

STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

HEBREWS

THE SUFFICIENCY
OF THE SAVIOR

JOHN T. STEVENSON

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To Paula
My beloved wife
Companion
Partner
Helpmeet
Lover
and Friend

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INTRODUCTION TO THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

Hebreds... is as a rare gem among a king's treasures; Christ's glory shines from its pages. (Irving Jensen).

This epistle, without introduction or subscription, is like the great High Priest of whom it treats, who was without beginning of days or end of years, abiding as a High Priest continually. (Godet)

There is, indeed, no book in Holy Scripture which speaks so clearly of the priesthood of Christ, so splendidly extols the power and worth of that unique sacrifice which He offered by His death, deals more adequately with the use and also the abrogation of ceremonies, and, in short, in short, explains more fully that Christ is the end of the Law. (John Calvin).

I was born in Washington, D. C. I've had the opportunity to return since then and it is a delightful city. The capitol city is one of the few cities in the United States that was designed by an architect before any of the buildings were raised. George Washington commissioned Piere L'Enfant, a French engineer in the Continental Army, to design the city. Capitol Hill was selected as the focal point and the broad avenues of the city were laid out like spokes in a wheel , emanating from this central point.

If you ever visit the Capitol, the very first place you ought to go is to the Washington Monument. It rises 40 stories above the city and from here, you have a panoramic view of the Capitol Building, the Library of Congress, the Reflecting Pool and the Lincoln Memorial. Across the Potomac River you can see the Pentagon. After taking in the fantastic design which rules the city, you are then ready to appreciate your tour through all of these great buildings.

The Bible is like that. Each book is a magnificent city, designed by the greatest Architect in the universe. Each book has a pattern and a plan. You will only fully appreciate the book itself if you have first had an overview so that you can see its pattern and design.

AUTHORSHIP

The human author of this book does not name himself. On the other hand, he is not anonymous, for he speaks as though the readers are familiar with his identity.

Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I shall see you. (Hebrews 13:23).

The author of this book was not attempting to be anonymous. If that had been the case, he would not have closed the book on this personal note. He goes unnamed, but assumes that his readers know who he is. This has led to a number of different theories as to the identity of the author.

1. Paul.

Many of the teachings found within this epistle have already been introduced in other epistles of Paul's. It has been suggested that, if this epistle was not written by Paul, then it was at least written by someone who was familiar with Paul's teachings and writings. Clement of Alexandria tells of a tradition that he had heard that the epistle was written by Paul in Hebrew and translated into Greek by Luke.

The epistle to the Hebrews he [Clement] attributes to Paul, and says that it was written to the

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Hebrews in the Hebrew language, and that Luke translated it carefully and gave it out to the Greeks. Hence the same style of expression is found in this epistle and in the Acts. (Eusebius, History of the Church 6:14).

However, the book does not read like a translation. While its quotations of the Old Testament are evidently taken from the Greek Septuagint, they flow seemlessly with the message of the book. At the same time, the tradition that Luke is somehow connected with the writing of the epistle might support an alternate view of its authorship.

2. Barnabas.

The early companion of Paul was a Levite and therefore would have been well versed in the Jewish rituals. But this is not in itself sufficient to prove the authorship of this epistle. I am not a Levite or even Jewish, but I have learned a considerable amount about the Jewish rituals.

3. Apollos.

We know very little about Apollos except that he was an Alexandrian Jew who was said to be eloquent of speech (Acts 18:24). It is true that the Epistle to the Hebrews contains a high form of Koine Greek, but such evidence of an Apollos authorship would be barely circumstantial. There is no reference within the book of Acts of Apollos going to Italy.¹

4. Luke.

We have already noted the words of Eusebius in mentioning the similarity of Greek style which is found in Acts and Hebrews. This is a very high style of Greek. Furthermore, we know from 2 Timothy 4:11 that Luke was with Paul in Rome just prior to Paul's death. It was at this time that Paul instructed Timothy to come to Rome.

¹ Another recent theory posits Priscilla as the author of Hebrews. Such a theory might appeal to some of today's modern and postmodern sensibilities, but it has even less to recommend itself than the case for Apollos.

Introduction to the Epistle to the Hebrews

In the book of Hebrews, we see that Timothy is now in prison, but it soon to be released. The author plans to journey with Timothy back to the churches to whom the epistle is written.

Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I shall see you. (Hebrews 13:23).

In the next verse, the author delivers a greeting from the believers of Italy: *Those from Italy greet you (Hebrews 13:24b)*. We can conclude from this that the epistle was written from Italy after Timothy had come to Rome in accordance with Paul's instructions. It was not written by Paul, for he was not released from prison following this imprisonment. Let me suggest the following scenario:

- ♦ Paul, as he is in prison in Rome, has Luke as his only companion (2 Timothy 4:11).
- ♦ Paul writes his last epistle to Timothy, the epistle we know as 2 Timothy. In this epistle, he instructs Timothy to come to Rome (2 Timothy 4:9,13, 21).
- ♦ Timothy comes to Rome to see the aged apostle before he dies. While Timothy is in Rome, Paul is executed by the Roman emperor and Timothy is imprisoned. While Timothy is still in prison and awaiting his release, Luke writes this epistle to the Hebrews, using notes left by his mentor, the apostle Paul. Although Luke is a Greek by birth, he has now spent many years with Paul and is familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures (although he relies upon his Greek Septuagint). Much of his thinking has been influenced by his constant exposure to Paul's theology so that his doctrine can be classified as "Pauline."

Does it really matter who is the human author of this epistle? No. In fact, I think that the reason he does not name himself in the introduction is so that you will focus upon the message rather than upon the messenger. We have a tendency to focus upon spiritual teachers as though they were something special. This is wrong. It is not the messenger who is important but rather the message which he is bringing.

DATE OF WRITING

1. The epistle seems to have been written prior to the destruction of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem which took place in A.D. 70.

For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; 2 he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; 3 and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. 4 And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was. (Hebrews 5:1-4).

When He said, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear. (Hebrews 8:13).

The priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship (Hebrews 9:6b).

2. The group to whom the letter is addressed had now been believers for some time. They are “second generation” Christians. They are told that *by this time you ought to be teachers* (5:12). They are called to *remember the former days* (10:32).
3. As we have already pointed out, this epistle is written after Timothy had been imprisoned in Italy (Hebrews 13:23-25). It is unlikely that this could have taken place until soon after Paul’s death in 63-64 A.D.

RECIPIENTS OF THE EPISTLE

The epistle is written to Jews, descendants of the children of Israel. We are not told where these particular Jews lived. It may have been a community

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outside of Palestine. There were Jewish communities scattered throughout the known world. Or it may have been sent to the Jewish believers who were living in Jerusalem. There is no mention of a mixed church of Jews and Gentiles as existed in most of the churches outside of Palestine.

We know a little of the problems of these Jews by the way the writer deals with these problems. They had heard the message of Jesus Christ, that He had died for sins and that He rose from the dead. They initially believed this message. But then persecution arose. In the midst of these hard times, they were now being tempted to leave Christ and to go back to their sacrifices and their religious ceremonies as a means of approaching God.

They were missing the point that Jesus is the fulfillment of all of the Old Testament sacrifices and ceremonies. These ceremonies and customs all serve as illustrations of His perfect person and work. As a result, they were attempting to return to the infancy of their faith. They were turning back to the Mosaic Law. They were like the baby who wants to again become a fetus.

THEME OF THE BOOK

The theme of this epistle is the absolute supremacy of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is better...

1. Than the Old Testament prophets (1:1-3).
2. Than the angels (1:4 - 2:18).
3. Than Moses (3:1 - 4:13).
4. Than Aaron and his priesthood (4:14 - 10:18).
5. As a way of living (10:19 - 13:25).

This theme is still relevant today. In an age when Christians are lured by all that the world has to offer, there is a message that we need to hear. It is the message that Jesus is better. He is better than popularity. He is better than status symbols. He is better than any other relationship. He is better.

THE FIVE WARNINGS OF HEBREWS

Have you ever been driving down a road and seen a warning sign ahead?

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Maybe it said, “Beware of falling rocks.” We don’t see many of those in Florida, but they are common up north. The book of Hebrews contains five warnings to the Jewish Christians. They are warnings to beware of certain spiritual failures.

1. Beware of Neglecting Salvation (2:1-4).
2. Beware of Not Entering into Rest (3:7 - 4:13).
3. Beware of Not going on to Maturity (5:11 - 6:20).
4. Beware of Insulting the Spirit of Grace (10:26-31).
5. Beware of Indifference (12:18-29).

Each of these warnings are given because there is a danger of leaving Jesus. The solution to each of these warnings is to see that Jesus is better. We can see the flow of thought in the following chart:

Jesus is Better...		
1:4	He is better than the Angels	Warning #1: How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation (2:2-4).
3:1	He is better than Moses	Warning #2: Take care lest any should be falling away from the living God and not enter into His rest (3:12; 4:1; 4:11).
4:3	He provides a better Rest	
4:14	He is a better High Priest	Warning #3: Those who have fallen away find it impossible to renew again to repentance (6:4-6).
8:1	He ministers in a better Sanctuary	
8:6	He has obtained a better Covenant which has been enacted on better promises	

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10:1	He has offered a better Sacrifice	Warning #4: If we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins (10:26-31).
12:1	He has brought a better City	Warning #5: If those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven. (12:25).

These are all different aspects of the same basic warning. It is a warning against not holding onto Christ. They comprise a spiritual road map. This road map will tell us of the right way to walk and it will warn us of the hazardous conditions which lie on the road to the Christian life.

WHEN GOD SPOKE IN THE BEST WAY

Hebrews 1:1-3

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Once upon a time, there were a group of goldfish who lived in a bowl. They had lived in the bowl as long as they could remember and none of them had ever left the bowl and come back to tell about what was on the outside. One day, one goldfish asked another, “What do you think is outside the bowl? This question generated quite a bit of speculation and, after a while, the goldfish came up with several possible answers.

One goldfish maintained that there was nothing outside the goldfish bowl. He maintained that, since he could see nothing in the side of the bowl but his own reflection, it was silly to believe in the existence of anything that could not be seen.

Another goldfish suggested that perhaps the goldfish bowl was surrounded by another goldfish bowl and that this bowl sat inside another bowl which itself was in a bigger bowl. He theorized that there might be an endless succession of goldfish bowls.

A third fish stated that the goldfish bowl must have come into existence just by chance and that it was the result of a “big bang.” He described this phenomena in big words so that the other goldfish would be properly impressed.

There was one little goldfish who was dissatisfied with all of the theories of his companions and he decided that the only way to find out what was on the outside the bowl would be to try to leave the bowl. With this in mind, he circled three times and then swam straight up as fast as he could. The other goldfish watched him as he jumped out through the shimmering surface of the water. They continued to watch, but the little goldfish did not return.

After a while, the first goldfish said, “He must have ceased to exist, because we all know that nothing can exist outside the bowl.” The second goldfish said, “Oh no, he moved up to a higher plane of existence. He has gone on to that larger bowl. The third goldfish said, “You are both wrong. He has evolved and changed into a new life form.” To this day, the three goldfish still disagree as to what happened to their small companion.

We are not goldfish, but we share a similar characteristic. We all live in a bowl that we could call the Natural Bowl. By this, I mean that we are bounded by time and space. There is a whole world of the supernatural that is unknown to us because we are limited by our natural bodies. We are unequipped to know anything about God or about angels or about life outside our own physical existence. But we do not have to remain ignorant about these things. God has spoken. He has spoken through prophets and He has spoken through dreams and He has spoken through signs and He has spoken through His written word. Most importantly, He has spoken through His Son. Jesus Christ entered the goldfish bowl by Himself becoming a goldfish.

This is the message of the book of Hebrews. It is that God has made Himself known to man by becoming a man in the person of Jesus. Because God had made Himself known ultimately in Jesus, it is Jesus who is to be seen as the better word of God.

GOD SPOKE TO THE FATHERS

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways (Hebrews 1:1).

The writer begins the book of Hebrews in the form of an essay. He skips over the customary salutation and greeting that would be found in an epistle and goes right to the heart of the matter. He is going to talk about the fact that God has spoken. We could sum up this verse in three points. There are three major truths which are presented.

1. God Exists.

This is not argued. It is not proven by the author. It is simply taken for granted as an obvious truth. In the same way, I did not begin this lesson by trying to prove that I exist. My existence is clearly evident. If I do not exist, then who wrote this paper that you are reading? In the same way, God never sets out to prove His own existence. He takes it for granted. That is not to say that evidences for the existence of God are not available, but they always begin with the truth that God is there.

2. God Has Spoken.

God is on the outside of the goldfish bowl of our physical existence. He cannot be seen by our eyes or measured in a laboratory. He cannot be reproduced in a test tube. This means that, unless He had spoken to us, we could never know Him.

3. God Spoke in many Portions and in many Ways.

- ♦ He spoke to Job out of a whirlwind.
- ♦ He spoke to Joseph in dreams.
- ♦ God spoke to Moses in a burning bush.
- ♦ He spoke to Joshua through an angel.
- ♦ He spoke to Samuel in a voice in the night.
- ♦ He spoke to Elijah in a still, small voice.
- ♦ He spoke to Daniel in a vision.

The revelation of God through the Old Testament prophets was fragmentary. It was here a little, there a little. Like pieces of a puzzle, it gradually came together in many different forms and many different ways.

It was also progressive. The writer of Genesis had a certain limited amount of information. The writer of Joshua had a little more. The writer of Samuel had even more. Each writer added to the pool of knowledge about God and about existence outside the goldfish bowl of our existence.

