insulting the Spirit of grace.

One must look to the sins of the people to whom this epistle was addressed in order to identify the condition described; and what were those sins? A neglect of Christian duty, lack of diligence in study, forsaking the assembly, and a tendency to revert to their old religion—those were the sins which were under consideration; and such were not the sins of reprobates, debauchers, or

scoundrels, but the sins of “nice people!”—nice people who did not realize that their indifference and alliance were not minor but major departures from the path of duty and that they were in deadly danger from such conduct.

If the attitude of millions today may be taken as example of the same sins they committed, it is probable that they did not realize that their wrongs were of any serious consequence. For us, as well as for them, excuses are plentiful; cares, riches, and pleasures require a dreadful preoccupation of most; and it becomes quite easy to view the kind of spiritual lapse in view here as trivial.

But may God help Christians to remember that as custodians of the Light of all Nations, their utmost endeavor is the least required of them, for their lives are forfeit to this task above all others that the Lamp of Truth be held aloft in the darkness of human sin and transgression.

Any carelessness or preventable inattention, any conscious neglect of Christian duty shall certainly bring upon the offender a mountainous load of blood-guiltiness. When people who are generally supposed to be Christians live lives that lead others to despise the truth, they stand in the same condemnation as the Pharisees who did not enter the kingdom themselves nor allow others to do so.

“Trampled underfoot . . .” here translates a Greek word used by Matthew for heartless and totally indifferent action. Lyle O. Bristol, Hebrews, a Commentary, p. 134, wrote, “The verb is used by Jesus of the useless salt cast out and trodden under foot (Matthew 5:13) and of the perils of being trampled down by swine (Matthew 7:6). Here it denotes that the sinner rejects the Son of God completely and brutally.”

It is easy to take the penalties of neglect, and other so-called milder sins, as stated in this verse, and from the practical result of such sins, impute to those that committed them “brutality,” “harshness,” and even “reprobate,” (rejected by God).

This actually avoids the point of the exhortation, namely, that neglecting the assembly, absence from the Lord’s Table, indifference and impiety—these things are said to make common the blood of Jesus, trample Christ under foot,

and insult the Holy Spirit. The human mind finds it hard to believe that respectable people will be lost.

“Regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant . . .” This refers to a lack of appreciation for the blood of Christ, making it “common.” How does one make the blood of Jesus uncommon? By his indifference to it, by responding to it not at all, or half-heartedly, by neglecting to enter by means of the access provided through it, or, in short, either by non-Christian or anti-Christian conduct.

“By which he was sanctified . . .” is further evidence that the people addressed in Hebrews, and with such a powerful exhortation, were true Christians as far as previous experience was concerned, and that they were not merely those “superficially” associated with Christianity. This poses so great a difficulty that translators and commentators alike often resort to radical devices in a vain attempt to remove it.

The difficulty, of course, is the sad, unwelcome fact, and one almost unbelievable, that even after one is a true and devoted Christian, enjoying all the privileges of salvation, even “sanctified” as in this verse, that even then such a person can defect from the Lord and lose his soul. All efforts to alter this fact, whether by tampering with the text of Scripture or by explanations that deny the text, should be rejected.

As an example of the latter, take Bristol’s words concerning the passage here. He said, “It has done despite unto the Spirit of grace”. The verb contains the thought of violent self-assertion and arrogance. Through His Spirit, God offers His love in action for man’s redemption. But the defiant sinner thinks that he does not need this help in his life. His rejection is harsh and brutal. It is in that last sentence of Bristol’s words that the common fallacy comes to light. What about the sinner who is not “harsh and brutal” but who rather reluctantly turns away from the fountain of grace, as did the rich young ruler (Mark 10)? How about him who is merely too busy with this life to concern himself with another? What about the man who simply never has time to think about it, after the first blush of his conversion is past? What of the soul which merely drifts away from it? It is the solemn conviction of this student that such

conduct on the part of men, however good they may be in the ordinary sense, and however justified by the customs of a permissive society—that such conduct is not merely deplorable but guilty.

The verse at hand calls such behavior by its proper labels; it is trampling underfoot the Son of God, making the blood of Jesus common, and insulting the Spirit of Grace.

Verses 30-31

These quotations are Deuteronomy 32:35-36. It is the apostle Paul quoting a well-known Scripture in his own words; and the proof of this is Romans 12:19 where exactly the same quotation in exactly the same words is found.

The fact of God's wrath is inherent in His holiness. These verses trumpet the fact that the God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament, and that He is angry with the wicked every day, that sin shall not stand in His presence, and that the utter and final destruction of everything evil is a part of God's eternal purpose.

“The Lord will judge His people . . .” is a pointed warning of judgment for the saints themselves, a fact also noted by Peter in 1 Peter 4:18.

“The living God . . .” is an expression used here and in three other passages of Hebrews 3:12, 9:14, and 12:22; and in this place seems to be given in answer to a possible question of why it is a fearful thing to fall into God's hands. It is because He is a living God!

Verse 32

This verse refers to the fidelity and endurance of the Hebrew Christians who passed through the tribulations that arose around the martyrdom of Stephen and the following persecutions.

Certainly, the words, “You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood, in your striving against sin.” (12:4) As used by the author, do not rule out Stephen's martyrdom as being the time of the sufferings mentioned here; because “you” could have reference to the generation receiving Hebrews, rather than to a congregation that had no history of persecutions. Hebrews was

addressed to the living and not to the dead; and whatever persecution was referred to, it was “a great conflict of suffering.”

Verse 33

The appeal in these words is to the truly heroic and faithful endurance of those Hebrew Christians who, at first, had stood against every persecution and insult, had endured every hardship, and had continued in spite of every shameful thing done to them, never deviating and never turning back.

The mention of gazing-stock brings to minds the words of R. Milligan, *op. cit.*, p. 288, in his quotation of Seneca, “In the morning men are exposed to lions and bears; at midday to their spectators.” “Reproaches” included scornful words of vilification, slurs, insults, lies, and curses of them that hated Christians. The particular thing the author stressed is that they had not merely endured such things but willingly identified themselves with any of their brethren thus treated, befriending them, accompanying them, and sharing their reproaches.

Verse 34

B. F. Westcott, *op. cit.*, p. 334, noted that, “This expression is found nowhere else in the New Testament except as a reference by Paul himself to his own imprisonment.”

The other-worldly emphasis in the thoughts of persecuted Christians shows that they had truly set their affections upon the things in heaven rather than upon the things of earth, “the better possession” being a reference to eternal rewards stored up for them that prevail through Christ. Jesus said, “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great.” (Matthew 5:12)

Verse 35

Yet another reference is here to that “confidence” so strongly advocated throughout this epistle. (3:6, 13) Christians are repeatedly commanded to maintain by the most vigorous affirmation of it at all times that boldness which they must exhibit under all circumstances, exhorting themselves by constant reference to it, continual glorying in it, and regularly persuading others, especially intimate associates in all walks of life.

Verse 36

This verse and through the end of this chapter conclude the fourth great exhortation of Hebrews. The exhortation is based on a number of considerations, among which are these:

- (1) We have a great high priest, who has opened the new and living way through the veil, that is to say, His flesh.
- (2) Willful sin shall certainly result in eternal destruction.
- (3) The Christians who received this epistle had already endured great hardships and suffering and should not throw all that away by becoming indifferent.
- (4) Patience should be exercised in order to win the crown of life.
- (5) Christ is faithful and will surely come to reward His followers as He promised.
- (6) We are not of them that draw back to perdition but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

“Patience” is stressed as the opposite of that impatience which began to develop in the hearts of many who expected that the Lord should have come already. Their expectations were founded on a misinterpretation of the Scriptures, but it was none the less a real disappointment.

Jesus said, “By your perseverance you will win your souls.” (Luke 21:19) One of the hardest things for the fleshly mind to realize is that the victory of faith is not achieved by one brilliant campaign but by a lifetime of patient and faithful service. It is not so much the glory of a promising start that the Lord desires as it is the glory of a faithful finish.

Verse 37

The importance of this verse is that whatever may seem to “delay” as viewed by men, it is not really so at all. God’s will moves inexorably to the fulfillment of its eternal purpose. Delay from the human viewpoint, is not delay at all from the viewpoint of God. His will is certain of accomplishment. The

blessed Savior will surely return. If it shall seem to men that Christ's return is delayed, let them remember that the final day, the consummation of things, the judgment and overthrow of the wicked—all these are every moment nearer than ever before.

Verses 38-39

Here is the answer to all problems, the solution of all difficulties, and the removal of all disappointments. This is a strong and candid declaration that Christians must “live by faith!” The matter of “when” Christ will come, as well as countless other questions can be safely left with the Lord. Enough for us to know is that, what God had promised is not about to fail.

“We are not of those who shrink back . . . “ is an affirmation of the writer's confidence that his readers will, after all, continue in the path of duty and ultimately prevail.

The dual mention of “faith” in these two last verses would appear to have thrust themselves upon the author's attention; and, immediately afterward, in what would be called by some a typical Pauline digression, there follows a moving, compressive discussion of faith, accomplished by a panoramic presentation of the great exemplars of faith.

DIVISION VI

(11:1-40)

CHAPTER 11

DISCUSSION OF FAITH, CITATIONS OF OLD TESTAMENT EXEMPLARS OF FAITH,

NOT MADE PERFECT APART FROM US

Verse 1

The preoccupation of scholars with their view of making this verse a logical definition of faith has resulted in the rendition before us, which is certainly no improvement, and would even seem to be capricious since the word translated

“assurance” is the same word translated “substance” in 1:3, and “confidence” in 3:14. R. Milligan, *New Testament Commentary*, Vol. IX, p. 298, is undoubtedly correct in the observation that this is not a formal definition of faith at all, but saying, “Rather, a plain statement with regard to its nature and province.”

James Macknight, *Apostolical Epistles*, p. 560, said, “The word “assurance” denotes a strict proof or demonstration; a proof which thoroughly convinces the understanding and determines the will.”

Adam Clarke, *Commentary*, Vol. VI, p. 762, followed the same line of thought, saying, “It is such a conviction as is produced in the mind by the demonstration (as a proposition in geometry) of a problem, after which demonstration no doubt can remain, because we see from it that the thing is; that it cannot but be; and that it cannot be otherwise than as it is, as it is proved to be.”

“Things hoped for” are all of those blessings, temporal and eternal, that make up the inheritance of the faithful. Resurrection from the dead and triumphal entry into the everlasting habitations are surely included.

“Things not seen . . .” include everything in the whole area of faith, the creation of the universe, the incarnation of Christ, the judgment of the world by the deluge, the second advent of Christ, the final judgment, the ultimate reception by every man of the destiny, good or bad, that shall be assigned to him by God’s enforcement of universal judgment, founded on justice and mercy. Unseen things are very strongly emphasized in this chapter, and repeated reference to them is made.

Verse 2

“For by it (faith) . . .” (means like the faith just mentioned), “The men of old gained approval.” It is what God writes of a man that alone is significant and consequential. Before proceeding with his discussion of those individuals, the writer goes back to the very beginning (Genesis 1:1) and makes the understanding of men regarding the creation also to be purely a matter of faith.

Verse 3

God made the world out of nothing, a fact perceived through faith and by no other means; nor is there any support for a contrary view in the technical meaning of the word “prepared.”

James Macknight, *op. cit.*, p. 560, wrote, “The word can also be used for the placing of the parts of any body or machine in their right order, as in Ephesians 4:12; but he also said that, “It means “to make” or “produce “ simply (Hebrews 10:5; Matthew 21:16) . . . In the passage under consideration this word is used to express not the orderly disposition of the parts of the universe, but their “production.” This verse coincides with Paul’s word expressed in Colossians 1:16.

Don Earl Boatman, *Helps from Hebrews* p. 343, paraphrasing verse 3 wrote, “By faith in the Divine revelations, we understand that the worlds were produced by the command of God from nothing; so that the things which are seen, the things which compose this visible world, were not made of things which then did exist, but without any pre-existent matter to form them of.” This paraphrase expresses the true meaning; for, after all, the Holy Scriptures everywhere set forth the doctrine that God made the worlds out of nothing.

Verse 4

ADAM, WHERE ARE YOU?

First of all, there is in this verse the glaring omission of the name of Adam, the mighty progenitor of the human race, neither he nor Eve, the mother of all living. The author of Hebrews is embarking on a kind of roll-call of the heroes of the past.

First there is mention of creation, following that a reference to Adam’s son, as in this verse, and later Sarah was mentioned along with Abraham; but there is absolutely no word regarding the first parents.

Adam Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 762, wrote some very perceptive words on this that are very moving, “It is a very remarkable that among the whole there is not one word concerning poor Adam and his wife, though both Abraham and Sarah

were mentioned. There was no good report concerning them; not a word of their repentance, faith, or holiness. Had there been anything praiseworthy in their life after the fall, it had surely come out here; the mention of their second son Abel would have suggested it.

God walked in the garden in the cool of the evening and called, “Adam, where are you?” (Genesis 3:9) And where is he? He is lost, disinherited, sentenced to eternal death, tortured by the knowledge of what he should be haunting his pitiful consciousness of what he is. It is not of Adam that we speak, but of his race. “Where are you?”

The words live forever, calling men to consider, to view their hopeless estate, and to move toward that reconciliation that is possible through Christ.