In each case, the Old Testament prophets came away with another glimpse of the character and the person of God. But the final and

complete communication of God was not accomplished through any of these means. The final and complete communication of God was accomplished through His Son.

GOD HAS SPOKEN IN HIS SON

...in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. (Hebrews 1:2).

We have seen the many ways that God spoke to the fathers through the prophets. But now we see that God has spoken again. This renewed speaking has taken place “in these last days.” After God spoke through the prophets there was a great silence. For 400 years there had been no prophets to speak the word of the Lord. But now, in these last days, God has spoken through a new agency which had never before been used. He now spoke to man through His Son. This is the fullest revelation of God. It is the person of Jesus Christ. It is the person of the One who was God and who became man so that He might communicate the Father to us. We can chart the flow of thought in the following manner:

God has spoken...	
To the fathers...	To us...
In the prophets...	In His Son...
In many portions and in many ways.	In these last days.

Now I want to ask you a question. Why is the writer making such a point? Why is it so important to know that Jesus is the fullest revelation of God? It is because the Jews to whom he is writing are in danger of turning away from Jesus to go back to the incomplete teachings of the Old Testament prophets. This is important! The teachings of the Old Testament prophets were not wrong. They were only incomplete. They were a partial revelation. They were *in many portions and in many ways*.

But the revelation that came in the person of Jesus is a complete revelation. He was better than the prophets because He exhibited the very person and character of God. He said to Philip on the night of the Last Supper, “*He who*

has seen Me has seen the Father. ” (John 14:9). None of the prophets could ever make a claim like that. Their knowledge of God was always limited. But Jesus had an experiential knowledge of God because He was the Son of God.

Let me use an illustration. If you wanted to get to know me, you could talk to someone who knew me. They could tell you a lot about me. You might come away with a certain amount of knowledge about me and what I do for a living. But if you really wanted to get to know me, the best way would be to talk to me. We would sit down and communicate and I would talk and you would listen and the conversation would go back and forth.

The same is true of God. The best way to learn about God is to meet Him in the flesh. You meet Him in the flesh when you meet Jesus Christ. God has been revealed in the prophets. He has been revealed in the Bible. But the best revelation of God came through Jesus Christ. He is better than the prophets because He has given us a better revelation.

	The Prophets	The Son
The Method	In many different parts.	A full revelation rather than a partial one
	At many different times	Once at the end of the age
The Agents	Through prophets	Through a Son
	The many	The One
The Quality	The Old Testament revelation was good	The new revelation in Christ is better
The Time	First came the prophets	Then came the Son
	The second revelation completed the first revelation	
The Recipients	The Fathers had only the first revelation	We have both revelations

THE PREEMINENCE OF JESUS CHRIST

In these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom

He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. when He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Hebrews 1:2-3).

The message of Hebrews is that Jesus is better. As the book opens, we see that Jesus is better than the Old Testament prophets. This is seen in seven ways.

1. His Heirship: ...*whom He appointed heir of all things (Hebrews 1:2).*

Jesus is better than the prophets because He has been appointed heir of all things. The Old Testament prophets foretold of a coming kingdom. They envisioned a time when God would take His throne on the earth and rule over the kingdoms of the earth.

I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven one like the Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him.

And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13-14).

Notice the title which is used in this passage. It is the “Son of Man.” This is a title which Jesus often used of Himself. He has been given the dominion of the kingdom of God. He is the heir of the kingdom.

2. His Role in the Creation: ...*through whom also He made the world. (Hebrews 1:2).*

Jesus is better than the prophets because He is the creator of the universe. None of the prophets ever created anything. None of the prophets were present at creation. The only way that the prophets knew about the creation was because God had told them about it. But

Jesus was there. He was present at creation and He wasn't merely there as a passive observer.

There is more in view here than just the creation of the world. The word which has been translated "world" is the Greek word *αἰώνας* (*aionas*) which means "ages." It is not limited to the mere world. It has in view all of history. Jesus Christ is the key to history. He designed the ages of man. He has planned the beginning and the ending. Each event is firmly in His control.

3. His Radiance: *And He is the radiance of His glory (Hebrews 1:3).*

Jesus said that He is the light of the world (John 8:12). The glory of God has been made visible so that men may see it. That glory is manifested in the person of Christ. None of the prophets could be called "the radiance of His glory." Do you remember Moses, when he had gone up on Mount Sinai and had stood in the presence of God? He came back down, and his face shown with the brightness of reflected glory. That radiance only came because Moses had been in the presence of God. It was not because Moses was anything special. But the radiance of Jesus Christ exists on the basis of who He is. He is the light of the world. He is not a mere reflection of that light. He is the light.

4. His Nature: *And He is... the exact representation of His nature (Hebrews 1:3).*

The prophets sometimes caught a glimpse of the nature of God. When we read the Scriptures, we often see some of the attributes of God. We see that He is holy and righteous and loving and gracious.

But Jesus manifested all of these qualities in His person. He is the exact representation of the nature of God. Do you want to know what God is like? Look at Jesus. Do you want to know how God thinks? Listen to Jesus.

5. His Power over All Things: *And He... upholds all things by the word of His power. (Hebrews 1:3).*

Not only did all of the ages come into

"The word of His power" is
τῷ ῥῆματι τῆς δυνάμεως,
a reference to His strength.

being through the Son, but they also are maintained through His power. This is important for you to know. Are you having problems? They were planned by the Son and now they are being held together by the Son. Is there something about your present situation that is stressful? Jesus Christ designed that situation with you in mind and now He is holding it together by the word of His power.

The One who died for you and gave His life for you has carefully brought you to your present situation. Nothing has come into your life for which He did not plan and for which He did not make provision. There are no problems which are too big for Him to handle. When everything looks as though it is going to fly apart, don't worry. He is holding it all together.

6. His Purification of Sins: *...when He had made purification of sins (Hebrews 1:3).*

One thing that the prophets were never able to accomplish was the purification of sins. The priests could offer sacrifices in the temple, but the blood of bulls and goats was never sufficient to purify sins. And so, the sacrifices always had to be repeated. The truth was that they merely looked forward to a future sacrifice which God would provide. That ultimate sacrifice was made on the cross when the Son of God sacrificed Himself for the sins of the world.

7. He Sat Down: *...when He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3).*

The Old Testament priests administered sacrifices every day in the temple. Each day, one of the priests was chosen to enter the temple and to offer incense upon the altar. Beyond this and only once a year, the high priest was permitted to enter into the holiest part of the inner temple to sprinkle blood upon the ark of the covenant which was kept within. These offerings went on day by day and year by year. Priests were always entering the temple.

There was one thing that no priest ever did while he was inside the temple. No priest ever sat down inside the temple. He was not permitted. There were several articles of furniture in the Temple, but there was no chair. The only seat in the Temple was the Mercy Seat,

the solid gold cover of the ark of the covenant. This represented the throne of God and no priest would ever dream of trying to sit on this seat. The priest never sat down while he was in the Temple. This was because the work of a priest was never completed. It was always a temporary work. The incense must always be offered again the next day. The blood must be sprinkled again the following year. The work was never done.

But when Jesus finished His work of purification on the cross, He ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. He has a unique distinction. He is the Priest who is seated. He could sit down because His work is finished. The work of our salvation has been completed. As He hung upon the cross, He cried out, "It is finished!" That cry signified that the payment for our sin was completed. The work is done. The ultimate sacrifice has been offered.

This is important for you to know. Many people have the mistaken idea that they must add something to the work of Christ in order to be saved. They think that the work of Christ was not sufficient in itself that they must add something to the payment that Christ made on the cross. But there is nothing that you can add to the work of Christ. It is a completed work. You cannot add anything to it. You can only accept it.

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:5).

You can have the confidence of knowing that your sins have been removed. This salvation is found only in Jesus. Trust in Him as your Lord and Savior and enter into that which He has provided on your behalf.

JESUS IS BETTER THAN THE ANGELS

Hebrews 1:4-14

*I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord:
He said to Me, “Thou art My Son, today I have begotten
Thee.
Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine
inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Thy
possession.” (Psalm 2:7-8).*

From the infinite solitude of eternity, God spoke and the universe sprang into existence. In a single moment of time, the heavens were woven together in a glorious tapestry. Newborn stars blazed forth their light, moving together to form spinning galaxies.

No man was present at that moment. No human eye was there to gaze upon the wonders of creation. No mortal was present to appreciate the handiwork of the Creator. But there were others who were there. There were supernatural beings who witnessed the hand of the Architect of the universe at work. These special servants of God gazed upon the grand design of the cosmos and they sang forth the praises of the God of creation.

*Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth! Tell
Me, if you have understanding,
Who set its measurements, since you know? Or who stretched
the line on it?
On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone,
When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of
God shouted for joy? (Job 38:4-7).*

These special servants of the Lord who sang His praises at the creation are called “the sons of God.” We know them as angels. What is an angel? The word “angel” is a transliteration of the Greek word ἄγγελος. It is the word for a “messenger.” We see angels occasionally through the Bible, bearing God’s messages to mortal men.

- ♦ Two angels accompanied the Lord when He came and spoke to Abraham.
- ♦ Two angels met Lot in the city of Sodom and warned him of the coming judgment.
- ♦ An angel wrestled with Jacob in the night and blessed him and changed his name to Israel.
- ♦ Angels were involved in transmitting the Law of God to Moses.
- ♦ An angel spoke to Joshua and gave him instructions on how to take the city of Jericho.
- ♦ An angel spoke to Gideon and commissioned him to drive the enemies of Israel from the land.
- ♦ An angel shut the mouths of the lions when Daniel was cast into the lion’s den.
- ♦ A certain angel came to Mary and told her that she would give birth to the Messiah.
- ♦ Angels appeared to the shepherds and announced the birth of Christ.

One of the most significant ministries of angels was in the transmission of the Mosaic Law. Moses is said to have met with an angel on Mount Sinai when he received the Law from God.

This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you. (Acts 7:38).

You who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it. (Acts 7:53).

Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator... (Galatians 3:19a).

Angels were involved in the transmission of the Law to Moses. The Jews had a very high regard for angels. If a message was given by an angel, it

carried a much greater weight than if it had been spoken by mere man.

The Jewish writings taught that angels served as mediators between God and men. This was correct as far as it went, but they also taught that angels were involved in God's decision-making processes. They thought that God always consulted His angels before making up His mind on what He was going to do. They pointed to Genesis 1:26 as a proof text for this belief.

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” (Genesis 1:26).

This verse was interpreted by the Jews to picture God talking to His angels, asking their advice concerning the creation of man. The Jews also believed that the angels were responsible for keeping the stars in place, for the holding back of the sea, for the control of the weather and for the keeping of time. They even believed that there were angels who served as prison wardens in hell and who tortured the people who were sent there.

This is important. The Epistle to the Hebrews is written to Jewish believers. That is why we call it the Epistle to the Hebrews. These people had been raised to believe many of these concepts of angels. As a result, they assumed that there could be nothing that was greater than the angels. Some Jews had even gone to the extreme of worshiping angels. Eventually, a teaching known as Gnosticism would arise which would teach that Jesus was an angel.

This brings us to the message of the book of Hebrews. It is that Jesus is better. The covenant that He brought is better than the first covenant that was brought by angels. His covenant is a better covenant because He is better than the angels.

THE TITLE OF JESUS

Having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

For to which of the angels did He ever say, “Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee”? And again, “I will be a Father to Him, and He shall be a Son to Me”? (Hebrews

1:4-5).

The first reason that Jesus is better than the angels is because He has a more exalted title than they do. Titles can be important. I have several titles. One of my titles is “husband.” If you don’t think that this title is important, just talk to my wife.

I spent many years working with the Fire Department. Many of the fire fighters who I worked with had been given nicknames. There were names like Blind Frank, Bullet Bob, Mickey Mouse and Big Bird. I was known by the nickname of “The Preacher.” These nicknames were all indicative of some characteristic of the one with the name. Names in the ancient world are the same way. They had meaning to their names and titles. Such names were very significant. Jesus has many titles. He is the First-born. He is the Messiah. He is the Redeemer. He is the Advocate and He is the Son.

Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee (1:5).

This is a quotation. It is a quotation of God. It is a quotation from the Old Testament. It is taken from the Psalms.

*I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord:
He said to Me, “Thou art My Son, today I have begotten
Thee.”
Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine
inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Thy possession.
(Psalm 2:7-6).*

This Psalm was sung at the Coronation of the King. At the ceremony in which a king was crowned, this Psalm would be sung by the Temple Choir. The Jews recognized in this Psalm a prophecy of the coming Messiah. He would be known as the Son of God.

This prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. God testified that Jesus is His Son at the baptism of Jesus. Jesus had come to be baptized by John the Baptist. He did this to identify Himself with the ministry and the message of John.

*And immediately coming up out of the water, he saw
the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending
upon Him; 11 and a voice came out of the heavens: “Thou art*

My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased. ” (Mark 1:10-11).

With this statement, God identified Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy. Jesus is the beloved Son of God. I think that someday God is going to say this again about Jesus. There is coming a day when Jesus is going to return to the earth. He will return to earth and He will be crowned King. That will be His Coronation Day. The whole earth will be His kingdom. The nations will be His inheritance. The ends of the earth will also be His possession.

I will be a Father to Him, and He shall be a Son to Me (1:5).

This was also an Old Testament prophecy. It was a promise that was given to David, the King of Israel. It was a promise that his son would sit upon the throne of Israel and that he would have a special relationship with God.

I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, 15 but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you.

And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.” (2 Samuel 7:14-16).