“By faith Abel offered to God” reveals the reason for his sacrifice being “more excellent” than that of Cain. It is a Biblical precept that “faith comes from hearing God’s word” (Romans 10:17), and in the light of that it may be definitely concluded that Abel acted in accordance with God’s command, whereas Cain did not.

What is written in the Bible by God is the witness of Abel’s righteousness; and the reason for this conclusion is the revelation that this witness is still going on, as implied by the words, “still speaks.” There is a Divine message in the blood of Abel. Did not God Himself speak of the voice of Abel saying, of the blood of Abel, that it cried out to Him “from the ground?” (Genesis 4:10) “What does the blood of Abel say?”

THE MESSAGE OF THE BLOOD OF ABEL

The blood of Abel says that God takes account of the injustices perpetrated against the innocent and that one day they will be avenged. The Lord said to Cain, “The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to Me from the ground.” (Genesis 4:10)

It was sin that cut down this young man in the morning of the world; and there is a score to be settled with sin. Abel, being dead, yet speaks. His blood

cries out from the ground, and not merely his, but the blood of all the innocents ever slain from the primeval violence, till the end of the ages.

God has appointed a day in which he will settle accounts, and nothing can show the necessity of such a thing anymore than the blood of Abel. No punishment of Cain could bring back Abel. He sank into the grave while Cain went on to build a city and continue his posterity in the earth.

The blood of Abel warns the murderer, and every wrong-doer, that the Creator will yet require that the accounts be settled. Every man ever born on earth shall confront that day and hour of judgment (2 Corinthians 5:10) when Abel, and all the righteous, shall receive their reward and when the unrighteous shall likewise receive theirs. Abel's blood shall never cease to cry out to God till that is accomplished. The blood of Abel says that the righteous are hated without cause. (1 John 3:11-13)

The blood of Abel says that it does make a difference how men worship God, that some things will pass in Divine worship and that others will not. This is the principle overlooked by Cain to his eternal discredit; and yet the great majority of mankind in the twentieth century after Christ seems not to know this.

In fact from the beginning of time, only two ways appear in which God can be worshipped, the true way, and man's way, the one good, the other evil; and man has before him only two choices, namely,

- (1) to worship as God has commanded, or
- (2) to worship in a manner that man supposes to be just as good! Cain should be sufficient warning that the second choice is folly.

The blood of Abel cries down many years of recorded history that it does make a difference how men worship God, whether they accept and practice the commandments of the Father, or decide to walk after their own traditions.

The blood of Abel says that the only true righteousness is in obeying the commandments of God. "And all Thy commandments are truth." (Psalm 119:151)

The term “Commandments” is extremely important, because thousands of thousands today are falling into the error of ancient Israel and are walking in their own ways instead of God’s. To all such persons, the Master addressed the question, “And why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46)

WALKING BY FAITH

Since faith comes by hearing God’s word (Romans 10:17), it follows that walking by faith means walking as directed by God’s word. Negatively, it means

- (1) that we should not walk by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7),
- (2) that we should not be guided by our own fallible, human feelings and emotions (Romans 8:4),
- (3) that we should not rely merely upon what seems right in our own eyes (Proverbs 14:12),
- (4) that we should not be guided by human traditions (Mark 7:9),
- (5) that we ought not to be influenced in our religious convictions and practices by the opinions of human majorities (Matthew 7:14),
- (6) that we must not allow the views and customs of our ancestors to be determinative (1 Peter 1:18), and
- (7) that we have no business consulting merely our own desires and pleasures where sacred things are involved, “For even Christ did not please Himself.” (Romans 15:3)

Verse 5

This verse casts a great deal of light on the Genesis account of the phenomenon of Enoch’s translation (taken-up). There, it is merely stated that God translated him, but here it is learned what translation meant, namely, that he was received into eternal fellowship with God without being obligated to pass through the experience of death.

The character of Enoch was summed up by Moses who said simply that, “Enoch walked with God.” This means that all his earthly sojourn was enacted

with constant respect to the Divine presence of God; and it was doubtless in consideration of his holy and blameless life (in a relative sense) that God saw fit to reward him in this near-unique manner.

Men may only conjecture as to why God elected to honor these men, and only these two (Elijah and Enoch), in that particular way; but it might have been to give all men hope of entering at last into fellowship with God in their bodies. Men's earthly bodies, purified and changed in the resurrection, shall be their eternal possession in the upper and better world.

James Macknight, *op. cit.*, p. 561, wrote, "Enoch's translation by faith is mentioned by the apostle, not to raise in believers an expectation of being translated into heaven, as he was, without dying, but to excite them to imitate his faith, in the assurance of being admitted into heaven in the body after the resurrection."

Will others be translated? Yes. 1 Corinthians 15:52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:17 teach that "all who are alive and remain" until the coming of the Lord shall be translated, changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. Of course, the promise is to the saved.

Verse 6

B. F. Westcott, *op. cit.*, p. 356, wrote that the faith described here has two elements,

- (1) The belief that God is, and
- (2) That He is morally active; in other words, it is a faith in the existence of God and in the moral government of God."

Verse 7

"By faith Noah . . ." The scriptures give a favorable account of his life, bearing witness that he was just, upright and that he found grace in the eyes of the Lord. God revealed to Noah His purpose in destroying mankind, except for a remnant, and gave detailed instructions for the building of the ark and the preservation of Noah and his family, along with specimens of lower orders of life in the animal kingdom.

“In reverence prepared an ark. . .” indicates that part of Noah’s motivation was fear.” All human motivation classifies, generally, under three headings of love, hope of reward, and fear; and significantly, all three are summoned in the Sacred Scriptures to urge and persuade men to obey the Lord. Precious and wonderful as motivation through love alone must be, man also needs his love reinforced and buttressed by the powerful collateral motives of hope and fear.

“Prepared an ark . . .” This shows that Noah was not saved by faith alone, but he worked out his own salvation with fear and trembling. (Philippians 2:12) Saved “by faith” is biblical and true; “saved by faith alone” is anti-biblical and untrue.

“Prepared an ark for the salvation of his household . . .” focuses attention on the family saved with Noah in the ark, including Shem, Ham and Japheth, and their respective wives, along with Noah and his wife, making eight souls in all.

“By which he condemned the world . . .” Noah condemned the world by preaching the truth to an unbelieving generation; for the truth will either save or condemn them that hear it, the same being true of the gospel itself. Paul called attention to this in 2 Corinthians 2:15-16.

Noah’s condemnation of the world was the result of his preaching a true message which they scornfully rejected. (2 Peter 2:5)

“He became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith . . .” means that even godly Noah was not sufficiently good to be saved by his own works or merits. His faithful obedience pleased God who made him an heir of the righteousness yet to be revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ who, in the fullness of time, would appear and indeed “fulfill all righteousness.” Noah was the very first man in the Bible to be designated “righteous;” and even then, it was not a righteousness from within but from above.

NOAH'S SALVATION A TYPE OF OURS

It is not proper to leave this study of the patriarch Noah without exploring a most remarkable reference to him in the New Testament. (1 Peter 3:20-21)

In this place the object is to discern the type and the antitype, Noah and his salvation being the type, and the redemption of Christians being the antitype.

- (1) Noah and his family were delivered from an old world to a new one; in the antitype, Christians are delivered out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of God's love. (Colossians 1:12).
- (2) In both cases, the deliverance must be seen as contingent upon the faith and obedience of them that were saved.
- (3) Noah's salvation was accomplished "through water," a reference to the fact that it was the water that bore up the ark and made it safe. The Christian's salvation is also "through water" in that the new birth includes baptism in water.
- (4) The same water that saved Noah and his household destroyed the disobedient world without the ark, thus fulfilling another biblical analogy. The same Red Sea which delivered the children of Israel overwhelmed the Egyptians with destruction. Moreover, the great commission (Mark 16:15-16) makes baptism to be the line of demarcation between the saved and the unsaved.
- (5) It was Noah's "water" experience that passed him from an old way of life to a new one; and, in the antitype, the Christian's "water" experience (baptism) moves him from the old ways into "newness" of life." (Romans 6:4).
- (6) After passing through the flood, Noah lived under a new covenant.
- (7) After the flood, Noah built the first recorded altar (Genesis 8:20) and worshiped God; this corresponds to the Christian's worshiping in a new way after their baptism.

- (8) Although delivered to a new world with all its privileges, Noah and his family were yet on probation, as certain of their sins quickly demonstrated; similarly, Christians, though redeemed through God's unspeakable gift, are nevertheless still in the days of their probation.

THE ARK OF SAFETY

The church is often called the "ark of safety," and a number of analogies support such a comparison.

- (1) Both were built according to specifications provided by God Himself.
- (2) God closed and opened the door of the ark; and God alone opens and closes the door of His church, there being only one in each case.
(Revelation 3:7)
- (3) Both clean and unclean were in the ark; and, alas, both wheat and tares grow in the same field. (Matthew 13:26)
- (4) Safety was in the ark alone; and so it is with the church.
- (5) The faithful within the ark were delivered from the ruin of the ancient world; the faithful within the church shall be delivered from the final destruction of the world.
- (6) The ark had one window, one source of light; the church has one source of spiritual illumination, the word of God only.
- (7) God providently guided the ark to its destination; and, in the great antitype, the church is providently guided in the same way, as promised by Christ who promised to be with His disciples "always, even unto the end of the world." (Matthew 28:18-20)

Verse 8

Herbert Lockyer, *All the Men of the Bible*, p. 28, wrote, "Abraham's place in the Bible portrait gallery is altogether unique and unapproachable. He stands out as a landmark in the spiritual history of the world. Chosen of God to become the father of a new spiritual race, the file leader of a mighty host, the revelation of God found in him one of its most important epochs."

Alone, of all the worthies who ever lived, Abraham is called the father of the faithful and even “the friend of God.” (Isaiah 41:8)

The Mohammedan, the Jew and the Christian alike think of themselves as the “seed of Abraham.” The Moslem world traces its connection with Abraham through Hagar and Keturah; the Jewish race came through Isaac, and Abraham’s wife Sarah; and the Christians are the seed of Abraham by faith in Christ who was Abraham’s promised “seed,” and through being baptized into Him. (Galatians 3:26-28)

“By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed.” It was not mere faith, but obedient faith, that commended its possessor to God and stands a stimulating example for men today.

“He went out, not knowing where he was going . . .” A factor often seen in the examples given here is the utter and unquestioning trust with which each received the word of God and acted upon it. Nothing in Noah’s experience made the thing God said he would do appear likely, or even possible; but he believed it and prepared an ark. So it was with Abraham who promptly obeyed God’s call without the slightest idea of where it would lead.

Verse 9

“An alien in the land of promise . . .” was the only status Abraham ever had in Canaan. Although God had indeed promised it to him, he never pretended to possess it. When beloved Sarah died, he insisted on weighing out 400 shekels of silver to Ephron the Hittite of the children of Heth for the purchase of the cave of Machpelah as a burial place, the only part of Canaan to which Abraham ever had an earthly deed or title. (Genesis 23:16)

God was his inheritance, his shield, his exceeding great reward; and, as related in the following verse, Abraham looked to the eternal city, the city that has the foundations, in that upper and better kingdom for the realization of all his hopes. He treated the world as a mere bridge, something to pass over, but not a place to dwell.

Certainly, Abraham, a tent-dweller, qualified as one who did not regard the earth as a permanent residence; and there is a genuine sense in which this earth is not the true home of the soul. The New Testament teaches that the Christian's citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20), that his treasure is above (Matthew 6:19), that his Lord is there (John 14:3), that his hope is in heaven (Hebrews 6:19), and that even his name is inscribed above. (Luke 10:20) But do men live as though they received this truth?

Verse 10

Regarding that city, James Macknight, *op. cit.*, p. 562, wrote, "Believers, after the judgment, shall be joined in one society or community with the angels. It is called a city which has firm foundations because it is a community which is never to be dissolved."

THE CITY FOURSQUARE

The city that comes down from God out of heaven, called the City Foursquare, is beautifully described in Revelation 21-22. The city is represented as walled, strong, impregnable, eternal, protected, guarded, and safe. Only happiness, serenity, and superlative joy are found therein.

God's presence is the light of it; His throne is the center of it; His worship is the occupation of it, and His people are the citizens of it. There is no death, no pain, no tears, no mourning, no suffering, and no sorrow. The Tree of Life grows there on either side of the river of life that flows out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. The tree bears its fruit twelve seasons in the year; and its leaves are for the healing of the nations. Each of the twelve gates is a single pearl; its twelve foundations, inscribed with the names of the twelve apostles, are such a precious stone. Its streets are pure gold. The kings and rulers of the earth bring their riches and glory into it; and its gates shall never close. (Revelation 22:5)

It should never be forgotten that the eternal dwelling place of the soul is real, genuine, and certain, for God is the maker of it. Yet, after all this is understood, it should be plain to all that any true comprehension of that city, must await man's final entry into it. (1 Corinthians 2:9)

Verse 11

When three angels appeared in human form to Abraham who received them and fed them, they promised that Sarah should bear a son; but Sarah who was listening laughed within herself, utterly rejecting the very possibility of such a thing at her age.

After being thus made aware of who promised them a son, Sarah believed it; hence the truth of these words, “By faith even Sarah, etc.”

Verse 12

“And him as good as dead” indicates that not merely Sarah, but Abraham also, was past the time of life when any children might have been expected of him; and although God, true to His promise, gave them strength for the birth of Isaac, it was plainly through the intervention of the Divine will.

Sarah, earnestly desiring a child, did not desire one by any of Abraham’s concubines, as they are viewed as Abraham’s servants, not hers; it was thus something different when she proposed that Abraham beget a child by her maid, Hagar, which would thus give her a child she could emotionally identify with, as being hers.

“As the stars of heaven in number and innumerable . . .” represents that, Abraham’s posterity should be innumerable. The holy writer’s making the sands of the seashore an example of how innumerable Abraham’s seed should be is easily understood; but it is amazing that he should also have pressed “the stars of heaven” into comparison, since for ages, men had believed the stars to be numerable and, in fact, composing only five or ten thousand, or some such number, in the ancient view.

Modern astronomy has indeed shown the number of stars to be beyond all human calculation, their numbers being reckoned in term of billions of billions.

Verse 13

“All these . . .” in this place, is not a reference to Abel, Enoch, and Noah, mentioned above, but to Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob and their children, this being a necessary inference from verse 15, and from the fact that the first three

mentioned did not receive the promise of entering Canaan, as did Abraham and his posterity.

“All these died in faith . . .” should never be separated from the essential lesson that it is dying in the faith that counts. “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord,” (Revelations 14:13) is another statement of the same principle. In the Master’s wonderful parable of the laborers in the vineyard, the payoff came in the twilight, “when even was come;” and every laborer in the vineyard of Jesus should stay with the task till the evening of life has approached, the twilight has descended, and the night has come, that is, until death. (Matthew 20:8)

“Without receiving the promises . . .” means “not receiving things promised,” In other words, they did not receive physical possession of the land of Canaan, nor the eternal city of which Canaan was the true, the valid reason, for this being clearly stated in verses 39-40 at the end of this chapter.

“Having welcomed them from a distance . . .” is said of the trust of those faithful ones in God’s ultimate fulfillment of His promise to them; and it was their glory, and the basis of their being such good examples for us, that they accepted the abeyance in which their inheritance was held, freely confessing that it was in another world that they expected its rich fulfillment.

“Having confessed that they were strangers and aliens on the earth . . .” These words refer to Abraham’s dwelling in tents, considering himself as one passing through the world, and not as making a permanent dwelling in it.

They accepted and made themselves content in their status as strangers, in an alien country. In this verse, the word “strangers” literally means “one who crosses the field,” and it came into wide usage during the times of the crusades, when all across Europe, it was nothing unusual for settled citizens to see a lonely traveler crossing a clearing or a field on the way to the Holy Land. The word came to have a very rich connotation of one who, leaving all other considerations behind, pressed onward toward some sacred goal.

Verse 14

This verse shows that the status of being a pilgrim, or sojourner, is not something that was imputed to Abraham by his admirers of a later age, but that he said these things concerning himself, as in Genesis 23:4. (Also see Genesis 47:9 and Psalm 39:12)

Needless to say, this is the only proper attitude of Christians, for Paul declared that “While we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 5:6; and Peter admonished Christians to “conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth.” (1 Peter 1:17)

Verse 15

The patriarchs were volunteers! They could have gone back home if they had so desired; and this reminds one of the challenge addressed by our Lord to the apostles when He bluntly asked them, “You do not want to go astray also, do you?” (John 6:67)

Every Christian needs to keep this fact in focus at all times, that no one has conscripted him to serve the Lord, and that if one prefers the world and what it may offer to the eternal things of God, he is surely free to take it, along with the consequences.

As for the world and its treasures, the Scriptures warn men over and over again of the ultimate incapacity of such material things to satisfy the seeking heart of man. It is ever true that, “Man shall not live by bread alone.” (Matthew 4:4)

In spiritual things, those who take the broad and easy road, instead of the way of the Cross, shall at last know that all that God said is true.

Verse 16

The implicit trust of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in all that God had promised, along with their accounting themselves strangers and pilgrims, was well-pleasing to God; and God was not ashamed of them.

“He has prepared a city for them . . .” is in the prophetic tense; that is, a future thing that God will do is spoken of as already done.

The city of the redeemed, mentioned by Jesus, and the one mentioned here as the inheritance of the patriarchs, is only one city, and not two, is evident from Luke 13: 28ff.

God's not being ashamed of His servants is, of course, contingent upon their not being ashamed of God, nor of Christ, nor of the gospel, nor of the church, nor of anything the Lord has taught in the Scriptures.

Verses 17-19

Without question, these verses refer to the most astounding demonstration of true faith in God to be found in the entire history of faith. Abraham's faith had already been cited by the author of Hebrews, but in these verses is an even more overwhelming example of it. Students of God's word in all ages have marveled at it; and in the words of Albert Barnes, Notes on the New Testament, Vol. Heb., p. 272, wrote, "It is the strongest illustration of faith undoubtedly, which has ever been evinced in our world."

"Abraham, when He was tested," is a reference to the remarkable test of his faith recorded in Genesis 22:1ff. That God never tempts any man in the sense of an inducement to evil is certain, "For God cannot be tempted by evil and He Himself does not tempt anyone." (James 1:13)

"Offered up Isaac . . ." Isaac's faith is singled out for more particular attention in verse 20; and yet there are a number of considerations which force it upon our attention here as a vital part of the trial of Abraham. When God commanded Abraham to offer up Isaac, he was a man of some 130 years of age and Isaac was in the prime of life.

The conclusion of Adam Clarke *op. cit.*, Vol 1, p. 138, was, "Isaac was likely about 33 years of age, it being implicit in Isaac's status as a type of Christ that he should have been, when offered, about the same age as our Lord when He was crucified.

Being in the prime and vigor of life, the heir apparent of all that Abraham had, and possessing without doubt the loyalty of every servant Abraham owned,

Isaac would most certainly have had the power to frustrate Abraham's purpose if he had chosen to do so.

ISAAC A TYPE OF CHRIST

The typical importance of Isaac is seen in the following:

- (1) He was supernaturally the son of Abraham; Christ's birth also was supernatural.
- (2) He was the "only begotten" of his father (in the sense noted above), and Christ was the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:18)
- (3) Both Isaac and Jesus consented to be sacrificed.
- (4) Both of them bore the wood, Isaac the firewood, Jesus the cross.
- (5) Both were sacrificed by their fathers, Isaac by Abraham, and Jesus by the heavenly Father.
- (6) The sacrifice of each of them occurred upon the very same location, one of the mountains of Moriah.
- (7) Both were in the prime vigor of life when offered, and very likely of the same age.
- (8) Isaac (in a figure) was dead three days and nights, this being the time-lapse between God's Command that He be offered and their arrival at Moriah, during which time, to all intents and purposes, Isaac was already dead; Christ also was dead and buried three days and nights.
- (9) Isaac was a model of love and affection for his wife, symbolizing the great love of Christ for the church.

"God is able to raise men, even from the dead . . ." Here is the secret that explains Abraham's willingness to offer up Isaac. God had promised through Isaac an innumerable posterity; and yet at a time when Isaac had no child, or even a wife, God commanded him to be sacrificed. Is such a contradiction? Not to Abraham, who only concluded that God intended to raise him from the dead! Two things of great importance come to light here, and both shall be noticed

more fully; these are the problem of apparent contradictions and the doctrine of the resurrection.

APPARENT CONTRADICTIONS

Abraham had no doubt whatever that the One who had given the great promises to be fulfilled through Isaac was at the time of his trial requiring him to offer Isaac, as a sacrifice. Since God's promise required the survival of Isaac in order to its fulfillment, and since Isaac was then to die, how could God's promise be true? Many writers have dwelt impressively upon the turmoil in Abraham's heart over such a dilemma; but the astonishing fact is that there seemed to be no such turmoil in Abraham. It simply was not there.

F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 311, wrote, "The impression that we get from the biblical narrative is that Abraham treated it as God's problem; it was for God, not for Abraham, to reconcile His promise and His command. So when the command was given, Abraham promptly set about obeying it; his own duty was clear, and God could safely be trusted to discharge His responsibility in the matter."

It was, to be sure, Abraham's faith in God's power of resurrection that enabled him to reconcile the promise and the command. This being evident from Genesis 22:5, where Abraham it is said to have promised his servants that both he and Isaac would return, after they worshiped God.

Let it be taken forever into account that God's word is never, in a true sense, contradictory, although instances of its seeming so are plentiful.

The greatness of Abraham's faith is that, regardless of how they seemed, he believed both; and the basis of Abraham's being able to do this was another thing God had revealed to him, the doctrine of the resurrection.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE RESURRECTION

Abraham believed that "God is able to raise up from the dead." Faith in the resurrection antedates even the time of Job and his faith in it (Job 19:25-27), for Abraham was before Job, as also is Genesis.

True, it is properly said that our Lord brought “life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10); but nevertheless, the Old Testament is not without its sure and certain witness of the resurrection. (Psalm 16:10)

This is nothing if not a prophecy of the resurrection. Also, Daniel said, “Many of them that sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.” (Daniel 12:2)

Our Lord, to be sure, went far beyond all of the marvelous intimations of immortality, resurrection, and eternal life found in the Old Testament, and flatly declared that all the dead, good and bad, small and great, shall be raised from the graves to confront God in the judgment. The entire teaching of Christ is oriented to the doctrine of resurrection.

REGARDING HUMAN SACRIFICE

The moral problem imposed by the fact of God’s commanding Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice is easily resolved in the light of a number of considerations. God never approved human sacrifice and summarily intervened and forbade Abraham to carry forward the execution of even God’s order requiring it.

Adam Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 136, wrote, “Abraham earnestly desired to be let into the mystery of redemption; and God, to instruct him in the infinite extent of Divine goodness to mankind, who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, let Abraham feel by experience what it was to lose a beloved son, the son born miraculously when Sarah was past child-bearing, as Jesus was miraculously born of a virgin.”

Surely, it must have been in that very experience that Abraham received a vision of the day of Christ, as John wrote, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it and was glad.” (John 8:56)

Human sacrifice is yet required of them that would truly serve God, not killing of victims, of course, but the relegation of every loved one to a secondary place in believing hearts, the first place reserved to Christ alone. Did not Jesus

say, “If any man comes unto Me, and hates not his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple?” (Luke14:26)

“God is able to raise men even from the dead; from which, he also received him back as a type . . .” is a reference to Abraham’s faith in God’s power to raise the dead.

Verse 20

Before us is another example of remarkable faith on Isaac’s part, in that, contrary to his own personal feelings, for he certainly preferred Esau, he gave the blessing to Jacob; and, even after learning that it had been by means of a shameful deception that he had been tricked into so doing, he confirmed the destiny regarding both his sons, thus revealing the uttermost faith in the inspired words of blessing each which he had spoken concerning them. In the article above under “Isaac a Type of Christ,” it was noted in such an analogy that Rebekah corresponds to the church. In such a comparison, there being a conflict in her very womb between Jacob and Esau, and her crying out, “Why then am I this way?” (Genesis 25:22), must stand as a type and prophecy of both bad and good in the visible body of the church, tares and wheat in the same field, and good fishes and bad fishes in the same net that represents the kingdom of God.

Verse 21

Jacob’s blessing the two sons of Joseph to the effect that they should become two tribes, with Ephraim being more powerful and greater than the tribe of Manesseh.

“And worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff . . .” The event connected with Jacob’s worshiping while leaning on the top of his staff (Genesis 47:29, 32) was a great demonstration of Jacob’s faith because it was there that he made Joseph swear that Jacob’s body should not be buried in Egypt but in the cave of Machpelah.

Students of the New Testament have long been perplexed by the rendition of this verse, but the explanation is simple. “Thomas Whitelaw, the Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 23, Heb., p. 515, wrote, “The Hebrew words for ‘staff’ and ‘bed’ differ only in punctuation.”

There is no mention of Jacob’s being ill, or being in bed. So it becomes obvious that the proper rendition is “leaning upon the top of his staff.” Therefore, it is certain that Jacob did not worship the top of his staff, but was leaning upon it.

Verse 22

This was in the same spirit of faith exhibited by Jacob when he gave a similar commandment concerning his remains, requiring that he be buried in Canaan, not in Egypt; Joseph’s bones were brought along. (Exodus 13:19)

Verse 23

The Egyptians deciding for policy’s sake to reduce the number of their slaves, the king decreed that all male children should be destroyed. The king’s decree had only one practical effect; it bounced Moses out of the Nile river, where his parents had at last placed him, into the lap of the princess who adopted him as her own son. This provided for Moses all of the education, training, and experience which would be so necessary in his great mission of deliverance for the Hebrews.

Verse 24

Like parents, like son! It is now shown that the faith of Amram and Jochebed was contained and carried forward in the life of Moses.

ROYAL REFUSALS

There are four royal persons in the Bible, each of whom made a notable refusal, these being Moses, David, Daniel, and Jesus. Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; David refused Saul’s armor (1 Samuel 17:39); Daniel refused the king’s meat (Daniel 1:8); and Jesus refused the popular efforts to make him an earthly king. (John 6:15)

Are these the four greatest refusals in History? They must be hailed as decisive victories of the human soul over temptation, making them stand forever as inspirational examples of the Christian who, in the probation of life, often finds the dreadful difficulty of saying, "No!" Each of the four refusals noted here was made by a young man in the vigor of life, and each involved a rejection of royalty. Moses rejected the royal adoption, David the royal armor, Daniel the royal table, and Jesus the royal crown.