The immediate fulfillment of this prophecy is seen in the person of Solomon. Solomon was one of the sons of David. He took the throne after David died. He was given the kingdom and he enjoyed special blessings from God. He was given wisdom from God. He was also disciplined by God when he sinned.

However there is also a second fulfillment of this prophecy. This prophecy is also fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is a descendant of David. He will sit on the throne of David. He has the wisdom of God. He did no sin, but He took on Himself the sins of the world. His kingdom will be established forever. Because of all these things, He is the better Son of David. He was better than Solomon because He did not depart from the Lord the way Solomon did.

Jesus is the Son of God. No angel ever received this title. No angel was ever called “the Son of God. Angels are fantastic creatures. They are

supernatural. They have tremendous power. They are able to enter the presence of God. But Jesus is better because He is the Son.

THE WORSHIP OF THE SON

And when He again brings the first-born into the world, He says, “And let all the angels of God worship Him.” (Hebrews 1:6).

The next reason that Jesus is better than the angels is because He is worshiped by the angels. This took place when He came into the world:

And when He again brings the first-born into the world (1:6).

This is a reference to the birth of Jesus. Even though Jesus existed from all eternity, there was a time in history when He became flesh. God was born in the form of a man. He became a man.

Notice that He is called “the first-born.” This does not mean that Jesus was the first one to be born. He was not the first to be born. There were millions of people who were born before Jesus was born. How are we to understand this title of firstborn? In the ancient world, the first-born held the position of first place in the family. He was the leader of the family. He received the major portion of the inheritance. He held a position of preeminence. He was the “Number One Son.”

This idea of preeminence is foundational to the idea of the firstborn. To call someone the firstborn was to say that they held the position of first place. For example, one of the early church fathers named Polycarp called Marcion the “firstborn of Satan.” Marcion was a heretic who taught false doctrine. By using this title, Polycarp meant that Marcion was Satan’s number one man. The birth of Jesus was that kind of birth. It was the number one birth. It was the most important birth in history. It was the birth that changed the course of history.

He says, “And let all the angels of God worship Him.” (1:6).

This is another quotation from an Old Testament prophecy. Once again, it is from the book of Psalms.

Let all those be ashamed who serve graven images,

*who boast themselves of idols; worship Him, all you gods.
(Psalm 97:7).*

Now, you are saying, “Wait a minute, John. That verse in the Psalms doesn’t say anything about angels.” That is true. But in the Greek Septuagint, the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek, the word “gods” (אֱלֹהִים) has been translated with the Greek word ἀγγέλοι (angels). The writer of Hebrews is quoting from the Septuagint and he is saying that this verse contains a prophecy of Jesus which was fulfilled when the angels worshiped Him.

Do you remember the story of the angelic announcement at the birth of Christ? The scene was the rolling hills outside the village of Bethlehem. A group of shepherds were gathered together in the cool night. Suddenly, the stillness of the night was broken.

And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.” (Luke 2:9).

Can you picture the scene? It is a chilly evening out under the stars. Perhaps the shepherds have a campfire going. Occasionally one of them stands up to throw another branch into the fire or to stamp his feet and warm himself against the brisk evening breeze. Suddenly there is a light. The shadows and blackness of the night vanish in sudden brightness. Before them in the blazing light stands an awesome creature. It is an angel. They are terrified. They suddenly see what sinful and lowly beings they are as they are confronted with this majestic spectacle. Then the angel speaks.

“What did he say?”
“He said not to be afraid.”
“He said that he is bringing us news of a great joy.”
“He said that a savior has been born.”

And the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; 11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger.” (Luke 2:10-12).

The angel begins his message by telling the shepherds not to be afraid. Angels are such fantastic creatures that this is usually the first thing an angel has to say when he is speaking to a mortal man. But this message is not one of fear. It is a message of good news. It is a message of great joy. The message is that a Savior has been born. His identity is “Christ the Lord.”

And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, 14 “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.” (Luke 2:13-14).

The word “host” used in verse 13 is a military term. It describes an army. These angels had once sang for joy at the creation of the cosmos. Now they sing for joy at the announcement of the birth of the One who created the cosmos. The angels worshiped Jesus and sang His praises. Angels know that it is wrong to worship anyone but God. This is an evidence for the deity of Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God. Therefore, He is worthy of worship.

THE ROLE OF THE ANGELS

And of the angels He says, “Who makes His angels winds, and His ministers a flame of fire.” (Hebrews 1:7).

The angels are seen in contrast to Jesus in this verse. We have already seen several truths about Jesus:

- ♦ He is the heir of all things (1:2).
- ♦ He created the ages (1:2).
- ♦ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact representation of the nature of God (1:3).
- ♦ He upholds all things by the word of His power (1:3).
- ♦ He made purification of sins (1:3).
- ♦ He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (1:3).
- ♦ He is the Son of God (1:4).
- ♦ The angels of God are called to worship Him (1:6).

Now, by contrast, we see several truths about the angels.

And of the angels He says, “Who makes His angels winds” (1:7).

This is a quotation from the Psalms. It is from Psalm 104. It is from a Psalm of Praise. It is describing God as the One who controls all of creation.

He makes the winds His messengers, flaming fire His ministers. (Psalm 104:4).

This is a picture of the Sovereign God. He controls the universe. The wind does His bidding. Fire is His sign of authority. Both are seen here.

Notice that the word “messenger” is used here instead of “angel.” That is because they are the same word in both Greek and Hebrew. In the context of the Psalms, the writer is speaking of the physical world and God’s control of the winds. But here in Hebrews, a higher truth is in view. Here in Hebrews we see that God is in control of the spiritual world as well as the physical world.

This brings us to a question. Why are the angels identified as winds? The Greek word which has been translated “winds” is πνεύματα (*pneumata*, the same word from which we get “pneumonia”). It can be translated “wind.” But the same Greek word can also be translated “spirit.”

I think that it is the latter meaning which is in view here. The angels are spirit beings. They are spirit oriented. They can see spiritual events in the same way that we can see physical events. The spiritual world is just as real and as experiential to them as the physical world is real and experiential to us.

I believe in the spiritual world. But I cannot see the spiritual world. I cannot see my prayers ascending to heaven. I cannot see my sins being forgiven. I cannot see the spiritual conflict going on around me. These things are intangible to me. But I am not so certain that they are intangible to the angels. This is because angels are made differently than we are. They possess a different set of senses. They have a different kind of body.

Who makes... His ministers a flame of fire (1:7).

The writer is still quoting from Psalm 104. That Psalm describes God as the One who controls all of creation.

*He makes the winds His messengers,
Flaming fire His ministers. (Psalm 104:4).*

In this picture of the Sovereign God, we are told that He controls the universe. The wind is a sign of His invisible workings. Flaming fire is His sign of authority. In the same way that God uses wind and fire for the benefit of man, so also the angels have a ministry which is to the benefit of man.

THE RIGHTEOUS RULERSHIP OF THE SON

But of the Son He says, “Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom.

“Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy companions.” (Hebrews 1:8-9).

Now we turn our attention from angels back to the Son. As great as angels are, the Son is greater still. Angels were seen to be servants. But the Son is the Sovereign Lord. The angels were brought into being in a point in time. Notice that verse 7 says that Christ “makes His angels winds...” But Jesus has a throne that is “forever and ever.” One is “made,” the other “is.”

Once again, the writer quotes from the Old Testament. Again, the quotation comes from the Psalms. This time, it is taken from a wedding Psalm.

*Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever,
A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Thy kingdom.
Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated wickedness;
Therefore God, Thy God, has anointed Thee with the oil of
joy above Thy fellows. (Psalm 45:6-7).*

This is a Psalm of Praise. It is praise of a bride for her bridegroom. The bridegroom is God Himself. The bride is God’s people. We refer to it as the church.

The Psalm describes the praises of the bride for her bridegroom. Notice that she focuses her attention on the righteousness of God. The righteousness of God was the subject of a great deal of attention in the Old Testament. One of the central teachings of the Bible has always been that God is righteous. Not only this, but God has always demanded righteousness of those who would fellowship with Him. This creates a dilemma. It is that there are no righteous people. All have sinned. This is why God sent His Son. It was that

He might present Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of men.

We have the privilege of being able to enter into the presence of God. This is not because we are good enough. Rather, it is because the righteousness of Jesus Christ; has been offered up on our behalf.

This is why it is so important that Jesus be seen as righteous. If He is not perfectly righteous, then He is not qualified to bear our sins and that means that we are still in our sins. Thus, the point is made that Jesus is righteous with an everlasting righteousness. Because He is righteous, God chose Him and anointed Him as the ultimate sacrifice for sins.

THE ETERNAL RULERSHIP OF THE SON

And, “Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Thy hands; 11 They will perish, but Thou remianest; and they will become old as a garment, 12 And as a mantle Thou wilt roll them up; as a garment they will also be changed. But Thou art the same, and Thy years will not come to an end.”
(Hebrews 1:10-12).

Angels have not existed from all eternity. They were a product of God's creation. There was a time when there were no angels and then God created and as a result of that creation activity angels came into existence. But Jesus was not created. He always existed. There was never a time when He did not exist. Not only was He not created, but He Himself is the Creator of all things.

Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Thy hands (1:10).

The same Jesus who walked on the waters of the Sea of Galilee had once created all of the seas. The One who was born of a woman designed the heavens and the earth. Because He is the Creator of all things, He is also the Creator of the angels.

They will perish, but Thou remianest” (1:11).

The heavens and the earth are seen in contrast to the person of Jesus. Go out and look at the highest mountain on earth. One day it will crumble to dust. But Jesus will still be there. Go to the beach and look at the sea. When all of the water has dried up, Jesus will still remain.

Go out tonight and look at the stars. When they have all ceased their twinkling and the galaxies have burned themselves out, Jesus will still remain. When the heavens and earth have passed away, Jesus will still remain. If you have been joined to Him in faith, then you will remain with Him.

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE SON

But to which of the angels has He ever said, “Sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.”

Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:13-14).

The final point of contrast between Jesus Christ and the angels is that God has made Jesus the sovereign ruler over all things.

Sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet (1:13).

This is a quote from Psalm 110:1. It is a Psalm of David. This verse is quoted more often in the New Testament than any other verse in the Bible.

The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.” (Psalm 110:1).

This Psalm was written by David. Do you remember David? He was the king of Israel. He was the greatest king that the Jews ever had. Jesus once asked the Pharisees about their interpretation of this passage.

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, 42 saying, “What do you think about the Christ, Whose son is He?” They said to Him, “The son of David.” (Matthew 22:41-42).

The Pharisees had been tossing questions at Jesus, trying to trip Him up. So far, they had been unsuccessful and now, as they stop to catch their breath, He turns the tables on them.

The question revolves around the person of the Messiah. Jesus asks, “Through whose lineage will the Christ come?” This word “Christ” is the Greek form of the Hebrew term “Messiah.” It literally means the “anointed one.” The Messiah was that person whose coming God had promised and who would be anointed with the Holy Spirit.

Now Jesus asks a very simple question. He asks, “To whom will the Messiah be related?” These Pharisees were quick with the answer. They knew that the Scriptures promised that the Messiah would be of the line of David. It was only in this way that He would have the authority to sit on the throne of David and to rule as King of the Jews. But now, while they are patting themselves on the back for their knowledge of the Bible, Jesus asks them another question.

He said to them, “Then how does David in the Spirit call Him Lord, saying, ‘The Lord said to my lord, Sit at My right hand, until I put Thine enemies beneath Thy feet.’ If David then calls Him Lord, how is He his son?”

And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question. (Matthew 22:43-46).

The question is taken from Psalm 110:1. Here is the question. How can David refer to the Messiah as his Lord when the Messiah is his son? You see, the Jews had a very high regard for their parents. Parents were in authority over their children and not visa versa. It would be expected that a child might call his father lord, but not the other way around.

If Messiah = Son of David,
then David is lord over Messiah

Why does David place himself under the authority of one of his descendants? The answer is that the One who is the son of David is also the Son of God. The Messiah is more than mortal man. He is God in the flesh. This was never said about angels. David never stated that an angel was his lord and master. On the contrary, angels have the position of servanthood.

Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation? (1:14)

Angels have a ministry. Their ministry is one of rendering service. They have been assigned the task of rendering service to those who will inherit salvation. Who are the heirs of salvation? We are! When a person believes in Jesus Christ and trusts in Him as Savior and Lord, he becomes an heir of God's salvation.

Here is a fantastic truth. These supernatural beings have been assigned the task of ministering to you. You are not aware of all the dangers that face you through the day. But God is aware. He has assigned His holy angels to protect you. They keep harm from coming your way. They allow nothing to touch you that has not been approved by the Lord. When the day finally comes that you are called home, they will act as your royal escort to heaven (Luke 16:22).

WARNING AGAINST DRIFTING AWAY

Hebrews 2:1-4

For you have forgotten the God of your salvation and have not remembered the rock of your refuge. (Isaiah 17:10a).

The epistle to the Hebrews is written to Jews who lived in a strategic time in history. They lived in the Roman province of Judea around 66 A.D. Little did they know it, but it was the end of an era. The Emperor of Rome at this time was Nero. He had just recently signed an edict that made it illegal to be a Christian. For the first time since the birth of the church, persecution against Christians became widespread. There had been persecution before this time, but it had never been sanctioned by the Emperor of Rome.

This new persecution had a wide range of effects. In far off Jerusalem the persecutions were particularly severe. The orthodox Jews had already been antagonistic to those who were followers of Jesus and now this antagonism was given the fuel of Roman law.

There was already a great mixture of beliefs among the Jews at Jerusalem. There were Herodians and Pharisees and Sadducees and Essenes. Within all of these groups were those who believed in Jesus. They had heard the message of the gospel and they had perhaps seen some of the miracles which were performed by the apostles. As a result, they had come to Christ and had joined the church at Jerusalem.