Like David, Christians should reject the armor of this world, preferring, "the whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6:14); like Daniel, they should reject the world's dainty fare, and like Jesus, any crown the world might offer, preferring the "incorruptible crown" (1 Corinthians 9:25), the "crown of righteousness," (2 Timothy 4:8), the "crown of glory" (1 Peter 5:4), and the "crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

Verse 25

"With the people of God . . ." There is another secret of Moses' choice. God was not with the idolatrous Egyptians; and, although Moses might indeed have indulged himself with all the luxury, vice, and tinsel glory of such an association, he believed the promises of God with reference to the covenant with Abraham and that promised "seed" in whom all nations would be blessed. When the moment came, he made the right decision, viewing the pleasures of sin in their character as short-lived, and at last unsatisfying.

The greatness of such a decision, "by faith," is implicit in the fact that even today so few find the power to really make it. Too many are unaware that the triumph of the wicked is short (Job 20:5), and that the righteous shall be held in "everlasting" remembrance (Psalm 112:6).

Verse 26

"The reproach of Christ . . ." is variously understood by commentators, some believing that:

- (1) it is the same kind of reproach that Christ suffered;
- (2) it is the reproach suffered for one's faith in Christ; or

(3) it is the reproach that Christ had to bear in His own person and also in the person of every believer in Christ.

Both the ancients who believed God's promise, acting accordingly, and anticipating the coming of the Holy One; and also the present believers who likewise accept the promise of the Holy One, as already manifested in the flesh in the person of Christ—both and all of these, ancient and modern, or whenever, when they suffer as invariably happens when righteousness encounters the inherent antagonism of evil, all such indeed do suffer the reproach of Christ.

“For he was looking to the reward . . .” This is a clear reference to the eternal reward of faith, everlasting life; and, as this chapter develops, it is more and more apparent that it was the supernatural which Abraham and his posterity so devoutly believed in and which motivated them in all their astounding deeds of faith.

It was Moses' respect to the heavenly reward that sustained and motivated his magnanimous life of unselfish love and service to the Hebrew nation. That alone could have strengthened him to endure all the trials experienced in his deliverance of them from bondage.

Verse 27

Here is another instance of the recurring theme of this chapter, “not made out of things which are visible.”

Even the creation was made of things “not visible,” (11:3); Noah was warned of “things not yet seen,” (11:7); Abraham's inheritance was to receive an inheritance “not knowing where he was going,” (11:8); for he was looking for the unseen city.

The result of Moses' faith in the invisible God was that the king of Egypt no longer inspired him with fear, thus proving that the more men fear God the less they fear any man, however powerful.

Verse 28

THE PASSOVER

The ruler of Egypt had repeatedly resisted the will of God concerning the freedom of Israel; and finally God decided to slay the firstborn of man and beast. As the tragic night drew near when God would do so terrible a thing, the Lord devised a plan by which the Israelites were spared in this awful visitation through their observance of the Passover. On the tenth day of the month Nisan, three days before the catastrophe, each family selected a perfect lamb or kid from the flock and kept it up till the fourteenth day of the month when it was slain between the two evenings, that is, about 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon. Shortly after sunset, each family of Israel gathered indoors, sprinkled the blood of the lamb upon the posts of the door, and ate the Passover lamb, each man being fully clothed with shoes, and staff in hand. The lamb was roasted perfectly whole with fire, not a bone of it being broken. One went outdoors till morning.

It is thus certain that there was a great deliverance from a great catastrophe and that the deliverance of Israel was a Divine act of God Himself. There cannot possibly be any other adequate explanation of such a thing as the Jewish Passover. It is equally certain that the extraordinary, even unique, conditions surrounding the destructive wonder and miraculous deliverance of the Jews, were consciously designed by God Himself to point the minds of men to the true Passover, Christ.

The great significance of the Passover for Christians is that Christ is our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7-8), there being a number of typical circumstances linking the Passover Lamb slain by the Israelites on that dark night of the Exodus with that "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," even the Lord Jesus Christ.

Note the following:

- (1) the perfection of the lamb (1 Peter 1:19),
- (2) that no bone was broken Psalm 34:20),

- (3) that it was slain at 3:0 P.M., the hour Christ died,
- (4) that it was eaten with the unleavened bread (1 Corinthians 5:7-8) and
- (5) that there was no safety for them not under the protection of the blood.

Thus the Passover was an extension and refinement of a type already in existence, even from the gates of Paradise, in the use of the lamb as a sin offering. John the Baptist hailed Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29)

In the matter of the Passover, Moses’ faith in the invisible is again in evidence. No one saw the death angel that night of the Passover; and no one could possibly see, then or now, how the killing of a lamb and the sprinkling of its blood could have made any difference. There was no physical evidence of impending disaster, no precedent to lead men to expect it, and no possible way of explaining just how such a thing could come to pass; but by faith Moses knew in advance what others could know only when the cry of agony arose at midnight when the firstborn of man and beast throughout the land of Egypt expired as God said they would.

Verse 29

Though the faith of Moses appears in this, it is also the faith of the people that enabled them to go into the sea at God’s command and trust in a deliverance, which from the human point of view was impossible.

There are several things of great interest here.

- (1) The same sea which delivered Israel swallowed the Egyptians.
- (2) All Israel were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea (1 Corinthians 10:2).
- (3) The agency by which God wrought that wonder is revealed as a “strong east wind” (Exodus 14:21). The Red Sea deliverance stands as a type of Christian baptism, marking the boundary between the Egypt of sin and the wilderness of probation, realized in the church.

Verse 30

Again it was the faith of Israel in the supernatural and invisible that sustained them and produced the victory. Just think of the frustrations of marching around a walled city, the soldiery and priests both in the procession, and the priests carrying the ark of the Lord and blowing on all those ram's horn trumpets! But Jericho fell, just as God promised. (Joshua 6)

Verse 31

The moral reason for God's destruction of Jericho and the dispossession of the kingdoms of Canaan and their being supplanted by Israel is apparent in this verse. It was not from any perfection in Israel, it was because of the moral corruption, decadence, and sin out of control in those cities described here as "disobedient."

THE FAITH OF RAHAB

As a citizen of a doomed city, Rahab rose to unprecedented heights of faith believing in the God of Israel, and furnishing the most amazing demonstration of it. Her faith is the first mentioned after the author of Hebrews skipped the entire period of the wilderness wanderings, finding for the entire forty years no special example of Israel's faith to be cited.

- The faith of Rahab overcame practically everything. It was truly a triumph:
- (1) over sin, her occupation being one that would not predispose her to righteousness;
 - (2) over patriotism, her own city and race being rejected as a consequence of her decision;
 - (3) over fear of death, a death she must have viewed as inevitable, no matter what happened, from her own people;
 - (4) over unpopularity, the cause of Israel being anathema to all the people of Jericho;
 - (5) over meager information, because no prophet had appeared to teach her the truth; her information consisted only of rumor, and some of that was forty years old; yet she believed!

(6) over the religious convictions of her loved ones, or over their irreligion if that was their state; and

(7) over wild alarm.

Think of it. Her covenant required her to remain in house; and as the entire complex of city walls, came tumbling down, what must have been her basic urge to flee?

Certain characteristics of Rahab's faith are commendable.

(1) It was stable in spite of many temptations to waver.

(2) It was evangelistic, leading her to reach out for the salvation of others.

(3) It was redemptive and elevating, regarding her character, because she did not continue as a harlot, but as the wife of a prince.

(4) It was sacrificial, because, in the fall of Jericho, which she aided, there was the loss of everything that she had.

How strange that Jericho's harlot should be such a singular example of faith. Christ found the same incredible paradox in that "the publicans and harlots" were nearer to God's kingdom than the religious leaders. (Matthew 21:31)

Verses 32-33

A summary of the significant deeds of each of men mentioned will be given, with special regard to how each fits into the list of the exemplars of faith.

"Gideon," destroyed the altar of Baal, and with only a handful of men, delivered Israel from the ravages of the Midianites. (Judges 6 and 7)

"Barak," is a surprise in the list, as he refused to take a field of battle against Sisera unless the prophetess Deborah went with him. (Judges 5)

"Samson," was born in answer to prayer and the promise of an angel who appeared to his parents; he was a Nazarite from birth and was moved by the Spirit of the Lord, to whom he prayed, and by whose special powers he performed feats of superhuman strength throughout his tragic life.

“Jephthah,” is usually remembered for his rash vow but it is his faith that comes to the mind. Jephthah spoke one word that should be the motto of every believer on earth, “I have given my word to the Lord, and I cannot take it back.” (Judges 11:35)

“David,” the man after God’s own heart, is the only king of Israel in the list; and his deserving to be so stems not from his flagrant sin, but from his willingness, in humility and penitence, to confess it and seek God’s forgiveness.

“Samuel” is another of the noblemen of faith, born in response to prayer to the service of God from earliest childhood, and one who lived a remarkably blameless life, his only sin being parental indulgence of his godless sons. (1 Samuel 8:1-5)

“And the prophets” is an inclusion of all those inspired men through whom the word of the Lord was delivered to men for the purpose of shedding light on the moral and religious problems of their own times, as well as for the enlightenment of men regarding the coming of God’s Holy One, the Messiah.

“Conquered kingdoms . . .” is not to be understood as the work of each man mentioned in the previous verses, but as R. Milligan, *op. cit.*, p. 326, wrote, “This means only that they did these things as a class of men distinguished by their faith in God.”

"Gideon," for instance subdued the kingdom of the Midianites. Others were distinguished in other ways. The same applies to the whole catalogue of deeds listed here.

“Performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions—this refers to general achievements of the above mentioned group of men.

Verse 34

Although the great heroes who achieved the remarkable things mentioned in this list are left anonymous in this reference to them, a familiarity with the Old Testament reveals the identity of many of them. It was Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Daniel 1-2) who through faith quenched the power of fire.

Of those who escaped the edge of the sword must be reckoned Elijah (1 Kings 19:2ff), Elisha (2 Kings 6:31ff), and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 36:19, 26) who escaped, in turn, the swords of Jezebel, Jehoram, and Jehoiakim.

“From weakness were made strong . . .” brings to mind the progression of Gideon from being the least in his father’s house to becoming the deliverer of all Israel, and Jephthah’s promotion from the status of a despised son of a harlot to that of Israel’s judge, and many others.

“Became mighty in war . . .” is a tribute to practically all the great commanders of Israel’s armies who, with God’s power preserved and defended Israel throughout its long history. It was their faith in God that made the difference, enabling a hundred to chase ten thousand (Leviticus 26:8), thus turning to flight alien foes.

Verse 35

Old Testament instances of women receiving their dead in a resurrection are those of the widow Sarepta (1 Kings 17:17-24), whose son was raised by Elijah; and the Shunamite woman (2 Kings 4:18-37), whose son was raised by Elisha.

From the New Testament, of course, may be added the widow of Nain, whose son Jesus raised (Luke 7), and the sisters of Lazarus (John 11) whose brother Lazarus was raised by Jesus.

“Others were tortured, not accepting their release . . .” The word “torture” as used in this verse means a very particular kind of torture, described by R. Milligan, *Ibid.*, who wrote, “Tortured means properly to stretch and torture upon the tympanum; and instrument of torture in the shape of a large drum, or wheel, on which criminals were stretched in order to be beaten to death with sticks and rods.”

“That they might obtain a better resurrection.” These words raise the question, “better than what?” Some believe it means an eternal resurrection, rather than a resurrection to a mere continuation of earthly life. Others think it means a better resurrection in eternity than would have been theirs in case they had yielded to temptation in order to prolong their earthly lives. This view

would make the better resurrection to be the resurrection of the just, as contrasted with that of the unjust.

Verse 36-39

The whole list of atrocities given here can be only a partial account of all the inhumanities and indignities heaped upon God's children by unbelievers through the long centuries during which the light shone in the darkness and the darkness overcame it not. (John 1:5) Many whose names none shall ever know till the judgment have suffered these or similar trials.

There were terrible atrocities practiced against many faithful Jews during the long centuries between the Old Testament and the New Testament; and through the apochryphal writings, the Jews who received Hebrews doubtless had great familiarity with all of them.

Zechariah was stoned (2 Chronicles 24:20); Isaiah was sawn asunder, being placed between two boards to expedite it, according to the Talmud; Urijah was slain by the sword (Jeremiah 26:23); Elijah wandered about in a sheepskin, this fact coming to light from the translation of the word "mantle" (2 Kings 2:13), used to describe Elijah's clothing.

"Of whom the world was not worthy . . ." This seems to be a proverbial expression thrown in here, to denote the holiness of the heroes of faith as contrasted with the godlessness of the vast majority of their contemporaries; and it has its application to the faithful children of God in every generation.

"Wandering in deserts and mountains, caves, and holes in the ground," is a reference to the flight of the righteous from the normal habitations of men in order to avoid the moral pollution of the age in which they lived; and the fact that many indeed did live as indicated here is proved by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls within our own times, and in just such a place as these described here.

Verse 39-40

"Did not receive what was promised . . ." "Promise," in the singular, is a reference to the Great Promise of true and total redemption in the true and only

“seed” of Abraham, which is Christ. Faithful as the ancient heroes were, the fullness of time had to arrive before they could obtain that promise.