This church at Jerusalem was composed almost entirely of Jews. They were descendants of Abraham and Hebrews by birth. In fact, in the early days of the church there had been some question whether it was even possible for

Gentiles to be saved without first undergoing the Jewish rite of circumcision. The first church council had been held 20 years earlier to settle this question.

That was then; this was now. It was now recognized that salvation was through faith and apart from racial or ethnic origin. In spite of this, the church at Jerusalem was still not integrated. It was still composed almost entirely of Jewish people. These Jewish Christians met together, but they also went to the Temple in Jerusalem to worship. They were still participating in the ceremonies and in the sacrifices and in the rituals of Judaism. But now, as this intense persecution begins to hit the church, these Jewish Christians are thrown out of the Temple. This is traumatic.

Today you might become unhappy with the church that you attend for any number of reasons. You might not like the pastor's sermons or you don't like the songs they sing or you don't think they are friendly enough. As a result, you might leave that church and go to another church down the street.

But it was different with the Jew living in the first century. For him there was only one Temple. The Temple was everything. He had been coming to the Temple every year since the time he was born. His parents and their parents and all of their ancestors for hundreds of years had come here to worship.

There is a strong temptation for these Jews to stop meeting with the Christians (Hebrews 10:25) and to turn back to the old sacrificial system. They will not actually deny Christ. They will merely compromise their beliefs and ignore Christ as they return to the Jewish ritualistic system. After all, God was in the sacrifices and the Temple before Christ was even born. Would He care if He was worshiped in the Temple as opposed to in the church?

This is the reason for the epistle to the Hebrews. The writer wants to warn these Jewish Christians against deserting the faith and hiding in the Jewish ritualistic system. Therefore, he sets out to show that Jesus is better.

- ♦ He is better than the Old Testament Prophets. They only spoke the word; He is the Word.
- ♦ He is better than the angels. They are only creatures; He is the Creator.
- ♦ He is better than Moses. Moses led the nation; He made the nation.
- ♦ He is better than Aaron and his priesthood. Aaron offered up sacrifices; He is the ultimate sacrifice.

Now, you might be saying to yourself, “How does all of this apply to me? I’m not a Jew who is living in the first century. I can’t identify with those problems.” There is a message here for you. In an age when you are being lured by all of the things that the world has to offer, there is a message that you need to hear. You need to hear that Jesus is better. He is better than popularity. He is better than status symbols. He is better than financial success. He is better than any other relationship. He is better.

THE DANGER OF DRIFTING

For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. (Hebrews 2:1).

The reason that it is important to know that Jesus is better is because there is a danger. It is the danger of drifting. You need to be aware of this danger. There will be five warnings given in the book of Hebrews. This is the first. It is a warning against drifting away. This is not being written to people who have not come to Christ. It is not written to pagans. It is written to those who have heard the gospel message and who have come and who have entered into the church. It is written to good church members. It is written to Christians. But now there is a danger. The danger is that they might drift away. This brings to mind the image of a drifting boat. If a boat is not anchored to something solid, then it will drift away. In Hebrews 6:19 we shall see that we have an anchor of the soul. His name is Jesus.

When I was a boy, my father built me a small one-man sailboat. My family lived in northern Florida to the east of Pensacola and there were many tiny islands that dotted the bay. On the hot summer days I used to sail out and explore these islands.

One day I landed on a small island and tied up my boat to a piece of driftwood. I came back to find both the boat and the driftwood floating out into the bay. I had made the mistake of tying up to an insecure object. In the same way, these Jewish Christians had anchored their hopes to the Temple and its rituals and sacrifices.

Now they are in for some hard times. There is rebellion in the air. Within a few months, Roman legions will be landing on the shores of Palestine. Within four years, they will surround the city of Jerusalem and will burn the

Temple to the ground. The sacrifices will cease. Those who have their hopes anchored to the Temple and its ceremonial system will find themselves shipwrecked.

This brings us to a question. Where have you anchored your soul? Where is your hope set? Is it on your career? Is it on your mate? Is it on your children? Is it on your church? If it is set on anything besides Jesus Christ, then you are in danger of drifting. Drifting does not seem too dangerous. Gradual things, by their very nature of being gradual, seem to be safe. But drifting is dangerous for the very reason that it does not happen all at once. It happens very slowly. It is gradual. Because it is gradual, it often goes unnoticed until it is too late.

THE CERTAINTY OF JUDGMENT

For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" (Hebrews 2:2-3a).

Notice the mention of angels. This is no accident. The entire first chapter was about angels. The reason angels were the topic of the first chapter was because the readers had an evident interest in angels. The point was that, as great and as powerful and as wondrous as angels are, there is someone better. The point in Hebrews 1 was that Jesus is better than the angels. There is a reason that the writer has made this point. It is because the Mosaic Law was given through angels.

- ♦ The covenant that Jesus brought is better than the covenant that was brought through angels.
- ♦ The way of life that Jesus brought is better than the way of life that was brought through angels.
- ♦ The relationship that Jesus brought is better than the relationship that was brought through angels.

Therefore, if the Law that was brought through the angels was unalterable, and if each transgression of that law received a righteous judgment, then how much more will we be judged if we neglect the salvation that was brought, not through angels but through the Son? We could chart it like this:

The Law	Salvation
Brought through angels	Brought through the Son of God
Angels are great	The Son is greater
Neglect of the Law brought certain judgment	Neglect of salvation is certain to bring greater judgment

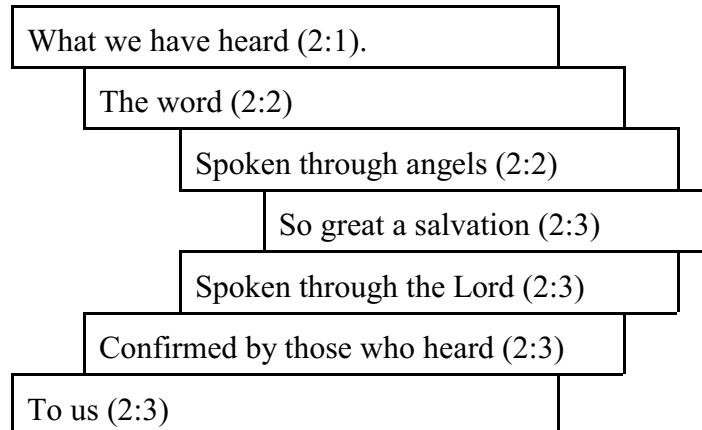
The commands of the Mosaic Law were very rigid. The breaking of those commands called for strict punishment. Very often, an infraction called for death. One who neglected the commandments of God would suffer the wrath of God. If such wrath was certain then how much more shall that wrath be certain today as men neglect God's Son?

The writer is taking the very fact that his readers are fascinated with angels and with their power and their glory and he is using that fact to draw attention to the importance of Jesus. If angels are great, and they are, then how much greater is the One who is a Son? Angels are messengers of God and servants of God, but they are not the Son Himself. If angels bore witness to the Son and if ignoring the word of angels is dangerous, then how much more dangerous is it to ignore the Son about whom the angels testified?

THE CONFIRMATION OF SALVATION

...After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us who heard, God also bearing witness with them both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will." (Hebrews 2:3b-4).

These verses form the second half of a parallel that was begun in verse 1. This type of parallelism is called a chiasm. We will see this sort of parallelism a number of times in the Bible. It begins with a point and it comes full circle to end with that same point. Each point of the parallel is seen in either contrast or as a comparison to its alternate point. It looks like this:



The pivotal point in this parallel is the salvation which has been declared by both God and angels. The danger is that this salvation might be ignored. The reason that it is so dangerous to ignore the salvation of God is because it has been confirmed with signs and wonders.

You see, most of the Jews who made up the church in Jerusalem had not heard Jesus preach. It has been over 30 years since the crucifixion of Jesus. Most of those who made up the church at Jerusalem had entered through the preaching of others. This was a “second-generation church.”

How were they to know that they had heard a true message? It was because of the signs and wonders of confirmation. When Jesus taught, He often performed miracles. There was a reason for this. It was not merely to get the attention of His audience. It was not to entertain them. The reason He performed miracles was so that they would know that the teachings He gave were of God. Those miracles were signs of confirmation. Jesus offered His miracles to the Jews as evidence that He was from God.

...though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.” (John 10:38b).

Peter offered the same evidence of the authenticity of Jesus when he preached Christ to the Jews.

“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know.” (Acts 2:22).

But the signs and wonders and miracles did not end with Jesus Christ. He promised that His apostles would also manifest such signs and wonders.

“And these signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it shall not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover. (Mark 16:17-18).

All of these signs were performed by the apostles in the years that followed the birth of the church. The book of Acts attests to the fulfillment of these miracles. For example, it tells of an instance in which the Apostle Paul was bitten by a snake, yet suffered no ill effects (Acts 28:3-5).

The writer to the Hebrews is very specific as to the reason for these miracles. It was God's way of bearing witness to the confirmation of the message that was preached by these apostles. God wanted people to know that the message which the apostles proclaimed was the same as that which Jesus had brought. Therefore, He gave them the same miracles which He gave to Jesus. The things that the apostles said were not their own opinions. This message was from God.

The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles (2 Corinthians 12:12).

How could you tell if a man who claimed to be an apostle was really an apostle? It was because he would back up his message with "signs and wonders and miracles. This brings us to a question. Are those miraculous gifts still operating today? I do not think so. Notice that they are described as something which took place in the historical past. The writer of Hebrews does not say that these miraculous gifts are still taking place. He does not say that the message of the apostles is still being confirmed in this way. He says that this confirmation took place in the past when they first heard the message.

That time of "signs and wonders and by various miracles" has ended. We no longer need such confirmation. Today we have a different means of confirmation. It is the confirmation of the completed Scriptures.

Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in

the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:30-31).

The books which make up the New Testament have been given to us as confirmation that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Have you accepted that message? Or have you been guilty of neglecting that great gift of salvation? We have seen the warning. Now you must decide if you will pay heed to it.

WHEN GOD BECAME MAN

Hebrews 2:5-10

What is man, that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him? (Psalm 8:5).

Three boys were arguing over whose father had the better job. “My father has a great job,” said the first boy. “He is a writer and he sits at a desk and types words onto a page and people pay for doing that.”

The second boy said, “My father has a better job than that. He’s a composer. He spends a few hours drawing a bunch of dots and lines onto a page and calls it a song and people pay him for it.” The third boy said, “My dad’s job is better than either one. He is a preacher. He stands up and talks for half an hour on Sunday morning and it takes six men to carry in all the money.”

There are some things that are good and some things that are better. There are a lot of good things in the Bible, but the message of the book of Hebrews is that Jesus is better.

- He is better than the prophets (1:1-3). God spoke at many times and in many ways through the prophets, but His ultimate communication to man was through His Son.
- He is better than the angels (1:4-14). Jesus has a better name than the angels. He is worthy of worship from the angels. He reigns over an eternal kingdom in which angels are only servants. He created everything, including the angels. He is the sovereign ruler over all things while the angels are mere ministers in His kingdom.

In light of the superiority of Jesus over the angels, the writer gives a sober

warning against neglecting the salvation that God has provided through His Son (2:1-4).

Now, as we come to Hebrews 2:5, it seems as though the writer continues the theme of the superiority of Jesus over the angels, presenting still another reason why Jesus is better than the angels. However, I am not certain that this is the case. The writer has already proven the point that Jesus is superior to the angels. Seven Old Testament Scriptures have been quoted to prove this point. Instead, I would like to suggest that the writer is now anticipating several obvious objections to the teaching that Jesus is superior to the angels. The objections go like this:

- ♦ How can Jesus be better than the angels if He had a mortal body while they have always been immortal?
- ♦ How can Jesus be better than the angels if He suffered the humility of the cross?
- ♦ How can Jesus be better than the angels if He died while no angel has ever suffered death?

The answer will be that Jesus took on a mortal body and He suffered the humility of the cross and He died so that He could be exalted. Thus, He who was first made low has now been lifted up above every creature. This is seen in three parts:

Hebrews 2:5	Hebrews 2:6-8	Hebrews 2:9-10
The Role of Angels	The Role of Man	The Role of Jesus
The world is not subject to the angels as it is to Jesus.	Man has been elevated to a position just a little lower than the angels, but everything is not presently subject to him.	Jesus was made a man, a little lower than the angels, that He might be exalted above all.

THE ROLE OF ANGELS

For He did not subject to the angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking. (Hebrews 2:5).

When you talk about the “world to come,” you normally think about heaven and a future state when God is sitting on a throne and all wrong things have been made right. The Old Testament is filled with promises of the day when God would set up His Kingdom upon the earth, a kingdom that would never be destroyed, and which would itself overcome all other kingdoms.

And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. (Daniel 2:44).

I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven, One like the Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him.

And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13-14).

Notice that the dominion of the earth was to be given to “One like the Son of Man.” When God created the first man, He told him to rule the earth and to exercise dominion over it (Genesis 1:28). Man lost that dominion when he rebelled against God and fell into sin. That is why weeds grow and insects bite and crops die.

One of the reasons that Jesus came to die was to regain that lost dominion. That dominion was won at in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. The dominion of the Kingdom was never promised to the angels. But it has been promised to the Son of Man, Jesus Christ.

THE ROLE OF MAN

But one has testified somewhere, saying, “What is man, that Thou rememberest him?