Then, what is that Great Promise which none of the ancients could receive, even though righteous; and which, apart from us, they shall never receive? And have either we or they received it now? The answer is both “Yes” and “No.” Certain aspects of the Great Promise have already been received by the faithful in Christ. The Christ has indeed appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself; and the great atonement has already been made. Every obedient believer has received the discharge of his sins through the blood of Christ, an earnest of the Holy Spirit in his heart, the communion of the fellowship of the saints in Christ, the blessed privileges of prayer and reliance upon the providence of God, and the sure and certain hope of the resurrection of our bodies from the grave, and of final entry into the home of the soul on high. But other aspects of the Great Promise shall await the consummation of all things.

Paul said, “In the future, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:8)

DIVISION VII

(12:1-13:25)

CHRIST’S EXPECTATION OF BETTER SERVICE FROM US

This final division of Hebrews is a sustained exhortation designed to establish wavering Christians more firmly in faith.

CHAPTER 12

VARIOUS EXHORTATIONS, THE RACE OF LIFE, THE CHASTENING OF BELIEVERS

FOR THEIR CORRECTION, WARNING FROM EXAMPLE OF ESAU,

MT. ZION CONTRASTED WITH SINAI

Verse 1

THE FIFTH EXHORTATION

Here begins the fifth and last of a series of grand exhortations in this epistle, all of them having a single purpose, which was to check the threatened defection of Christians back to Judaism. The author achieved a marvelous urgency in his words and argument. The great exhortations exhibit his purpose in writing; and of all the considerations called forth from their history and from their Scriptures had only one design, namely, to keep them in the holy faith. The success of the inspired author is evident in the fact that for nearly two thousand years it has been practically impossible for Christians to be proselyted to Judaism; and yet that was the big problem confronted by the author of Hebrews.

The analogy brought forward in this exhortation is between a footrace, such as those seen in the great Olympic Games and the Race of Life. This type of comparison was used a number of times by Paul; and the appearance of that apostle's favorite metaphor in this epistle surely suggests his authorship of it.

"So great a cloud of witnesses . . ." has primary application to the imposing list of Old Testament heroes just detailed in the preceding chapter. Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament, Vol, Hebrews*, p. 292, wrote, "It is a figurative representation, such as is common, and means that we ought to act as if they were in sight." R. C. H. Lenski, *The interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James*, p. 424, rejects the concept of the ancient worthies as spectators, saying, "The souls of the saints are at rest; they are no longer concerned about the trials that occur on earth."

Perhaps the Holy Spirit has purposely used a word here that is not intended to be fully comprehended until God shall make all plain. On the question of whether the righteous dead know exactly what Christians in this age are doing, this verse at best, could give only an intimation, and would have to be understood in the light of all else that the Scriptures say on this subject. The conversation of Christ with Moses and Elijah (Luke 9:30) is enlightening on this point. The view most nearly corresponding to that of this writer is the one

expressed by Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 391, who wrote, “At the same time it is impossible to exclude the thought of spectators in the amphitheater . . . These champions of old occupy the place of spectators, but they are more than spectators. They are spectators who interpret to us the meaning of our struggle, and who bear testimony to the certainty of our success if we strive lawfully. (2 Timothy 2:5)

“Lay aside every encumbrance . . .” is the order for all who would win in the Christian race. There are two classes of impediments to be avoided by the successful contender in the race of life, the first of these being “weights,” as mentioned here. This class of hindrance includes just about everything that can get in the way, or impede the Christian contender’s progress. Things not bad at all in themselves, but which, in the last analysis, hinder the work of the child of God must all be cast aside. Just as the runner in a race travels as lightly as possible, the Christian must avoid being weighted down with all kinds of worldly duties and commitments.

Far too many children of the King allow their time, talent, and money to be preempted by secondary things, things that must be recognized as “weights,” when understood in the light of their effect on dedication to Christ and His cause on earth.

“And the sin which so easily entangles us . . .” is the second class of hindrance the Christian contender must avoid. It refers to conduct inherently unrighteous, which is always a mortal enemy of faith.

If a paraphrase may be ventured, perhaps it means, “Lay aside the sin that is always so conveniently close to us.”

“Run with endurance the race that is set before us.” Robert L. Cargill, *op. cit.*, p.114, wrote, “The race that Christians must run is neither a saunter nor a stroll but a race, it is a difficult struggle.” He also said, “That the word for “race” is *agona* from which we get the word ‘agony.’ The race of life is an agonizing, grueling course and requires Christian endurance if one is to win.”

"Patience," then, is not merely sitting down and waiting till something happens. It means endurance and the power of perseverance, including the ability to finish what is begun.

THE CHRISTIAN RACE

The metaphor comparing the Christian life to a race has the following biblically supported analogies:

- (1) the contender must be legally enrolled in a contest in order to win; the Christian must contend lawfully by belonging to the church and accepting the full obligations of Christian service. (2 Timothy 2:5)
- (2) Some win and some do not. (1 Corinthians 9:24)
- (3) For the contender in an athletic contest, discipline is an absolute prerequisite of success; the Christian runner too, must lay aside every weight and the ever-convenient sin in order to win. (12:1)
- (4) A host of spectators watches a race in the coliseum; the spirits of the just behold the efforts of the Christian contender. (12:1)
- (5) Patience is required of both the athletic contestant and the Christian, endurance being necessary to win in both cases.
- (6) The winner is rewarded, the earthly contender with a perishable reward, the Christian with an eternal reward. (1 Corinthians 9:25)
- (7) The analogy becomes a contrast in the matter of how many may win.

In the earthly contest, only one receives the prize; but in the heavenly contest, every man may do so, since his victory does not depend upon any relationship between his achievement and the achievement of his fellow contestants. If he runs well, he may win; if all run well, all may win! It is so much better to run in such a contest where all may win.

Verse 2

Above the great cloud of witnesses is the great King Himself, Jesus our Lord; and, although some doubt may prevail concerning the ability of the other witnesses mentioned to behold our trials, there is no doubt about this in regard

to Christ. Indeed He does see, know, understand, and eternally intercedes on our behalf that we might indeed win the prize.

Jesus is on our side. He died for us, beholds our trials, is sympathetic with our condition; and His holy desire is for our glorious success. He suffered and was tempted in every way as are we; but He prevailed and passed through such things to joy unspeakable and full of glory; and looking unto Him, as here admonished, is the means of finding grace to follow His blessed example. “Looking unto Jesus” means focusing all of one’s spiritual vision upon the Lord. (Matthew 14:30)

“The author and perfecter of faith . . .” means “captain and perfecter.” Or in some versions it reads, “the author and finisher” of our faith. Christ did not merely preach faith as an obligation for others but was Himself a perfect demonstration of the life of faith while living in the limitations of the flesh, in spite of all the oppositions of the kingdom of evil. During His earthly ministry, Jesus exhibited true faith in all His actions without availing Himself of any of the personal advantages derived from His supernatural powers. Thus, He performed no miracle for His own benefit, feeding His faith with the same word of God available to all, and having recourse to prayer, just like all other men, and even choosing not to know certain things such as, for example, the day and hour of the end of the world. (Matthew 24:36) In the sense, then, of having lived it to the fullest, Jesus perfected our faith, and, in addition, made the atoning sacrifice and built the institution which He called, “My church,” as a sanctuary for all who believe in Him.

“Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame . . .” sets forth the means of Christ’s power to endure the cross. It was from the full knowledge of the joy that would flow out of His victory. For the sake of setting the shame and joy in the proper contrast, we shall note the shame first. It is nearly impossible for modern man, so far removed from the event, to appreciate the full and dreadful meaning of the cross. Paul struggled to shock men’s minds on this very point, reminding the Galatians that, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.” (Galatians 3:13; Deuteronomy 21:33)

The death of our Lord upon the cross cast a heavenly glow even upon the rude and terrible instrument itself, encircled it with the nimbus of light and salvation, and made it to glow in the conscience of all mankind for two millenniums. Therefore, today, when men think of the cross, they think of that which is sacred in the song and story of two thousand years, that which is fashioned in gold and worn as a ornament of the good and the beautiful, that which stands in the most honored place of the world's greatest cathedrals, and that which has become a symbol of love, mercy and truth.

It cannot be surprising that men fail to appreciate the shame of the cross, as intended by the author of Hebrews. In the days when our Lord confronted the cross and perished upon it, it symbolized the very opposite of all those glories associated with it ever since. It stood for degrading, humiliating, shameful, and horrible death, and for all the crimes, debaucheries, treacheries, and brutal sins of which the cross was the penalty. Christ deeply felt the ignomy and repugnance associated with the cross and found the ability to endure it only by contemplation of greater joy that loomed beyond it, a joy the Christ Himself would possess in superlative measure, and likewise a joy that would be made available to the millions of earth who would accept it.

“The joy set before Him . . .” was the joy of reversing, at last, the tragic defeat of humanity in the Paradise of Eden; the joy of knowing that Satan’s purpose of destroying man was foiled; the joy of “bringing many sons unto glory” (2:10); the joy of the saved entering heaven “with songs of everlasting joy upon their heads” (Isaiah 35:10); the joy of the herald angels’ “tidings of great joy to all people” (Luke 2:10) and such marvelous joy that, in truth, no vocabulary may describe it, no rhetoric suggest it, or finite mind fully conceive it.

Verse 3

What is said here of “Him who has endured such hostility by sinners” is no mere reminder of such things as the Lord experienced, but a warning for Christians to be on guard against the same kind of opposition. The victory which the Lord promised His followers over “your opponents” (Luke 21:15)

derives from the knowledge of the Scriptures (Titus 1:9) and was listed as one of the qualifications of an elder.

Hostility is a verbal attack upon a believer for the purpose of destroying his faith, and it means to oppose, contradict, deny, controvert, or dispute.” Those who resort to destroying are among the most despicable of mankind; for, having no faith of their own, they resort to all kinds of pettiness, quibbling, murmuring, complaining, and questioning regarding the faith of others. Stung by the serpent in their own consciences, deformed by sin, and unwilling to seek the healing of their own shame, they have recourse to a vile assault upon the faith of others, not hesitating to destroy, misrepresent, pervert, or deny the most sacred truth in efforts to gain their unworthy objective.

The classical example of hostility was the Pharisees, especially as presented in the gospel of Matthew. They maliciously contradicted Jesus; and the record of our Lord’s patient endurance of their slanderous and shameful opposition is a source of encouragement for those of any age who must deal with the cunning deceit of the hostility, whose strategy, in the final analysis, boils down to this, that they will simply wear the believer out, if possible, causing him at last, to faint and fall away. The apostles warned the Christian against fainting.

ON FAINTING

Paul said, “And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary . . .” (Galatians 6:9) The Christian who faints becomes a spectacular failure, sometimes throwing a whole church into consternation, this being true both physically and spirituality.

One moment a man is part of the community of faith, making a contribution to the services and to the forward progress of the church; but then he faints; and suddenly he is a help no more, but it takes the time and attention of several others to minister to him!

What are the causes of fainting?

- (1) The arrogance of wicked men was a hindrance that brought the Psalmist near to fainting (Psalm 73:1-3).

- (2) Hunger and thirst, physically, can cause fainting; and the same is true spiritually. (Psalm 107:5) People long separated from Bible study, prayer, and preaching tend to faint.
- (3) Adversity can cause one to faint. (Proverbs 24:10)
- (4) Sin causes fainting. (Lamentations 1:22)
- (5) Fear sometimes results in fainting (Luke 21:26), especially fear of men and of what they may do.
- (6) The chastening of the Lord can be an occasion of fainting, as the author of Hebrews pointed out a moment later. (12:5)
- (7) In the physical world, some dreadful disease, such as cancer, can cause men to faint; and this has its counterpart spiritually; and, in a world where there are all kinds of pernicious doctrines of men denying every truth taught in God's word, once such evil teaching enters the heart, it can cause fainting and death.

Verse 4

The sufferings of Christ, even unto death, are here contrasted with the sufferings of the Hebrews; and the interjection of the word "yet" appears to be the bluntest kind of warning that such a dreadful experience may indeed be waiting for them, just ahead.

Sin is personified in this verse, being represented as the antagonist of Christians; and so it is. Some of the struggles of faith are against men, but the great struggle is against sin.

Verses 5-6

The exhortation, in this reference, takes a new turn. He had just been speaking of the fact that they had not been required to seal their faith with their blood; but now he stresses that even the hardships and sufferings which they did experience, far from being anything unusual, were exactly what they should have expected; and he charges them with having forgotten that the sufferings of Christians are grounded in the benevolent purpose of God who imposes upon His children the kind of chastening that will strengthen and correct them. The

doctrine of the chastening of God is neglected today; and it is likely that some have scarcely heard of it; but, of course, it is a valid teaching of the scriptures, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament; and the knowledge of it in Christian hearts can be the source of glorious light on many a dark day.

THE CHASTENING OF GOD

The nature of chastisement is explicit in the diversity of troubles and sorrows that are imposed by the Lord upon His children, usually in the sense that He allows such things to befall them, with the holy and benevolent intention of improving the quality of their spiritual lives. An Old Testament example is Job who suffered the loss of wealth, loved ones, reputation, health, and honor—all upon the specific permission of God.

There is an eternal purpose of God toward His children; and that purpose is personal and corrective—such as the meaning of chastisement. The full nature of it is revealed in that it wears many faces, appearing and reappearing in an infinite pattern of sorrows and hardships. It is the experience of all of God’s children, there being no exceptions whatever, and the absence of it denoting no favoritism of God’s part, but the illegitimacy of the one apparently favored. It is a severe experience, as revealed by such a word as “scourges,” applied to it here and is not to be understood as any mock trial or superficial difficulty; but the child of God is confronted with actual tribulations designed to test the hearts of all them that pass through them.

The purpose of chastisement, as revealed in the following verses, is totally benevolent and springs from the infinite love of God for His weak and sinful human children.

Three designs are involved:

- (1) that of correcting our faults,
- (2) strengthening our faith, and
- (3) promoting our eternal welfare. It is not God’s will that His children should have everything they desire in this life. Riches and luxuries may cause pride to flourish in the heart; success in life’s various projects may

cause men to trust in themselves; and even true righteousness may lead to despising others; but against all such eventualities, the chastening rod of the Lord is laid upon the believer.

The response of Christians to chastisements is fourfold.

- (1) The child of God must not despise it. (Verse 5)
- (2) He must not faint under the impact of it. An example of how not to respond to chastening is that of Peter, when Jesus permitted Satan to “sift” him, that being only another name for chastening. (Luke 22:31) Peter’s response to it at first was to faint, but he quickly recovered.
- (3) He must submit to it, verse 9, saying at all times and under all circumstances, “O Lord, Thy will, not mine, be done.” He must not murmur nor complain.
- (4) He must be exercised thereby (verse 11), meaning that he shall cooperate with the divine purpose and strive for the deepening and strengthening of his faith under the chastening circumstances, giving God the glory, and making sure that he appropriates the profit the Lord intended him to have as a result of it.

Verse 7

The chastening of sons by their fathers has gone out of style in the current generations; and, had these lines been addressed to the present age, they might well have been reversed.

What son is it whom his father does chasten?” Our age is the loser, however, in the abandonment of a principle old as humanity and which carries the sanction of Divine approval.

Certainly, God does not intend, in a spiritual sense, that His children shall approach the ultimate test without the advantage of the corrective blessing of heavenly discipline.

Verse 8

God does not overlook any of His children in meting out the needed chastening; and that, should there appear to be any omissions, it is not a mark of Divine favor but of total rejection and alienation from God.

Verse 9

In this verse, the contrast is between the fathers of our bodies and the Father of our spirits; and as J. Barmby, *The Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 21, Hebrews, p. 366, wrote, "If a dutiful child submits patiently to the chastisements of his earthly parents, although he has derived only his body from them, how much more submissively should we bear the Divine corrections, seeing they proceed from Him from whom alone we have received our spiritual and immortal nature.

Verse 10

The punishment imposed by earthly parents is, at best, subject to error and to its admixture with caprice, anger, and other elements of parental shortcoming; but the chastening of God is never unreasonable, never more than the child can bear, (1 Corinthians 10:13), and is never imposed from any unworthy motive on the part of God. It is solely for the profit and ultimate holiness of the recipient.

Verse 11

Several things appear here. The chastening of God is not expected to be a pleasant or delightful experience, but "grievous," its purpose being to "exercise" the believer by forcing him to adapt to straitened, hazardous, painful, sorrowful, or discouraging circumstances; and its purpose being the ennoblement of spiritual life, the strengthening of character, and the enhancing of the prospect of eternal life. The most wonderful people on earth are those who have passed through the chastening experiences of life, whose faith, love, understanding and sympathy are grounded in the true love of God and man; and whose lives, as a result, have been expanded and beautified.

Verses 12-13

The image of the great Olympian contest is the vision in the author's mind; thus, the limp, relaxed hands and the palsied knees bring to mind a boxer who is "out on his feet," or a runner who is about to falter in the race. (Isaiah 35:3)

"Make straight paths for your feet . . ." is a reference to encouragement of the weak and faltering by smoothing the way before them. It is the stronger members of the believing community who are able to do this, or at least take the lead in it. In view of the difficulties and temptations through which all must pass, every Christian should be concerned with removing obstacles, in every way possible, from the course of his fellow believers. Perhaps, if their paths are made "straight" even the lame, the feeble, and the injured may yet press on to victory. The tenderness of these lines is moving.

The exhortation thus far has dealt with the metaphor of the great athletic contest in such a place as the ancient Coliseum. In the next verse, the author leaves the athletic metaphor and states the same urgent exhortations in more classical terms.

Before leaving the teaching here, as it concerns chastening, it should be remembered that here is an explanation of many of the tribulations that come to God's faithful children. Paul said, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22)

Also, our Lord did not say, "Blessed are you WHEN men shall revile you, but "Blessed are you WHEN men shall reproach you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake." (Matthew 5:11)

Verse 14

"Pursue" carries the idea of diligence and urgency, "peace" being personified here and designated as the quarry which men are to pursue.

"Peace with all men . . ." is the objective of Christians at all times and places. Jesus gave His blessing to the peacemakers, (Matthew 5:9), and Paul commanded believers to be at peace with all men, "if it be possible." (Romans 12:18. "Sanctification" is a reference to practical holiness as manifested by the

pure and virtuous lives of God's children, being that state of life at the opposite pole from the sins enumerated in the next verse. It does not refer to any so-called second blessing, or special endowment of the child of God, making him invulnerable to temptation, or giving him any advantage not enjoyed by all Christians.

“Without which no man will see the Lord . . .” These words show the vital necessity of the peaceful and holy lives of Christians. The holy life is not an elective or optional matter for Christians, but is demanded and required of all who hope to enter heaven. Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8); none others need apply.

Verse 15

This verse emphasizes that God's grace which has appeared to all men (Titus 2:12) and brought salvation to the world, may yet be ineffective in some because of their failure to abide by the conditions upon which salvation is offered. It should be noted that it was not merely the faith of those which the author questioned, but their conduct.

“Root of bitterness” is reference to an evil man, as James Macknight, *op. cit.*, p. 570, wrote, “A root of bitterness is a person, utterly corrupted, and who by his errors and vices corrupts others.” Thus, the bitter root of this passage is the opposite of Christ. The fitness of the application of this metaphor is seen in the comparisons below.

THE ROOT AND THE STAR

The contrast between a root and a star is little short of infinite; and only an inspired author could ever have dared to combine the two metaphors and refer both of them to Christ in a single verse of Scripture. (Revelation 22:16)

- (1) There is the contrast between what is near and what is far.
- (2) There is the contrast between what is invisible and what is visible.
- (3) There is the contrast between the earthly and the heavenly.

- (4) There is the contrast between the local and the universal. A root is a local thing, while a star transverses the galaxy.
- (5) There is the contrast between the slow and the swift. A root does not even appear to move; a star travels many thousands of miles per second!
- (6) There is a contrast between the small and the great.
- (7) There is the contrast between the low and the high. Any student will quickly see how Christ, in one sense or another is all of these things.

Now the root of bitterness, taking the first of each pair of contrasts above, is a small, local, earthly, invisible, low character, working slowly and very near believers; and the aptness of such a person's being called a root of bitterness is seen in the astounding results of evil that can be produced by such a person, through whom the many may be defiled. One little root is capable of producing a mighty tree.

Verse 16

On the question of whether or not Esau was a fornicator, it may be observed that the Old Testament does not so designate him, nor is the deduction that he was, mandatory from the teaching of this verse. The answer turns upon the intent of the modifying phrase, "as Esau." Does it apply to "fornicator" as well as to "profane person?" Relying solely upon the Genesis account of Esau and the ordinary implications of the word "profane," it would appear to be a safe speculation that Esau was both profane and an adulterer, each sin being inherent in the other.

FORNICATION

The command, "Thou shall not commit adultery, as it stands in the Ten Commandments, is likewise binding upon Christians, with the added condition that the thoughts and attitudes antecedent to that sin are also forbidden. Even if such a sin should be seen as no sin against either of the partners to it, there is a third partner involved in all human actions, namely God Himself; and God has forbidden it. Joseph while a slave in the hose of Potiphar, refused to commit adultery with his master's wife, not on the grounds that it would have been a sin

against a woman like her but as he said, “How can I sin against God and do this wickedness?” (Genesis 39:9)

The sin of fornication, or adultery (and for all practical purposes, the sins are one), is destructive and antagonistic.

It is against the following:

- (1) primarily against God, as noted above,
- (2) against one’s body (1 Corinthians 6:18) this being true no matter how “body” is understood, whether the physical body, the body of the family, the social body, or any corporate body, many a corporation having been wrecked by adultery),
- (3) the church, as stated in the text,
- (4) marriage, that institution being able to survive any assault except this (Matthew 19:6), (5) the life of the nation, and
- (6) against one’s very soul, (Proverbs 6:32).

“No immoral or godless person . . .” is the opposite of a holy person. Our word “immoral” still carries the inherent meaning of unfitness to enter the temple.

“Esau, who sold his own birthright . . .” This remarkable incident (Genesis 25:29ff), involving the transfer of the birthright for the smallest of considerations, only a pot of lentils, prompts a look at just what the birthright entailed.

It was the most extensive right that could change hands on the basis of heredity and included:

- (1) the right of primogeniture, that is, the right of the first born to receive a double portion of his father’s possessions. Under it, Esau would have been the head of Isaac’s house, and in a sense the ruler of his brethren.
- (2) The right to convey the blessing to his own posterity.
- (3) The right of the priesthood, making its possessor the patriarchal religious leader of his people,

- (4) The right of custodianship of the sacred promises regarding the Messiah and the promised “seed” of Abraham. It seems nearly unbelievable that any man with any regard at all for sacred and holy things should have despised them all and bartered them away for a bowl of beans.

But the lesson is very pointed for the readers of Hebrews. They too were on the point of giving up something even more valuable than the bartered inheritance of Esau. In their threatened return to Judaism, they would have been giving up all the realities of which Esau’s forfeiture had been only typical. The irreversible nature of such a defection would have sprung not from the very nature of men themselves. In the sense of men’s moral defections, there are some thresholds which, once crossed, admit of no returning.

Verse 17

Esau had sold his birthright, and the bargain stood. He got the pot of lentils! His later grief and tears over his wretched lapse appear very pitiful, even though thousands of years have passed since that tragic event occurred. It would be a mistake to question or blame the judgment of Isaac in withholding from Esau the birthright he had consented to sell for a trifle.

There is every reason to believe that Isaac loved Esau more than Jacob, and that only considerations of the greatest moment could have compelled him, at last, to permit the blessing to rest upon Jacob, who, as far as Jacob’s intention was concerned, had procured it through fraud. But long before the “afterward” spoken of in this verse, it became apparent to Isaac that something had gone wrong in Esau, the profane; and Isaac’s wisdom taught him that Esau was disqualified and incapable of so sacred a trust. Esau had become such a man as could not be the head of the tribes of Israel, nor stand in the forefront of the people as a priest of God.

It should be noted that Jacob’s procuring the blessing through means of deception, even though he bought it, was also reprehensible; and the judgment of God overtook him for that, and he received retribution in kind for what he had done.

Jacob deceived and lied to his father, but he too was deceived and lied to by his sons in the matter of the sale of Joseph; and there is every reason to believe that Jacob carried the memory of that shameful hour of his deception of Isaac, like a burning coal in his bosom, throughout all the 147 years of his life. With all his sins, however, Jacob did possess the one redeeming characteristic of regard for sacred things and faith in the promise of God, which enabled him to become a true prince of God, that being the meaning of the name "Israel," given to Jacob by an angel of the Highest. (Genesis 32:28)

The remaining 12 verses (18-29) present a contrast between the law of the gospel, particularly between the awesome events at Sinai, where the law was given, and the even more awesome spectacle of the enthronement of Christ on the right hand of God in heaven. The Hebrew law-giving was a frightening and awe-inspiring experience for Israel and Moses; but, when properly understood, the Christian's law-giving is even more impressive. First, the author recalls from the book of Exodus some of the circumstances of that former event.

Verse 18

The mountain that may be touched, of course, was Sinai; and the blackness, gloom, and whirlwind refer to dramatic out flashings of God's power in the violent demonstrations of nature accompanying the event. (Exodus 19:18)

Verse 19

The sound of God's voice was so terrible that the people did not wish to hear it again and so entreated God to speak only to Moses who would convey to them the message of the Father. (Exodus 20:18ff)

"The blast of the trumpet . . ." is of special interest, since a trumpet sound is associated with the final judgment and the resurrection of the dead. (1 Corinthians 15:52). The seven angels with seven trumpets are a feature of John's vision of the last things. (Revelation 8:2)

Verse 20

"They could not bear the command . . ." The thing that God has commanded Israel, sited here, was that they should kill any beast that might

inadvertently touch the mountain, not kill it in the ordinary way, but by stoning or casting it through with a dart. (Exodus 19:12f) The significance of this is that the mountain was held so sacred that any beast touching it thereby became holy itself as when Korah's censers were offered, (Numbers 16:28), so holy that Israel could not even touch the beast that had touched the mountain; hence, they were not to kill the beast by touching it in any way, but by stoning or casting through with a dart.