“Thou hast made him for a little while lower than the angels; Thou has crowned him with glory and honor, and hast appointed him over the works of Thy hands; 8 Thou hast

*put all things in subjection under his feet." For in subiecting
all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him.
But now we do not yet see all things subiected to Him."*
(Hebrews 2:6-8).

The dominion of the world to come was never promised to the angels. But the writer of the Old Testament Psalm pointed out that God has put all things under the feet of man. The passage quoted is from Psalm 8:4-6. It is a Psalm of David. It is a song of praise. But I want to point out something. The writer of Hebrews does not name the author of this Psalm which he quotes. This does not mean that he did not know that David was the author. He does not name the author of any of the multitude of quotations from the Old Testament that he uses throughout this book. There is a reason for this. The reason is that he does not want to focus attention on the Old Testament writers. He wants to focus attention on Christ.

What is man, that Thou rememberest him? (2:6).

This is a rhetorical question. It expects no answer because the answer is obvious. What is man? Is he worthy of God's consideration? No. The only reason that God considers man is because of the work of Jesus on man's behalf.

I imagine that David wrote this Psalm one evening as he looked out into the silver starlight over Jerusalem. He sees the splendor of the heavens and he bursts forth in song.

*When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers,
the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; 5 what is
man, that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of
man, that Thou dost care for him? (Psalm 8:4-5).*

As David looks at the awesome works of the Lord, he asks why such a God would even bother with mankind. Go out and look at an anthill. Those ants are so much smaller and so much more insignificant than you are. The gap between God and man is infinitely greater than that which is between you and those ants. However, God has not only bothered with man, but He has crowned him with glory and honor and has appointed him over the creation and has put all things in subjection under his feet. Man has been given an exalted position in the universe. That position will one day be exalted even higher.

Thou hast made him for a little while lower than the angels (2:7).

Man is only a little lower than the angels. That is pretty high. That is higher than everything else in this universe. But this lower status will not last. It is only for “a little while.” There is coming a day when man will be equal to the angels (Luke 20:34-36).

Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet (2:8).

When God created Adam and the woman, He ordained that the entire creation be placed in subjection to them.

Then God said, “Let Us make man in our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” (Genesis 1:26).

Man was to rule. He was given dominion over the entire earth. All things were placed under his feet. He was the lord of creation. He was the king of the earth. He was the sovereign of this planet. But something happened. Man lost the dominion that God gave to him.

But now we do not yet see all things subjected to Him (2:8).

Man lost his dominion over creation when he fell into sin. Before that time, he was lord over all that the Lord had created. But now, he would have to fight with creation in order to sustain a living. On the day that Adam sinned, the Lord pronounced a curse upon the earth and all the lived upon it.

Then to Adam He said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, You shall not eat from it; Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life.

“Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field; 19 By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you will return.” (Genesis 3:17-19).

The curse on the earth and all life which lived upon it was threefold.

- ♦ First, the ground was cursed. It entered a state of de-evolution. Instead of getting better and better, it is getting worse and worse.
- ♦ As a result the curse on the ground, man will experience a life of endless, unproductive toil. He will spend his life in a struggle against the earth and then he will die before he can realize the fruits of his labors.
- ♦ Finally, the man will experience death. Although his days on the earth may be long, they are limited in number. He will eventually die. Death statistics are astounding. Every ten out of ten people die. Before the fall there was no death. Death came as a result of sin.

There is coming a day when all of that will change. There is coming a day when the old order of things will be changed. There is coming a day when the curse will be lifted. There is coming a day when man's toil will be laid to rest. There is coming a day when death will be conquered.

For creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth until now.

And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. (Romans 8:20-23).

The world is not as it was meant to be. It entered a state of futility. But there is good news ahead. The earth awaits a rebirth. It will one day be restored. There is coming a day when God will restore the earth to it's former glory. That which has been polluted by the effects of sin will be cleansed. That which today sees violence and destruction will one day become a paradise of peace. We also await a rebirth. We have already been born again on the inside, but we also look forward to a renewal of our bodies.

THE ROLE OF JESUS

But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. (Hebrews 2:9-10).

Now we see come to the purpose for this passage. It is an answer to the objections that would arise from claiming that Jesus is better than the angels.

Jesus was a man. Aren't men inferior to angels? If Jesus was a man, then wouldn't He be inferior to angels? If Jesus is inferior to angels, then wouldn't the teachings of Jesus be inferior to the teachings of the Law which came through angels?

Now we see the answer. It is that man was originally created to be higher than the angels. But man fell. Man sinned. Therefore it became necessary for Jesus to become a man and to become lower than the angels. However, He became lower than the angels in order to lift men higher than the angels.

But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels (2:9).

Now we turn our attention from man to the One who became man. We see Jesus. When Jesus was born, He took on an infinitely lower position than that which He had held for all eternity. He became a man. As a man, He placed Himself in subjection.

He placed Himself in subjection to His foster parents. He placed Himself in subjection to the laws of the land. He placed Himself in subjection to the rulers of the nation. He placed Himself in subjection to the I.R.S., to the Roman taxation system.

During that time, though He was God in the flesh, He lived under the authority of others. That period of subjection was crowned at the cross.

Because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and

honor (2:9).

Jesus came to die. When we think of the death of Christ, we picture the bloodstained cross and the tortured mass of quivering flesh that hung naked upon it. We hear the jeers and taunts of those who were the enemies of the Lord and we hear the rattle of the soldier's dice as the guards gamble over the robe of Jesus. This is a picture of suffering and of death. But we must never think of that picture as a picture of defeat. It was not a defeat, but a glorious victory. It is in the midst of that suffering of death that we see Jesus crowned with glory and honor.

And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Therefore, also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth.

And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:8-11).

Jesus humbled Himself to the point of death. He died. You know that. What you must also know is that He died for you. He took your place on the cross. In heaven today sits the One who became a man. That Man is Jesus. He is the only perfect and righteous man. You have been predestined to be conformed into His image. You are a co-heir with Him. You will share in His inheritance.

JESUS THE KINSMAN REDEEMER

Hebrews 2:11-18

He has sent redemption to His people; He has ordained His covenant forever; holy and awesome is His name. (Psalm 111:9).

We live in a country and a culture in which freedom is taken for granted. It has not always been the case. Slavery was a very common institution in the ancient world. There were a number of ways in which a man might become a slave.

- ♦ He might be born into slavery. The son of a slave was himself considered a slave.
- ♦ He might be captured by an invading army and become a prized captive, led away in chains to a foreign country to be sold as a slave.
- ♦ He might fall into debt so that he was forced to declare bankruptcy. This involved selling yourself into slavery to pay the debts that were owed.

Picture the situation of this last scenario. An Israelite living in the land of Palestine is hit with economic disaster. Perhaps a famine has come over the land and wiped out his crops. Rather than resort to begging, he sells himself into slavery, using the proceeds to pay off his debts and to care for his starving family. He becomes a slave. Can he ever regain his freedom? Yes. But it can only happen if the redemption price is paid.

Now if the means of a stranger or of a sojourner with you becomes sufficient, and a countryman of yours becomes

so poor with regard to him as to sell himself to a stranger who is sojourning with you, or to the descendants of a stranger's family, 48 then he shall have redemption right after he has been sold. One of his brothers may redeem him, 49 or his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or one of his blood relatives from his family may redeem him; or if he prospers, he may redeem himself." (Leviticus 25:47-49).

This was the Law of the Kinsman Redeemer. It listed four qualifications which were necessary for a man to fulfill the role of Kinsman Redeemer. It was only when a man possessed these four qualities that he was permitted to perform this task.

1. He must be a Kinsman.

The passage is very explicit that this redeemer must be related to the one whom he is going to buy back out of slavery.

2. He must be Free himself.

A slave was unable to purchase another slave. A Kinsman Redeemer must be himself free of the debt and of the bondage which had fallen on the one who was to be redeemed.

3. He must be able to Pay the Price.

If he did not have the necessary sum of money which was required to pay the purchase price, then he would not be able to redeem his relative. There was a price and it must be paid.

4. He must be Willing to pay the price.

It was not enough to have a kinsman who was able to accomplish the work of redemption. He must also be willing to make the sacrifice of paying the price. I imagine that there were a number of slaves with rich uncles who just didn't want to spend the money to release their unfortunate relative from slavery.

Each of these qualifications was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. God sent Jesus into the world's slave market of sin to purchase men from their bondage of sin. He alone met the qualifications of the Kinsman Redeemer. He became a

Kinsman by taking on flesh and becoming a man. He was free from the bondage of sin. He was able to pay the ransom price. He was willing to pay the price.

THE PROMISE OF A KINSMAN

For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying, “I will proclaim Thy name to My brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will sing Thy praise.”

And again, “I will put My trust in Him.” And again, “Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me.” (Hebrews 2:11-13).

The Old Testament prophets promised that One would come who would be the Kinsman Redeemer of all men. He would set right those things that had been made wrong by sin. He would set free those who were in bondage to sin. He would purify those who were unclean. He would sanctify His people.

For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father (2:11).

The work of Christ did much more than merely provide a fire insurance claim from hell. He set you apart. He sanctified you. He made you a part of a special people which is known as the family of God. This is what it means to be sanctified. If you have come to Christ, then you have become a member of the family of God. The God of the universe is now your Father. You are His child. You have entered into an eternal relationship.

This principle of sanctification was rooted in Jewish theology. To sanctify something meant to set it apart for a special purpose. For example, when a man went up to Jerusalem and gave an offering of money to the Temple, those coins were sanctified, that is, they were set apart for the use of the Temple.

The Jews were a set apart people. Their entire culture set them apart from the rest of the world. They ate differently than other people. They dressed differently than other people. They lived differently than other people. They worshiped differently than other people. They were different.

Jesus came to make men different. He loves you just the way you are, but He loves you too much to leave you the way you are. If you come to Him, then He is going to change you. He is first going to bring you into the family of God and then He is going to change your life so that there will be a growing family resemblance between you and your Heavenly Father.

The Jews were set apart on the outside. They did all sorts of exterior things to set themselves apart. But Jesus came to set you apart on the inside. He came to make you a child of God. He entered the family of men so that men could enter the family of God. This is not a new teaching. It was prophesied by the Old Testament prophets.

I will proclaim Thy name to My brethren (2:12).

This quotation is taken from Psalm 22:22. It is a Messianic Psalm. It is the Psalm that opens with the cry of Jesus upon the cross when He screamed, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” It is the Psalm that focuses on the sufferings of the Messiah. But now, He who was once crucified has been exalted. On the basis of the ministry of His death, He now proclaims the name of the Lord to His people. This is important. The reason that Christ became man and was made lower than the angels was so that He could call men His brethren. It is through Him that we can be known as the children of God.

I will put My trust in Him (2:13).

This second quotation is taken from Isaiah 8:17. Isaiah writes in a day when the Assyrian armies loom on the horizon. They will soon march against Israel and devastate the land. There will be only one way of escape , to trust in the Lord and to wait for His salvation.

The book of Hebrews is written to such a people. Now it is the legions of Rome which loom on the horizon. Within a few years, the Roman general Titus will besiege the city of Jerusalem and the land will be laid waste. There will be only one thing that the people can do; trust in the Lord.

There is a lesson here. It is that adversity teaches us to trust in the Lord. One day after we had experienced a series of rather expensive automotive problems, my wife said, “I wish that someone would give us a lot of money.” Now, I want you to know that I would not complain in the least if someone were to fulfill that wish. However, the Lord has given us those needs for a

reason. They are given so that we will trust in Him.

Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me (2:13).

This third quotation is also from Isaiah 8. It quotes from the very next verse. It describes the identity of those who are trusting in God. They are the children of God. This is important. The Jews thought that they were the children of God because they were descended from Abraham. But a child of God is one who trusts in God.

The same principle is true today. Having Christian parents will not save you. Joining a church will not help you. Only God can save. He calls you for this purpose to faith in His Son. You are called to enter into a family relationship with God in faith.

THE COMING OF THE KINSMAN

Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook in the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; 15 and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. (Hebrews 2:14-15).

Jesus fulfilled all of the requirements of the Kinsman Redeemer. We covered those requirements at the beginning of this chapter, but it will help to repeat them.

- ♦ He must be a Kinsman.
- ♦ He must be Free himself.
- ♦ He must be able to Pay the Price.
- ♦ He must be Willing to pay the price.

Each of these qualifications was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. They are seen in this passage. This is seen in verse 14.

Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook in the same (2:14).

Since the ones who were to become children were flesh and blood, that is,

they were mortal men, so also Christ took on flesh and blood and became a mortal man. This was one of the requirements of the Kinsman Redeemer. He must be a Kinsman. He must be related to the ones whom he is going to purchase from slavery. Jesus took on flesh and became a Kinsman to the human race in order that He might redeem men from sin. Christ was our Kinsman Redeemer. He fulfilled all four of the requirements of the Kinsman Redeemer.

1. He became a Kinsman.

It was impossible for God to save us apart from the incarnation of Christ. God could not die for us because God cannot die. He is eternal life and He is the source of all life. Only by being born as a man and taking on human flesh could He experience death for us.

2. He was free from the bondage of sin.

Jesus Christ was the only man who has ever been free from sin. From the day that Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden to this day, all have been under that bondage. Only Christ was qualified to set us free.

3. He was able to pay the ransom price.

Even if there had been another man who had been without sin, the death of such a man would still be lacking the infinite merit to pay for the sins of the whole world. At best, the sacrifice of a finite man could only atone for the sins of a single man. But the death of Christ was not the death of a mere man. It was the death of an infinite being. It was the death of God in the flesh. God died in our place. Only the death of such a One could have been sufficient to save the world.

4. He was willing to pay the price.

This is the most amazing truth of all. God loved us enough to send His Son to die in our place. When the venerable theologian, Karl Barth, was asked what was the most profound truth that he had ever learned, he replied:

Jesus loves me, this I know,
For the Bible tells me so.

This is the great message of the gospel. It is the message that God's love has triumphed over the work of Satan to set us free.

That through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil (2:14).

Here is the reason why Christ became flesh and joined the human race. It was so that He might nullify death. It was so that He might bring to naught the work of Satan.

What does Satan have to do with death? It was Satan who deceived the woman in the Garden of Eden and thereby brought sin into the world. Satan's plan was to undo God's perfect work of creation. God had created man in His own image. Satan caused that image to fall. Christ, through His death on the cross, restored that perfect image and conquered death. Not all the hosts of darkness were able to keep the Son of God in the grave. He arose from the dead, proving that He had conquered Satan once and for all.

And might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives" (2:15).

Men have always suffered from a fear of death. You have only to watch the reaction of a man in his physician's office as he is told he has a malignant cancer to understand that this fear is a reality.

We have been set free from the fear of death. We can actually look forward to death. Death is no longer the end. It is now the beginning. It is a promotion to a higher kind of living.

THE NECESSITY OF A KINSMAN

For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham.

Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. (Hebrews 2:16-17).

The writer now ties in these truths concerning the Kinsman Redeemer with the previous message about how Christ is better than the angels.

Jesus is better than the angels even though He took on flesh and became a little lower than the angels. He did not do that for the sake of the angels. He did it for the sake of the descendants of Abraham. Do you remember the promise that was made to Abraham? It was a promise that God would bless him.

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you; 2 and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; 3 and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12:1-3).

God appeared to Abram and told him to leave his family and his country and to move to a new land. In return, God promised to bless Abram and to make him a blessing. Notice the last phrase of this promise. *“In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”* This blessing to Abram will have far-reaching effects. It will extend to all the families of the earth.

Don’t miss this! You can partake of that blessing which was given to Abraham when you put your faith in the God of Abraham. At such a time, you become one of Abraham’s spiritual children.

And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:29).

Do you belong to Christ? It is only those who belong to Him who will be heirs with Abraham. It is only those who belong to Him who are the true children of Abraham.

Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things (2:17).

In order to bring salvation to Abraham and his descendants, Christ had to become one of Abraham’s descendants. He did not merely become a man. He became a Jew. He did this in fulfillment of the promise. He is the blessing through which all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

That He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in

things pertaining to God (2:17).

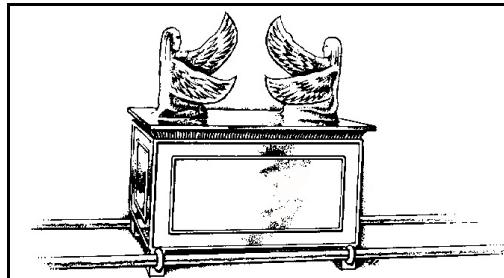
Here we see a theme introduced which shall be developed more fully in the chapters which follow. It is the theme that Jesus is our high priest. The office of high priest was the highest religious office in Judaism. The high priest was the one who entered the Holy of Holies once a year to offer sacrifices for the sins of the nation.

The high priest in the days of Jesus had been Caiaphas. He was anything but merciful or faithful. He was a false shepherd. He was not merciful, for he was ready to condemn the One who had never sinned. He was not faithful, for he rejected the message of the Son of God. But Jesus is the true shepherd. He is merciful with those who have transgressed against Him. He is faithful and just to forgive their sins. He offered the perfect sacrifice.

To make propitiation for the sins of the people (2:17).

The word “propitiation” refers to an appeasement, a payment that satisfies. This word was used by the Greeks to describe an offering that was brought to appease the wrath of an angry god. For example, in the midst of a violent storm, the people would think that they had offended Poseidon, the storm god. In an effort to satisfy his anger, they would offer a sacrifice. When the storm ended, they would say that his anger had been propitiated.

But there was also another use of this word. In Jewish theology, the place of propitiation was located inside the Temple. At the very center of the Temple was the Holy of Holies. Within this room there had stood a single article of furniture. It was the Ark of the Covenant. It was a wooden box overlaid with gold. It held Aaron’s rod, a bowel of manna, and the broken remains of the Ten Commandments. The cover of the Ark was made of solid gold. This was known as the Mercy Seat. It also had another name. It was called the *hilasterion*. It was called the Propitiation, the place of satisfaction. It was here that the high priest would come once a year to offer a sacrifice for the sins of the nation.



Jesus is our high priest. He has made an offering for our sins. He has

appeased the righteous anger of God. He bore the wrath of God in His own body on the cross. He is the place of God's satisfaction, the place where God's righteous judgment against sin was satisfied.

THE REDEEMER WHO SUFFERED

For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted. (Hebrews 2:18).

Here is another reason that Christ became flesh and joined the human race. It is so that He might be tempted as we are tempted and that He might suffer as we suffer. Jesus didn't just come to earth and then die. He also went through all the hurts and the pains and the testings that are part of life.

He suffered bodily hunger. He suffered the grief of the death of a loved one. He suffered the betrayal of a friend. He suffered the taunts of his enemies. He suffered the temptations of Satan.

Because He suffered all these things, He is able to understand and empathize with our sufferings and our temptations. Are you going through hard times? Jesus understands. He has been there. He went through those same kinds of experiences. He knows how to help. You don't have a cosmic God who is indifferent to your daily problems. You have a God who is intimately acquainted with your problems. You have a God who has been there. He has hurt where you hurt. He has cried where you cry. He has been tempted where you are tempted. Because of that, He is able to help.

CHRIST AND MOSES

Hebrews 3:1-6

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your country-men, you shall listen to him. (Deuteronomy 18:15).

Of all of the characters of the Old Testament, there was none who was revered and held in such high esteem by the Jews as Moses. He was the man who spoke to God face to face. He was the man who was entrusted with God's holy law. He was the man who was chosen by God to lead the Israelites out of their slavery in Egypt. He was Simon Bolivar and George Washington and Abraham Lincoln all rolled up into one.

Throughout his life, the hand of the Lord was upon him. God protected him as a young child, when the Pharaoh of Egypt; had condemned all male Hebrew children to death. Through a fantastic process of circumstances, the young Moses came to be adopted by the daughter of Pharaoh so that he was raised and educated in the palaces of Egypt. As a man, he attempted to begin the deliverance of his people by murdering an Egyptian taskmaster. As a result, he was forced to flee to the wilderness. But even here he was not forgotten and God appeared to him and commissioned him.

Moses stood before Pharaoh, the most powerful king in all the world in that day. Through the hands of Moses great and awesome plagues were brought against the land of Egypt, devastating the land until the Pharaoh was forced to release the Hebrews.

Moses led the people through the Red Sea and by his hand, the armies of Egypt were destroyed when they attempted to follow. He went up to meet God on Mount Sinai and was given the Law of God. Forever after, it was known as the Law of Moses. Later, when the people had broken the Law, he

served as the advocate for the people, pleading for their forgiveness. When he came down from Mount Sinai, his face shown with the reflected glory of God. Even in death, the hand of God was on Moses, digging his grave and burying him on Mount Nebo.

He was the prophet and priest and king. And yet, as great as Moses was, the writer to the Hebrews points out that there is One who is better. That One is Jesus.

CONSIDER JESUS

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

Notice how this chapter begins. It begins with the word “therefore.” Whenever you see the word “therefore” it is there for a reason. The reason takes us back to the previous chapter. What did we see in the previous chapter? We saw that...

- ♦ Jesus is better than the angels because He holds a higher position than the angels.
- ♦ Jesus is better than the angels even though He suffered and died because He suffered and died in order to defeat death and the devil.
- ♦ Jesus was made like us (human) so that He could come to the aid of humans in a way in which no angel ever could.

This is addressed to Hebrew Christians. That is why we call this epistle by the name of Hebrews. They have heard the message that Jesus died for their sins and rose again from the dead. They have accepted that message. They became Christians. They became *“partakers of a heavenly calling.”* But now there is a problem. Some of them have begun to turn away from Christ. They have begun to turn back to the Mosaic Law. They are turning from Christ back to Moses. Because of this, they are called upon to “consider Jesus.”

Consider Jesus (3:1). What does it mean to “consider Jesus”?

- ♦ It means to focus our attention upon Him - who He is and what He has accomplished on our behalf.
- ♦ It means to trust in Him, believing in Him as our Lord and as our Savior.
- ♦ It means that we ought to reflect and meditate upon His person, directing our love and devotion toward Him.

You might be saying, “How does this apply to me? After all, I’m not being tempted to return to Judaism.” However, you might be going after something else. You might be following after your own good works. You might be focusing on some religious experience. You might have your eyes on some spiritual leader. Or you might be looking at your past life before you came to Christ and thinking of those times as “the good old days. If this is the case, then you need to consider Jesus. When problems come, consider Jesus. When temptations arise, consider Jesus. When you get ready to throw in the towel, consider Jesus.

Why is it so important to consider Jesus? Because if you are a Christian, then He is your goal in life. You are running in a spiritual race. There is a goal. You are going somewhere. Your life is not the product of blind chance. It has a purpose. It has a goal. The goal is Jesus. One of these days, you are going to become just like Him. In the meantime, you are moving in that direction.

REASONS TO CONSIDER JESUS

1. They ought to consider Jesus because of who they are: *Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling... (3:1)*.

- ♦ They are brothers.

This epistle is written to Hebrews. That is why we call it the epistle to the Hebrews. They are Jewish. They are all descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We ought never to forget that, if we are Gentiles, then we are reading someone else’s mail.

- ♦ They are holy brethren.

They have been set apart as a special family. That is what the word “holy” means. It literally describes something that has been “set apart.”

The Jews did not set themselves apart. They are not special because they decided to be special. Theirs is not a self-imposed holiness. They are holy because God has made them holy. He called them to be His special set apart people.

- ♦ They are partakers of a heavenly calling.

This epistle is written to those who are heaven bound. They are not heaven bound because they are good or deserving. They are heaven bound because of the grace of God. That is the only way that anyone anywhere can hope to reach heaven.

The word translated “partakers” is the Greek word μετοχοι (*metochoi*). It is used in Luke 5:7 to speak of “partners” in the fishing business.

This is written to people who have already come to know Jesus. They are a part of the earliest church. They are “holy brethren” and “partakers of a heavenly calling,” not because of their goodness or even because of their Jewishness, but because of Jesus. They have come to faith in Him.

This means that this passage can be applied to us who are not Jewish. We are also brothers, not in the physical sense, but spiritually. We have also been called to a holy brotherhood. And we have also been made partakers of a heavenly calling. Because of all this, we also ought to consider Jesus.

2. They ought to consider Jesus because of who He is: *...consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession (3:1).*

We have already been introduced to Jesus in this epistle. He has been described as the Son of God (Hebrews 1:2, 5) who sits at the right hand of God. Now we see two other aspects concerning the identity of Jesus.

- ♦ He is the Apostle

When we think of the word “apostle,” we normally think of the Twelve who followed Jesus: Peter, James, John and the others. But the word “apostle” has a wider meaning than merely the twelve disciples.

Our word “apostle” is a transliteration of the Greek word ἀποστελος (*apostelos*) a compound word made up of ἀπο (*apo*) meaning “from” and στελλω (*stello*) meaning, “to send.”. This word was used as early as the Peloponnesian Wars to describe the admiral of the Athenian fleet who was “sent out” with authority to command the navy in battle.

The twelve apostles were given their own apostleship in a similar vein. They were commissioned by Christ and sent forth with authority to be His representatives to the world.

In what sense are we to understand Jesus as the Apostle of our faith? He was sent forth from heaven itself as God’s official representative to mankind. He has been given all authority from heaven to establish His kingdom upon earth.

That is what Jesus said about Himself. “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). It is on the basis of His authority given from heaven that He has delegated authority to the twelve apostles and sent them forth to make disciples of the nations. Jesus was sent from heaven with authority. His authority was given by the Father. When He spoke, He did so with the authority of God.

For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say, and what to speak. (John 12:49).

Jesus did not speak on His own behalf. He spoke the message of God. He spoke the words of God. He is the Apostle of God. But I want to stress that Jesus is not merely an apostle. He is the Apostle. All of the other apostles were appointed by Him. Their authority comes through Him.

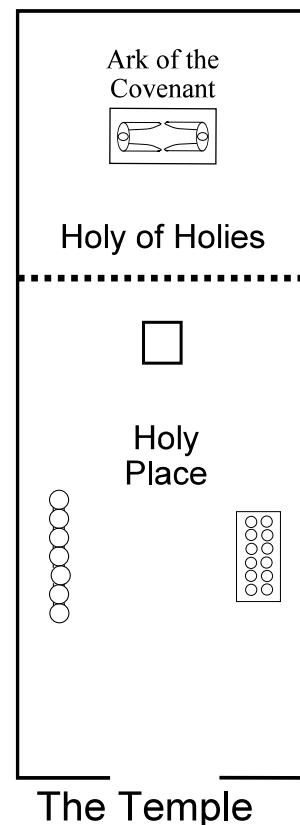
Within the county in which I live, there is a sheriff. He is an

elected official. Now, the Broward County Sheriff's office has quite a number of Deputy Sheriffs. But there is only one who is The Sheriff. All of the others are merely deputies. They have no authority of their own. They have been delegated their authority from the Sheriff. This is what Jesus did. He delegated his authority to certain men. They became apostles because He delegated His authority to them.

- ♦ He is the High Priest of our Confession.

We have already been introduced to the concept of Jesus as our high priest in Hebrews 2:17 where we saw Him described as becoming “a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God.”