Verse 22

The author turns to a presentation of the glories of the central authority in Christianity, a contrast being at once evident in the two mountains. Sinai was an alien mountain in a foreign land; and Zion was the poetic name for Jerusalem, the name of the eminence upon which the city was built, and which enshrined the deepest emotional affection of the whole Hebrew nation. The prophets had extolled the word of the Lord as going forth from Mount Zion. (Isaiah 2:3) It was toward Mount Zion that the captive Daniel had prayed in Babylon; and even Jesus Christ referred to it as "the city of the great King." (Matthew 5:35)

Verse 23

The general assembly and church of the firstborn is a designation for the whole community of the redeemed in heaven and on earth; and because of the classes of beings, other than men, mentioned here as being citizens of that place, "the general assembly" possibly has a much wider inclusiveness than usually thought of in this matter. B. F. Westcott, *op. cit.*, p. 413, wrote, "The description of the scene of the Divine kingdom to which Christians are come is followed by a description of representative persons who are included in it, and with whom believers are brought into fellowship. These are angels and men, no longer separated, as at Sinai, by signs of great terror, but united in one vast assembly."

This view would make the "general assembly" and the "church of the firstborn" to be actually two entities, the latter a component of the first, yet

distinct from it. “Who are enrolled in heaven” is a reference to the Book of Life and to the names of the redeemed of all ages written therein.

THE BOOK OF LIFE

One of the consolations of Scripture is in that the names of Christians are indeed written there in the Book of Life, there where God has inscribed it, and where none but He may blot it out. Jesus confirmed that our names “are written in heaven.” (Luke 10:20) Paul actually gave the names of some, that is, Clement and certain faithful women, whose names are written there, (Philippians 4:3); Moses revealed that his own name is so written (Exodus 32:32); and the prophet Daniel mentioned them that shall be found “written in the book.” (Daniel 12:1)

The apostle John spoke of that book as containing the names “written from the foundation of the world in the Book of Life of the Lamb who has been slain.” (Revelation 13:8)

A study of the various references to the book of life reveals the following:

- (1) Christians’ names are written in it;
- (2) the ancient faithful, such as Moses, are therein;
- (3) those whose names are not inscribed in it shall not be saved (Revelation 13:8; 20:15; 21:27);
- (4) even though inscribed there, a name can be blotted out, and for sufficient cause will be blotted out. (Revelation 3:5)

Regarding the subject of when the names of the saved are inscribed in the Book of Life, it would appear to be at the time of their entry into the kingdom of God, that is, when they confess Christ and are baptized into Him.

Christ had previously promised His disciples that whosoever should confess Him before men would also be confessed by Christ before God and His holy angels (Matthew 10:32); and the first ever to make such a formal confession was the apostle Peter saying, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16; Christ then and there confessed Peter, saying, “Blessed art thou, Simon, son of John.” (Matthew 16:17)

The parallel between the two confessions is significant and supports the conclusion that Jesus was honoring the promise to confess the souls who confessed Him. If this is true, then He still does so; and those who confess Christ and are baptized into Him are confessed in heaven at the same time; and the conjecture may be allowed that such is the occasion of names being inscribed in the Book of Life.

“To God the Judge of all . . .” reveals that in some special sense God is in the heavenly city, although God is everywhere and is “all and in all;” nevertheless, there is a sure sense in which God shall not merely be in that eternal city, but the center of it, with His throne in the midst of it and His face as the light of it.

“And to the spirits of righteous men made perfect . . .” refers to raised and glorified men who have passed through death after the tribulations of life, or who have been changed in a moment at the sounding of the resurrection trumpet. (1 Corinthians 15:51f) The number includes not Christians alone, but all of them who in prior dispensations did the will of God.

Verse 24

The appearance of Christ in the heavenly city, as stated in these verses, harmonizes with the entire New Testament, especially Revelation, where Christ is invariably spoken of as closely associated with the Father in His throne, the throne of God being actually called, “the throne of God and of the Lamb.” (Revelation 22:1)

The existence of such a thing as this is most instructive.

- (1) the universe is a controlled entity; it is under law and does not operate aimlessly, nor is it standing alone and isolated to run down of its own accord; there is a throne, with all that implies;
- (2) the government of the universe is personal, not a robot, but a “Thou” being the center of it;
- (3) the universe is undergirded with justice, this being explicit in the character of Him on the throne; and

(4) mercy is the great feature of universal government as applied to humanity, this being assured by the fact of the Lamb also being on the throne.

For observations on “the voice of the blood of Abel” see under 11:4.

Verse 25

This is a recapitulation of the argument in 10:28-30, to the effect that, if God punished the disobedient under the old dispensation, the punishment of the disobedient under the new dispensation is even more certain, this being due to the greater dignity of the mediator, Christ being superior to Moses, etc. In this verse, the emphasis is upon the contrasting citadels of the authority of Moses and that of Christ, Moses speaking from earth, Christ from heaven.

Verse 26

The author here refers to the earthquake at Sinai, and then to Haggai’s prophecy of another such disturbance (Haggai 2:6), making the latter a prophecy of the end of the world. Such faith and perception on the part of the author of this epistle is a moving demonstration of the trust that may be reposed in every word that God has spoken. There are no unimportant Scriptures.

That a great earthquake will indeed occur at the end of the present world order is assured in Revelation, where it is related that the heavens and the earth shall flee away from the great white throne and the judgment of God.
(Revelation 20:11)

Verse 27

The eternity of matter is a theory rejected by the inspired author of Hebrews. The great earthquake that shall mark the dissolution of the earth and all that is in it is not merely a possibility, but a certainty; and the basis for that certainly is that it has “been made!” It is not eternal, but a thing, created by Almighty God to serve a purpose, and certain to be removed when that purpose is fulfilled. Thus, as he nears the end of his epistle, the author again emphasizes the great truth he stated in the first chapter (1:10-12), namely, that the world will wear out and be removed, like garment, rolled up; it “shall perish.”

The doctrine of the world's end and the cataclysmic developments associated with it are so forcibly brought to view here, that a little further study of such a theme is due.

THE END OF THE WORLD

The end of the world and its replacement with new heavens and a new earth do not appear to be merely a peripheral concept but a central doctrine of Christianity. The doctrine of the end of the world was bluntly stated in the great commission itself, as enunciated by Jesus, who promised to be with His disciples, "even to the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20) Peter spoke at length on the subject saying, "The earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10) and giving extensive attention to the doctrine of the last things and the fiery judgment of God that shall terminate them in the total dissolution of the material world.

Scientifically, the end of the world must be viewed as a foregone certainty. Whether from the failure of its energies when the sun is at last burned out, or by the cataclysmic engulfment of the earth by the sun, one or the other being certain to come eventually, the earth must be viewed as having a terminator at the end of its course.

Men cannot know with certainty, or even by any degree of probability, what the final fate of the earth may be; but its eventual doom is a basic Christian teaching. It is brought forward here to establish the greater stability and certainty of the kingdom of Christ which will survive whatever happens.

Verses 28-29

There is a marked resemblance in this exhortation with that of Peter who wrote, "Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning and the elements will melt with intense heat." (2 Peter 3:11-12)

This appeals to the holiness of God and His burning wrath toward all evil issues in the declarations that, "Our God is a consuming fire." Men cannot fully

understand what God is like, and any understanding of His nature should always include the concept of His love and sympathy for His human children. The emphasis here is upon another phase of God's character. F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 385, wrote, "It is an aspect of the character of God revealed in the Bible that plays little part in much present-day thinking about Him; but if we are to be completely "honest to God," we dare not ignore it. Reverence and awe before His holiness are not incompatible with grateful love and trust in response to His mercy."

Of the utmost importance is the proper identification of the "kingdom that cannot be shaken," as mentioned here. It is the same as that church, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail." (Matthew 16:18)

The church of the New Testament and the kingdom of Christ are one institution, not two. Jesus Himself used the terms "church" and "kingdom" interchangeably in His announcement at Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:18); and it is mandatory to view the Lord's words there as a reference not to two institutions but to one.

THE CHURCH AND THE KINGDOM BEGAN AT THE SAME TIME

The first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ must be regarded as the birth both of the church and of the kingdom. The references regarding the establishment of the church of Christ on Pentecost are extensive, but one is enough to show the truth; it is Acts 2:41. It was the first occasion recorded where the general invitation was extended under terms of the great commission, where every person was invited to obey it, and where those who did so were added to the church. Note carefully this inspired utterance in Acts 2:41.

After the day of Pentecost, concerning those who obeyed the gospel, it is stated, "The Lord added to them day by day those who were saved." (Acts 2:47)

The statement of the Holy Spirit is that God aggregated, or added, the souls on Pentecost, in the sense of forming them together for the first time as a body, hence He did not say God added to them, there being no them to which they could have been added on that day. One may be thankful for the candor of scholars who frequently add the words "to them" in verse 41, where they do not

belong, but who also write the words carefully in italics that the student may discern the truth.

Christ prophesied that the kingdom would come with power during the life span of Himself and His apostles, saying, “Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste of death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.” (Mark 9:1)

The phraseology used by the Lord suggests that some would taste of death before the kingdom was established, that being fulfilled in the death of Judas and also of Christ. Judas and Christ both tasted death before that memorable Pentecost arrived. It is thus incorrect to think of the kingdom being established at any other time in history, except the lifetime of the apostles.

After Pentecost, all references to the kingdom are in the past tense, or present tense, making it to be an institution in existence. Note the verb forms in the following

- (1) Christians have been translated into the kingdom, (Colossians 1:13).
- (2) The author of Hebrews, in the verse at hand, speaks of “receiving” a kingdom thus making it a present fact.
- (3) The apostle John said of himself and other Christians that Jesus “Made us to be a kingdom.” (Revelation 1:6) A little later, John said, “I John, your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus.” (Revelation 1:9) The kingdom was just as much a reality when John wrote, as are the tribulation and patience. All three are in Christ!

Searching the entire field of time between the reference to the kingdom as future, and those making it already a fact, is there any specific time, event, or place designated in the Scriptures as “the beginning”? The answer is affirmative. Acts 11:14 has a firm reference to the day of Pentecost as “the beginning;” and it is all but conclusive that the “beginning” of the kingdom, or church, is meant. What else, if not the kingdom or church, began on Pentecost?

The nature and extent of the kingdom of Christ are manifested in the entire sweep of Christianity through the ages of probation, “throughout all ages, world without end,” (Ephesians 3:23). It is a spiritual kingdom, “not of this world,” yet in it. Christ is the only head of this kingdom, either in heaven or upon the earth (Matthew 28:18-20); nor is His kingdom ever to be thought of as giving place to another. Even the “everlasting kingdom” (2 Peter 1:11) is in no sense another kingdom, but only an extension and fruition of the present kingdom, at which time Christ will “deliver up” the kingdom to God. (1 Corinthians 15:24).

CHAPTER 13

VARIOUS EXHORTATIONS, LOVE OF THE BRETHREN, HONOR IN MARRIAGE, HONOR OF ELDERS AND MINISTERS, STABILITY IN DOCTRINE, GIVING OF ALMS, CONCLUSION

Verse 1

This is one of the shorter verses of the Bible but worthy indeed of standing alone as a Divine injunction of greatest importance. The various exhortations listed in this chapter are divided into three categories. They are:

- (1) social duties (verses 1-6),
- (2) religious duties (verses 7-17), and
- (3) personal instructions of the author (verses 18-25). Significantly, love of the brethren stands at the head of the list of all obligations.

BROTHERLY LOVE

Our brother! He stands before us, like ourselves, made in the image of God, an heir of eternal life, and a beneficiary of the blood of Christ; and our love should reach out to him with all of the emotional thrust of which the heart is capable. Like me, he is compassed with infirmity, tormented by temptations, pressed with the cares of life, frustrated and defeated in many of his fondest hopes, seeing those eternal realities which he so passionately desires to believe,

as through a glass darkly, being oppressed daily by the confusion and darkness that becloud man's mortal journey, and caught up like all other men upon the escalator of time moving him inexorably to the *terminus* of his pilgrimage.

Mortal? Yes, but immortal too, destined to live forever in joy or in remorse, needing our encouragement, our love, our aid at every step of the way, standing to benefit by our loving prayers, and to be strengthened by the handclasp of our brotherly affection. Who can withhold his love from a brother? Only the reprobate. (1 John 2:11) And who is my brother? Not him alone who belongs to my little circle, but the "stranger," as taught in the next verse, that man we may never have seen before, but a man in extremity, needing love and compassion in a world that has little of either such a man as that befriended by the good Samaritan (Luke 10:33)—and all this of course, is just another way of saying all men. Every man is my brother; for, if I miss him in Christ, I shall hit him in Adam!

This verse teaches three things:

- (1) that the Hebrews addressed here had such love of the brethren,
- (2) that it is God's will that such brotherly love should have been continued, and
- (3) that there were manifestly some dangers that it might be permitted to wane.

All kinds of things can cause brotherly love to fail. Differences of opinion, selfishness, conflicts of interest, lack of personal association with brethren, an awareness of sins in others more than consciousness of our own sins, spiritual pride, vainglory, ambition, love of ease or luxury, and just about every other state or inclination of the natural man; but it is the glory of the Christian faith that love of the brethren will surmount every barrier.

Here is the secret of a growing and effective church, and there is none other. If the disciples truly love one another, the resulting fellowship will be such that men shall desire to break into it, as contrasted with a communion appealing to them by persuasive argument alone, into which, if they enter at all,

it is with reluctance. More people can be loved into the fellowship of Christ than will ever be enticed into it through other means.

Verse 2

This might be a reference to the conduct of Abraham and Lot who granted open and ready hospitality to certain strangers who proved to be not men at all, but angels. (Genesis 18:1; 19:1)

The duty of hospitality is one of the most exacting and difficult requirements of the Christian life, it should be exercised faithfully in respect of the commandment of God, and in the framework of another of the Divine laws that Christians should be “as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves.” (Matthew 10:16)

Verse 3

Christians are commanded to identify with the imprisoned and ill-treated, remembering that, as long as one is subject to the limitations of the flesh, the misfortune that comes to others may come likewise to himself.