Whereas there were many sorts of apostles in the ancient world, there was only one high priest. The high priest in Biblical times was the loftiest office of the entire priesthood. The high priest was the president of the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of Israel. He had the solemn privilege and duty of entering once a year into the innermost part of the Temple to offer the blood of atonement for the sins of the entire nation.



The high priest was the only man in all of Israel who was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies was the innermost sanctum of the Temple. It was separated from the rest of the Temple by a great double veil. Within this room had once stood the Ark of the Covenant on which sat the Mercy Seat, the throne of God.

This room was considered to be the throne-room of God on

earth. It was the most holy place on all the earth. No other man was ever permitted to enter here. Even the high priest was permitted to enter only once a year.

Each year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would pass through the veil and enter into the Holy of Holies. He would approach the presence of God on behalf of the people. He would carry in his hands the blood of a freshly sacrificed animal. He would sprinkle the blood on the Mercy Seat to atone for the sins of the nation. We have a High Priest today. He is Jesus. He has entered into heaven. He has approached the throne of God. He provided Himself as the sacrifice and then He approached God on our behalf.

Remember that this passage is written to Jewish people and it is written at a time when there was still a Temple in Jerusalem and still a high priest serving in that Temple. However, the Christian (whether Jewish or Gentile) has a special high priest who transcends any simple earthly high priest. Our high priest has not entered into an earthly temple. He has entered into heaven itself to become the High Priest of our Confession.

THE WORKS OF JESUS & THE WORKS OF MOSES

He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house. 3 For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house.

For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. (Hebrews 3:2-4).

This section will be a study in contrasts and comparisons. It will involve a series of comparisons and contrasts between Moses and Jesus. That doesn't mean all too much to those of us who are not Jewish. But it meant a great deal to the Hebrew readers of this epistle and it means a lot to Jewish readers of today. Moses is the hero of the Jewish faith. It was he who stood head to head with the pharaoh of Egypt. It was he whom God used to free the

Israelites from their slavery. It was he who led them into the wilderness and brought to them the law of God. It was he who taught them that they were to be a holy nation and a special people. It was he who gave them a promise of a land and a nation.

Moses	Jesus
Moses was faithful (3:2).	Jesus was faithful (3:2).
Moses was given honor (3:3) - He is the representative of the House of God.	Jesus was given more honor (3:3) - He is the builder of the House of God.
Moses was faithful in the House of God as a servant (3:5).	Jesus was faithful in the House of God as a Son over the House (3:5).

1. Moses and Jesus: Two who were Faithful.

He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses was also faithful in all His house (Hebrews 3:2).

One of the most important qualities in an apostle is the he be found faithful, that he discharge the duties for which he was appointed. Jesus is not merely the Apostle of our faith. He is the faithful Apostle. He had a trust committed to Him and He fulfilled that trust.

The point of this comparison is not to make Moses look bad or to lower his perception in the eyes of the Jews. The writer begins this section by affirming the faithfulness of Moses. Even though there were times when Moses sinned, he was generally faithful as a servant to the Lord.

Jesus was also faithful to the Lord. He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises given by Moses himself that there would come One who would be a prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18).

2. Jesus the Builder.

For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house. 4 For every

house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. (Hebrews 3:3-4).

Here we come to the first point of contrast between Jesus and Moses. It is in the area of the creature versus the Creator. We have already said that Moses was faithful as a servant in the House of God. But the faithfulness of Jesus transcends that of a mere servant. Jesus not only served the house, He built the house.

When we read of the “builder of a house” we naturally think of an architect and a contractor and construction workers. While the text is able to carry that meaning, the phrase “builder of the house” can also refer to the founder of a dynasty or the establishment of a household. In this way, we could say that the founder of a royal family has more honor in that family than a faithful servant to that family. This is not a detraction against the faithful servant. It is rather a placing of honor where it is rightfully due. Thus we have two images portrayed in this figure of speech:

- a. The builder of a house.
- b. The head of a family.

Which is in view? They are both correct. It is possible that this is a play on words in which we are to understand both ideas. Jesus is the head and founder of our spiritual family. When you come to faith in Him, you find that He has become your older brother. He is the heir to the kingdom and you have become a co-heir with him.

Jesus is also the maker of heaven and earth. We read in John 1:3 that “*all things were made by Him and without Him there was not anything made that was made.*”

Now we see why Jesus is better than Moses. Moses lived in his house. But Jesus built His house. Moses was merely a servant in the house of Israel. But Jesus was the Son in His house.

Moses	Jesus
He was faithful to his obligations	He was faithful to His obligations

He was born into the house of Israel	He created the house - in fact, He created all things
He ruled over the house of Israel	He rules over the church
He was a servant in the house	He is a Son

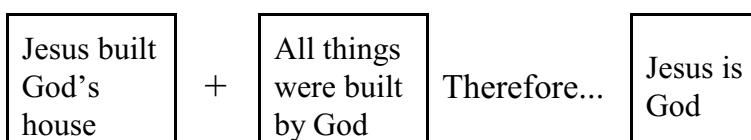
Let me illustrate this relationship. Let us consider two people. The first is Mister homeowner. He has purchased his own home free and clear. The second is Mister Rental. He pays rent in order to live in a house that belongs to a landlord.

The simple truth of the matter is that Mister Homeowner has more authority over the house in which he lives than Mister Rental has over the house in which he lives. Why is this the case? Because one owns the property and the other does not.

The same is true in our comparison of Jesus and Moses. Moses only had the authority of a servant in the House of Israel. But Christ is the Lord over His House. He is Lord because He made His House and every other House. By way of further explanation, the author adds this general statement about the building of things.

For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. (Hebrews 3:3-4).

Do you see the point? We have just seen that it is Jesus who is the builder of the house of God. Now we are told that the builder of all things is God. The conclusion is inescapable.



This is not the only place where we read that Jesus is the Creator of all things. John 1:2 says that *all things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.* The Bible is careful to say that everything that exists today owes its existence ultimately to Jesus.

WHOSE HOUSE ARE YOU?

Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; 6 but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end. (Hebrews 3:5).

Up to this point, everything we have read in the book of Hebrews has been didactic. That is, it has been teaching us about Jesus and how he is better than the angels and how He is worthy of more honor than Moses. But now we move to the realm of the practical in the last part of this verse. It moves from Jesus to speak about us. Notice the continuing analogy of the house:

- ♦ Jesus is the faithful Son over the house.
- ♦ We are of that house.

It is not bad to be a servant. There is nothing dishonorable in being a faithful servant. The writer of the epistle is not putting Moses down in order to lift Christ up. Instead, he is raising Moses up to lift Christ higher.

Jesus is the heir to the household. It is a household to which we belong... if. It is at this point that we are introduced to a conditional clause. We can be said to be holy brethren and partakers of a heavenly calling and members of the household of God if certain conditions are true.

Whenever you see a conditional clause in the New Testament, it is one of four possible types. The following chart sets forth these types and their resulting implications:

Clause	Explanation	Example
1st Class Condition	“If” and it is assumed to be true	“ <i>If you are the Son of God</i> ” (and you are) - Matthew 4:3.
2nd Class Condition	“If” and it is assumed to be false	“ <i>If you will fall down and worship me</i> ” (but you won’t) - Matthew 4:9.

3rd Class Condition	“If” and it might or might not be true	“ <i>If you confess your sins</i> ” (perhaps you will and perhaps you won’t) - 1 John 1:9.
4th Class Condition	“If” and I wish it were true but it isn’t	“ <i>If you are reviled for the name of Christ</i> ” (I wish you were, but you are being reviled for other reasons) - 1 Peter 4:14).

The conditional clause found here in Hebrews 3:6 is a third class condition. The question has not yet been settled in the minds of the readers whether they will indeed continue to hold fast their confidence in Christ. That is why this epistle is being written. It is to warn them of the potential consequences of not enduring in their faith.

What are the conditions which determine whether or not we are members of the household of God? There is only one mentioned. It is the condition of endurance. We are called to “hold fast” (*κατασχωμεν*, the subjunctive plural of *κατασχω*), literally to “get down” our confidence and the boast of our hope. These are not two separate things which we are to “get down.” They are the same thing.

Our confidence = The boast of our hope

Both of these must be held *firm until the end*. It is not to those who begin the race that the victory goes, but to those who finish the race. The story of the Hebrews is of a people who had began well but who were now being tempted to stop. And so a warning is given. The warning is that the victory only goes to those who endure to the end.

Are you a member of God’s household? We would normally answer that question by saying that you are if you have come to trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. But the writer of Hebrews does not put it that way. He would answer the question by saying that you are if you continue to trust in Christ.

Here is the principle. The faith that God gives is a continuing faith. When

God saves a man, He saves Him both permanently and continually. God's people are known because they continue to believe.

How can you tell if a person is really a child of God? Because he believes in Christ and because he goes on believing. He endures in his faith. That doesn't mean that he never stumbles. But he always gets back up. He always comes back. He continues to hold firm to his confidence in Christ.

THE DANGER OF UNBELIEF

Hebrews 3:7-19

6 *Come, let us worship and bow down;
Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.*
7 *For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture,
And the sheep of His hand.
Today if you would hear His voice,*
8 *Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
As in the day of Massah in the wilderness;*
9 *When your fathers tested Me,
They tried Me, though they had seen My work.*
10 *For forty years I loathed that generation,
And said, “They are a people who err in their heart,
And they do not know My ways.”*
11 *Therefore I swore in My anger,
“Truly they shall not enter into My rest.” (Psalm 95:6-11).*

This Psalm contains a call to worship the Lord. It is a Psalm which focuses upon the wonder and the majesty of God. But there is also an exhortation here. It is an exhortation to listen to the voice of the Lord with an open heart. With this exhortation comes a warning. It is a warning of judgment. The warning is based on an event which took place at the very beginning of the history of the nation of Israel.

The family of Jacob had migrated to Egypt in the days of Joseph. Through his influence, they were permitted to settle in Egypt. But eventually they became slaves in Egypt. After a period of 400 years, Moses was called by God to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. Great signs and wonders were used to deliver the Israelites from their captivity. They witnessed the mighty hand of the Lord working on their behalf against Egypt. They saw great

plagues befall the Egyptians through the hands of Moses. They saw the Red Sea parted before them and they passed through its waters. They were led through the Sinai wilderness by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. They were miraculously fed each day. They observed the presence of the Lord filling His tabernacle.

But after all this, when it came time for them to enter into the land that God had promised to them, the Israelites became afraid. They were afraid that God might not be strong enough to accomplish what He had promised. They heard the report of the spies who had been sent into the land and this report emphasized just how big were the inhabitants of that land. In their fear, they rebelled against the Lord. When He commanded them to go in and to take the land that He had promised, they said, "No!" As a result of that rebellion, God condemned that generation. He did not allow them to enter into the promised land. They were condemned to wander in the wilderness. Over the next 40 years the entire generation died in the wilderness.

The writer of the book of Hebrews will be using this Psalm as his text. He will quote from this Psalm and he will give a warning which will be based upon what happened to Israel. There is a contrast to be seen between the previous paragraph and the one to which we now come. It is a contrast between Jesus and Israel. It is a contrast between the faithful versus the unfaithful.

3:1-6	3:7-11	3:12-15	3:16-19
Faithfulness of God seen in Christ	The Example of Israel	Warning against unbelief	Results of disobedience
Christ... <ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ A Promise♦ A House♦ Faithful	Israel... <ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ Unbelief♦ Wilderness♦ Rebellion		Whose example will you follow?

This is going to be a study in contrasts. The faithfulness of Christ will be seen in strong contrast to the faithlessness of Israel in the wilderness. Because of this, we will be left with a decision. Will we follow the example of Christ or the example of Israel?

THE EXAMPLE OF ISRAEL

Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, “Today if you hear His voice, 8 do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, 9 where your fathers tried Me by testing Me, and saw My works for forty years.

“Therefore I was angry with this generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart; and they did not know My ways’; 11 as I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’” (Hebrews 3:7-11).

The writer quotes from the Psalm. He quotes from Psalm 95. This was a very special Psalm to the Jews of that day. It was traditional for them to read this Psalm at the beginning of the Sabbath day. They viewed it as a Psalm which spoke of their Sabbath rest. The word “Sabbath” in Hebrew means “rest.” It was the day which the Lord had given for them to rest from their labors and to remember their God.

1. A Conditioned Decision: *Today if you hear His voice (3:7).*

Notice that there is a choice you have to make. This choice is introduced by the word “if.” The words of the exhortation apply to you if you hear His voice. It indicates that you have a decision to make. You can choose to listen to the voice of God. Or you can choose to ignore it. There is no third choice. You are going to do one of these two options. In fact, you are doing one of these two things right now. This is not a call to do something in the future. It is a call for the nasty here and now. It is a call to do something today.

This is a 3rd class conditional clause, indicating the uncertainty as to whether the readers will indeed hear the voice of the Lord.

2. The Warning: *Do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me (3:7).*

The warning is given. It is that you do not harden your heart. What does this mean? How do you harden your heart? You do it by developing callouses. I used to play the guitar. When I first started to learn to play, it was difficult. After only a few minutes, the fingers

of my left hand would begin to hurt from pressing down on the strings. But as I continued to practice each day, something happened. The ends of my fingers became hardened. They began to develop calluses. Soon my fingers did not hurt when I played the guitar.

Your heart can become hardened or callused in the same way. When you first reject a portion of God's truth, it is difficult. His truth strikes to your very heart and touches you. There is guilt. But if you continue to turn away from His truth and if you continue to reject what He has to say, then soon you will develop spiritual calluses. Your heart will become hardened so that God's word can no longer penetrate. The result of this kind of hardening to the Word of God is tragic. It is seen in the example of Israel in the wilderness.