Verse 4

The moral status of fornication and adultery is one; both are sinful. Both sins alike, however they may be distinguished as different, are condemned; and they are treated in this verse as one in guilt and penalty.

One may not lawfully depreciate the marriage state and contradict its holiness a sanctity by deeming it a contamination in some, such as priests, or by imputing to it any less holiness than pertains to any other lawful condition.

Verse 5

Paul declared the love of money to be the root of all kinds of evil. (1Timothy 6:10) The love of money springs from sinful discontent with one's status in life, his possessions, the extent of his luxuries, and comforts, or his lack of the power money might bring; but there is a corollary of that discontent, namely, a lack of trust in the providence of God. Not relying upon the promise of the Lord for his protection and blessing, a child of God mistakenly supposes that he may be able himself to supply what is needed or desired, through the

means of accumulating money, thus hoping to acquire the security and confidence that have been forfeited through lack of trust in God. The author here seeks to strike down both supports of the love of money,

- (1) the discontent of men, their passionate and burning desire always for more and more, and
- (2) their lack of reliance upon the promises of God.

And, concerning the promise of the Father, the author here quotes Joshua 1:5, "I will not fail you or forsake you." Covetousness, or the love of money, is idolatry. (Colossians 3:5) It makes ourselves, or what may be accumulated by us, to be the center of trust, and not the Lord, thus supplanting Him in the very center of one's affections.

Verse 6

This verse is from Psalm 118:6 and is cited as a further support of the premise that believers should trust in the Lord, not fearing what men may be able to do to them.

Verse 7

Nothing is of more moving and lasting power than a faithful example. The lives of such noble leaders were to be imitated, not necessarily in regard to all their deeds, but rather in the supreme matter of their unswerving faith.

Verse 8

THE CHANGELESS CHRIST

Christ is the changeless one, and this universal truth is called into view at this place for the purpose of persuading the readers that the same Christ who had preserved a previous generation in their trials and would no less preserve them in theirs.

Why is Christ changeless? Because He is God and changelessness is an attribute of deity. God said "For I, the Lord, do not change." (Malachi 3:6) Also, because Christ is perfect, there can be no change; for to change perfection is to mar it.

What a consolation for Christian hearts is the changelessness of Christ! Soon or late in every life, there appears the great emotion to “hold to God’s unchanging hand.” True change can be quite desirable and exciting for the young and inexperienced; but when swift and basic changes accompany the failure of earthly prospects, the loss of health, the death of loved ones, or the onset of age, the soul of man seeks a haven of rest and finds it in the unchanging love of Jesus.

When revolutionary fires sweep the earth, kingdoms rise and fall, or tides of evil engulf nations and civilizations, then the changeless Christ shines as the pole star in a firmament of darkness, an unchanging hope in a sea of troubles.

The changelessness of Christ means that the system he delivered is also changeless. The gospel is the same; the plan of redemption is changeless; Christ’s rules for the church, its government, doctrine, purpose, and hope—all, like Christ who gave them, are changeless. His wise and benevolent purpose for humanity, His great love, His assurance of the resurrection and life eternal—all are the same. Why? He is the same yesterday and today, yes, and forever!

His throne is eternal; He was present, and a participant, in creation itself. The heavens are the work of His hands; they can, and will, perish; but He changes not. They shall wear out like an old garment, and He shall change them and roll them up; but in the words of the author in 1:12, concerning Christ, “But Thou art the same, and thy years will not come to an end.”

Verse 9

The mention of “meats” suggests the various Old Testament restrictions concerning things clean and unclean were demanding and receiving attention from the Christians who received Hebrews, despite the fact that all such restrictions had been removed. (1Timothy 4:1-5)

The proclivity of the whole human race to save themselves by some kind of diet is an amazing characteristic of *homo sapiens*. Long after Christ Himself made “all meats clean” (Mark 7:19), even the apostle Peter protested a vision from heaven saying, “Not so, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy or unclean.” (Acts 10:14)

The long centuries of preoccupation by Roman Catholics with their “fish on Friday” syndrome, various vegetarian cults, and right down to the latest enthusiasm for protein diets, to say nothing of the aversions of millions of Asians for swine’s flesh—all these things show how deeply ingrained in human nature is preoccupation with meats. How far better it would be if men could be established by grace, that is, concerned with the knowledge and love of God, instead of being caught up in the observance of some diet, especially where religious considerations are involved. Long ago, the Master taught that it is not what men eat, but what they think that causes most of the real troubles besetting the race of men.

What a man eats is of secondary importance, “Because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated.” (Mark 7:19) No wonder, then, that preoccupation with meats is a thing with utterly no profit.

Verses 10-11

This is an astounding argument. Very well, he seems to say, “You people who want to eat according to the rules of the old order, hear this. Even the priests of that order could not partake of the bodies of the animals used in sin offerings, for they were burned without the camp. Very well, the true sin offering is Christ, who suffered without the camp, fulfilling the type; and they of the old order have no right whatsoever to partake of Christ, unless they shall repudiate the old order and identify themselves with Him who suffered without the camp. Thus, the writer’s argument is conclusive and overwhelming. Let his readers forget about keeping the old rules and restrictions; to keep them is to make Christ unavailable to them.

Verse 12

The author is still dealing with the atonement provided by the blood of Jesus. It is the necessity of Jesus’ suffering without the gate, or beyond the camp, that is stressed here. That necessity arose from the typical significance of burning the bodies of the animals used in sin offerings at a place outside the camp of Israel, and later outside the city.

James Macknight, *Apostolic Epistles*, p. 576, wrote, “The Israelites having cities to live in, at the time of our Lord’s suffering, “without the gate” was the same as “without the camp” in the wilderness. Wherefore, criminals being regarded as unclean were always put to death without the gates of their cities. In this manner, our Lord suffered.”

Verse 13

The immense significance of Christ’s suffering “without the camp” lies in the fact that it totally dissociated Him and the blessings available in Him from the old institution. Not only in the manner of His death was the Lord made a curse (Deuteronomy 21:23), but also the very place of His death, without the city, beyond the pale, richly symbolizes the total break away from the old system. The old law failed signally in this, that it cast forth, upon what amounted to the city garbage dump, the Holy Christ Himself! It was the sin of Israel, as well as the sin of all men, that fulfilled the prophecy; and their only means of recovering grace in the sight of God was to reverse their decision, to go beyond the camp, identify with Him whom they had cast out, and accept the mercy of God in Christ.

Verse 14

The temporary and ephemeral nature of all earthly possessions is in view here, focusing the mind of Christians upon the eternal city that comes down from God out of heaven.

The tendency of all men to view their earthly life and dwelling as all there is, is materialism. It is the vision of the eternal things that provides the only safe antidote for the prevailing virus of materialism.

Verse 15

The sacrifice of praise, being differentiated from the sin offering, supplied by Jesus in His atonement; and this other type of offering is similar to the various thank offerings that were made under the Law, but with this difference: theirs were offered only on certain stated occasions and according to certain established rules; but ours is offered at all times, “continually” in the words of

praise and thanksgiving, with confessions of Christ's love, mercy, and blessing plus all other forms of giving God the glory throughout oral testimony.

It has been repeatedly revealed in Hebrews that a Christian's conversation, in the last analysis, is not merely a measure of his devotion but also a means of increasing both his own faith and that of others.

Every hour of every day, the child of God should seek occasions to speak humbly and lovingly of the wonderful blessings in Christian service, and of the love and mercy of God, of God's goodness, and of the peace and joy in believing.

Verse 16

It is not enough merely to talk a good Christian life, one must also live it. One's moral deeds and liberality in the grace of giving should keep pace with his oral profession; and the admonition to "communicate" is not a reference to anything verbal but to the old-fashioned grace of giving. It means that a Christian is obligated to give liberally, purposefully, continually, prayerfully, and faithfully of his money and other possessions for the forward movement of the faith. A child of God who fails in this duty must be adjudged lacking in a vital area of duty.

Verse 17

The Divine injunction to obey persons in authority covers obedience to civil powers; and even the policeman is hailed in Scripture as "a minister of God to you for good" (Romans 13:4); but the obedience required in this verse is submission to the elders of the church.

An elder is called "bishop" in this verse, that "the bishop must be blameless as God's steward" (Titus 1:7); and the apostle Peter extended the terms to include, at least in some sense, all Christians, calling them "good stewards of the manifold grace of God." (1 Peter 4:10) The terms "presbyter" and "bishop" as used in the New Testament refer not to two offices, but only to one.

That this office, controlled, as to them that may be appointed to it, by the enumeration of their qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9), is one of most crucial importance in the church is evident in the command of the Lord that

Christians must submit to it.. Every Christian should be loyal, faithful, and obedient to such men, who themselves must give an account to God, and who do not lord it over God's heritage, but in patience, love and forbearance, seek only that which contributes to the happiness and spiritual prosperity of the community of believers.

This verse here is a stern reminder that there is such a thing as authority in the church of Christ, and that one may flaunt it is at great risk to his soul's salvation.

There is nothing in this injunction that for a moment would require Christians to submit to unfaithful, unsound, sinful, or deceived elders; and it must be taken into consideration as a fact that some occasions arise when the faithful servants of the Lord should separate themselves from any group of overseers whose leadership clearly moves away from biblical norms and in sinful and unrighteous directions, in which case, not merely a soul is lost, but a church! "If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."

Verses 18-19

This request for the prayers of his fellow Christians postulates a number of valid deductions.

- (1) Despite all the stern warnings in Hebrews, and the rebukes administered therein, the writer still holds his readers to be bona fide Christians in covenant relationship with God. Whatever their actual lapse, or threatened failure, they were yet safely within the body of the redeemed and were considered to be such persons whose prayers would benefit the devout author of this great epistle.
- (2) A second matter of interest is the basis upon which the author predicated his request for prayers, namely, that he was at the end of things he could do himself toward the attainment of the object mentioned, and also that he had a clear conscience.

As B. F. Westcott, *op. cit.*, p. 446, wrote, “The prayers of others will not avail for our neglect of duty. They help, when we have done our utmost, to supply what we have failed to do, and to correct that we have done amiss.”

(3) Another deduction regards the increased efficacy of prayers offered by many, as contrasted with prayers offered by only one, or a few. The Scriptures teach that the prayers of many may prevail where the prayers of one, or only a few, might not.

“That I might be restored to you the sooner” is not a reference to the imprisonment of the author, that idea being ruled out by what is said a little later in verse 23; but it implies that circumstances beyond his control had hindered him until that time. It could have been illness, the stress of duties, some unfinished project that he could not leave, or one of many things. Whatever it was, there was, as indicated here, a patient, humble submission to events as they had developed, and a casting of the whole problem upon the will of God through prayer.

Verses 20-21

This magnificent doxology is one of the noblest in holy writ and inspires the deepest emotions of love and gratitude to God.

“Brought up from the dead . . .” is a reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, this being the one place in the whole epistle where it is specifically mentioned, although it is implied on every page of it. Just so, there is only a single reference to the cross (12:2); but the fact of it underlies practically every sentence in the whole book. The reference to Christ as “the great shepherd” is a reminder to the rulers mentioned above that they are, after all, themselves under a shepherd and must give an account to Him.

“The eternal covenant” is the new covenant, contrasted with the old which was abrogated; and the blood of that covenant is the blood of Christ by which the central atonement contained in it was procured, and which blood is symbolized and celebrated in the observance of the Lord’s Supper. Jesus Himself said on the night in which He instituted His supper, “This is the blood of the new covenant, shed for many for the remission of sins.” (Matthew 26:28)

The strong Pauline cast of this whole chapter was noted in the introduction; and the whole thrust of this part of Hebrews is so strongly marked by the familiar style, personality and theology of the great apostle to the Gentiles that no translation can obscure it. It is as though one were reading an extension of the book of Romans, or some other of Paul's epistles.

Verse 23

There are two areas of ambiguity in this verse. "Take notice" or it could mean that Timothy had been released from prison, or that he had been freed of an assignment, or completed a task.

Such problems are of little concern, the central thought being perfectly clear, namely, that Timothy, having been freed from whatever impediment had previously hindered him, was expected by the author, who fervently hoped that his arrival would be in time to enable both of them together to travel for a personal visit with the recipients of this epistle.

Verse 24

This is an expression of courtesy and concern addressed to the elders of the church to which this epistle was directed.

"The saints," it should be noted, were not the canonized dead but the living members of the congregation; and they were to be saluted, or greeted, in the writer's name.

"Those from Italy" are understood to be persons at that time living in Italy, from which place it is supposed Hebrews was written.

It is the view, that the easiest understanding of the verse is best namely, that they were Italians, living where one would expect Italians to live, namely in Italy at the time of writing, included the greetings of his fellow Christians of Italy to the saints in Jerusalem.

Verses 25

This was Paul's customary way of concluding a letter. In this light, Paul's benediction of grace, as in this final verse, has much of the quality and significance of a signature, Paul's!

“Grace” means the favor of God, especially with regard to His mercy in sending His only begotten Son to suffer and die for men.

This all-comprehensive word of summary for the entire system of salvation, provide by God for sinful mortals, is a fitting word with which to close the passionate words of this loving letter.