3. The Example of Israel: *As when they provoked Me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness (3:8).*

The writer alludes to an event which was rooted in the early history of the Jews. This was a part of their national heritage. It was the event of the sin of Israel in the wilderness.

The Israelites in the wilderness had no reason to disbelieve God. They had seen His mighty power in the land of Egypt working on their behalf. They had seen the great plagues fall upon the Egyptians through the hands of Moses. They had seen the Red Sea parted before them and they had passed through its waters and they had seen the Egyptian army perish when it tried to follow. They had been led through the Sinai wilderness by cloud and fire. They had been miraculously fed and sustained upon their journey.

After all of these things, when it came time for them to enter into the land that God had promised them, they became afraid. They determined not to obey God. They called God a liar. They said, "God promised more than He is able to deliver." In so doing, they provoked God.

Because of this, the entire generation of Israelites was doomed to die in the desert. The only two men of that entire generation who were permitted to enter into the land were Joshua and Caleb. The same generation that was saved out of Egypt by the blood of the Passover lamb and who went through the Red Sea with Moses and who was

given the Law at Sinai went on to die in the wilderness. They never entered the land. They never received the promise.

Why? Because they did not continue in belief. They hardened their hearts against the Lord and they rejected His word. As a result, they died in the wilderness.

WARNING AGAINST UNBELIEF

¹² *Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God.*

¹³ *But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “today,” lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*

¹⁴ *For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end; ¹⁵ while it is said, “Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me.” (Hebrews 3:12-15).*

Now there is a warning. The warning is given on the basis of the experience of their forefathers. They are to learn from the mistakes of Israel. This is significant. The Bible is not merely a history book full of nice stories. These narratives are given for a reason. They are given so that we might learn from those past mistakes.

1. The Basis of the Warning: *Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God (3:12).*

Notice the title that the writer uses for God. He calls Him the “Living God.” There is a reason for this. The same God who brought judgment against the Israelites in the wilderness is still alive and well. He is the God that will one day judge you. One day you will stand before the living God.

Back in the 1960's a number of liberal theologians declared that God is dead. Those theologians are now all dead, but God is still alive. Because there is a Living God, we are to take heed lest we follow in Israel's footsteps.

This is a warning to all who have come to Christianity. It is a warning to all who have ever followed Christ. It is a warning to Christians. It is a warning to you. The warning is against falling away. The phrase “falling away” is translated from the single Greek participle ἀποστηματι (apostenai), from which we get our word “apostasy.” There is a danger. It is the danger of apostasy. It is that you might find yourself falling away from the Living God.

What does this mean? You must remember the context in which this is written. This is written to Hebrew Christians who were being persecuted for their faith. They have been brought up to worship in the Temple and to keep the Sabbath according to the Scriptures. But now as they turn from the Law to follow Christ, they are faced with persecution. As a result, they will be tempted to leave Christ and return to the comfort of their Jewish ceremonial system. They will be tempted to apostatize. This epistle is written to encourage these believers to remain in the faith.

Do you see the point? To depart from faith in Christ is to depart from “the living God.” This was a particularly Jewish designation for God. Remember that when Caiaphas wished to bind the words of Jesus, he said to Him, “*I adjure you by the living God*” (Matthew 26:63). The reason that apostasy is so terrible is because God is the Living God. It isn’t a bad thing to depart from a dead god. But God is the God of life and to depart from Him means that you are departing from the source of life.

2. The Warning of a Gradual Departure: *But encourage one another... lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (3:13).*

There is a danger. It is not that you might make a sudden departure from the faith. Most people do not go that route. Rather, the danger is that you might be gradually *hardened by the deceitfulness of sin*. Sin is like that. It grows on you. Each time you sin, you tend to go a little further. Each time you sin, it becomes a little easier. Eventually you will reach the place which it doesn’t bother you at all.

3. The Requirement of Endurance: *For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end (3:14).*

There is an important principle here that I want you to see. It is that we have become partakers with Christ. This has tremendous implications. If you have trusted in Christ as your Lord and Savior, then you have entered into a living relationship with Him. You have been identified with Christ.

- Because He is the Son of God, you have become a child of God.
- Because He is righteous, you also have been declared to be righteous, justified through faith.
- Because He is holy, He has set you apart and made you holy.
- Because He has eternal life, you also share in that same eternal life.
- Because He has risen from the dead, you also one day will rise from the dead.
- Because He is the heir to the kingdom of God, you have become a co-heir with Christ.

These are all a result of your relationship in Christ. But that relationship only exists if you *hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.*

Here is an important truth. It is the truth of endurance. You are only a part of the household of Christ if you have an enduring faith. You cannot come to Christ for a few minutes and then turn around and reject Him for the rest of your life and expect to be saved.

At this point, you may object, “But that means you can lose your salvation!” No it doesn’t. But it does mean that real faith is lasting faith. Your salvation is not a work which is accomplished by you. It isn’t accomplished by your good works. It isn’t accomplished by your endurance. It isn’t even accomplished by your faith. It is accomplished by God. If you are a believer today, it is because God has done His work in your heart so that you were able to understand and believe the message of the gospel.

The work of God has lasting results. If He has saved you, then you will continue to be saved. If He has truly changed your life, it will continue to be changed. And if He has brought assurance into your heart, then you will endure in the holding fast to that assurance.

This truth also contains a grave warning. It is a warning that it is

possible to have a false assurance. I recall a story about a world class rock climber who was preparing to climb the face of El Capitan, the 3000 foot rock face at Yosemite National Park. The climber tied a safety rope and started the ascent and had gotten only thirty feet up when there was a slip and a fall and the rope gave way because the knot had been tied improperly. The fall was not fatal, but it proved that there had been a false sense of assurance. In the same way, it is possible for a man to think that he is saved and to be wrong. It is possible for a man to come to Christ and to go through all of the motions of being a Christian and then to fall away from the faith and to still be unsaved. In fact, the reason that such a man invariably falls away from the faith is because he was not saved in the first place.

They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us. (1 John 2:19).

How can you tell if a person is really a child of God? It is because he believes in Christ and because he goes on believing. He holds fast the beginning of his assurance firm until the end. That does not mean he never stumbles. It means that, when he does stumble, he comes back.

THE RESULT OF DISOBEDIENCE

For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? 17 And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? 19 And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief. (Hebrews 3:16-19).

Here is the result of disobedience. It was a failure to enter into the promised land. This is important. The very people who Moses led out of Egypt were the same people who provoked the Lord. It was not the pagans who died in the wilderness. It was not the heathen that God judged. It was God's people.

Notice the movement of this passage. It is seen in the three questions:

First Question	Second Question	Third Question
Who provoked Him?	With whom was He angry?	To whom did He swear that they should not enter?
An example of unbelief.	An example of condemnation.	An example of judgment.

These were people who had witnessed the mighty works of God. But they fell because they did not believe.

- ♦ God gave a promise. They responded in unbelief.
- ♦ God provided a house. They responded by choosing the wilderness.
- ♦ God was faithful. They responded in rebellion.

Do you see the point of the passage? It is that it is possible to be the recipient of the promise, to be identified with those who have departed from the old land of Egypt and to begin the journey to the promised land, only to fall short and die in the wilderness.

Here is the danger. It is the danger that you might follow in their footsteps. It doesn't mean that you die in a physical wilderness. But the physical death they died has a spiritual counterpart. The road is the same. It begins with an attitude of unbelief. It ends either with repentance or with the judgment of God upon that unbelief.

THE SABBATH REST OF GOD

Hebrews 4:1-13

“You made us for Yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you.” (Augustine, Confessions).

If there is one attribute that characterizes the world today, it can be summarized in the one word restlessness. Our society today is made up of people in a constant state of agitation and unrest. It is like the man who jumped on his horse and galloped off madly in all directions. We need only to pick up a newspaper to find the evidence of the great unrest in the world today.

- ♦ It is seen in the wars that are being waged.
- ♦ It is seen in local politics.
- ♦ It is seen in the sexual revolution.
- ♦ It is seen in the arts and entertainments.
- ♦ It is seen in the colleges and universities.

We need not remain in this state of restlessness. God has offered us a place of peace. He has for us a rest into which we can enter. This is the call that we find in the 4th chapter of Hebrews.

COMING SHORT OF GOD’S REST

Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you would seem to come short of it. (Hebrews 4:1).

The writer to the Hebrews begins this section with a warning. The warning

begins with the word “therefore” and takes us back to the previous chapter. It was there that we saw the example of the Israelites who died in the wilderness because of their unbelief. And because of their example, we are now given a warning. It is a warning against failing to enter the “rest” of God.

Now I want to ask you a question. What is this “rest of God?” Some Bible teachers have said that it is some mysterious level of spirituality to which we must attain. But I would suggest that spirituality is not an issue in this passage. The problem that these Hebrew Christians were facing was the temptation of turning away from Jesus to return to their Jewish ceremonies and sacrifices. The danger was that they entertain the idea that they could still go back to the old covenant way of doing things. They were forgetting the significance of Jesus and how central He was to their faith.

This gives us a clue to the meaning of the “rest of God.” It is the salvation rest that comes through Jesus Christ. The Jewish religious system was one of continual work. It had continual sacrifices. It had continual observances, It had continual Sabbaths and ceremonies. None of these aspects were ever completed. Each one had to be repeated on a regular basis. But the work of Jesus Christ is a finished work. He accomplished the work of our salvation on the cross and then He said, “It is finished.” After He rose from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. The work has been finished. And we can enter into that finished work. We can enter into that rest. How is this accomplished? It is very simple:

The Gospel + Faith = Rest

Do you ever have doubts as to your relationship with Jesus Christ, questioning the reality of your faith in Him? Of course you do! That is not in itself a bad thing. I am not speaking of questioning whether God is faithful to His word, but rather a questioning of our own commitment to Him. The writer of this epistle says that it is okay to ask such questions. Indeed, he says that you ought to be fearful of not entering into the rest that God provides.

The problem with failing to enter into that rest is that it is so available. Notice that *a promise remains of entering His rest*. It would be one thing to ignore the rest of God if we weren’t certain that it existed. But having been assured by God that such a rest is available, it is foolish for us to neglect it.

FAITH - THE KEY TO ENTERING INTO GOD'S REST

For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "As I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. (Hebrews 4:2-3).

Here is a promise. It is that we can enter the rest of God. This is what the cross is all about. It is known to us as the “good news,” the gospel. This same message was proclaimed to the children of Israel who came out of Egypt. They were told that there was a place of rest that God had prepared for them. They only needed to do one thing to enter that place of rest. They had to believe.

1. The Negative Result of Unbelief: *But the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard (4:2)..*

The “they” of this verse refers back to the last chapter. It speaks of the children of Israel in the wilderness. The Israelites who followed Moses out of Egypt failed the test. They came short of entering into the rest of God. They were told that they could enter the land of Canaan and that God would give it to them. They need only believe the promise of God. But they did not believe. They called God a liar. They said that He was not big enough to take the land for them. They said that the giants who were in the land were too big for God to handle.

Don’t miss this! They heard the promises of God. They heard the word of God. But they did not believe it. Because they did not believe it, they did not benefit from the promise.

The Example of Israel in the Wilderness	The Application to the Church Today
They heard the word.	We have heard the word.

Faith was required in order to enter into the Promised Land.	Faith is required in order to receive eternal life and enter heaven.
Israel did not believe and did not enter in.	What will you do?

It is not enough to hear the word. They heard the word. They were given the Law straight from Mount Sinai. But the word did them absolutely no good because their hearing was not mixed with faith.

There is an application here for you. You might hear the message of the gospel. You might be persuaded that it is a wonderful message. You might come and join the church and pray a nice prayer. But unless your hearing is united with faith, then it will not help you. Faith is the vital ingredient.

The Israelites in the wilderness

The story is told of a tightrope walker who was able to cross Niagra Falls. People came to watch and express their belief in his ability, but real faith was not seen until one agreed to sit in a wheelbarrow while he was pushed across the wire by the aerialist.

2. The Positive Result of Faith: *For we who have believed enter that rest (4:3).*

Notice the two tenses which are used. It reflects a movement from the past to the present. *We who have believed* (past tense) *enter* (present tense) *that rest*. When you believed in Christ, you entered into a process. It is a process which is still continuing. You began that process and you are continuing in that process. It is the process of entering into God's rest.

To enter into and to partake of the rest of God takes faith. Not good deed. Not works. Not church attendance. Not tithing. These things are all self accomplished. But faith is a dependence upon the work of another. Christ has already worked on our behalf. He did His work for us on the cross. By trusting in that work, we continually experience the process of enjoying His rest.

THE PROMISE OF THE SABBATH REST

For He has thus said somewhere concerning the seventh day, “And God rested on the seventh day from all His works”; 5 and again in this passage, “They shall not enter My rest.”

Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, 7 He again fixes a certain day, “Today,” saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, “Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.”

For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. (Hebrews 4:4-8).

This concept of a Sabbath rest did not originate with the Mosaic Law. It goes all the way back to the beginning of history. It goes back to creation. It goes back to the seventh day of creation. You remember the narrative. As each of the six days of creation are recorded, we continually read that “God said” such and such and then He created and made that which He had ordained. As we come to the beginning of Genesis 2, there is a change.

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts.

Any by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.

Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made. (Genesis 2:1-3).

We are usually in the habit of thinking of the sixth day as the crown and the climax of God’s creation. That was the day in which He created man. But God did not bless the sixth day. He did not sanctify the sixth day. It was the seventh day that He declared to be special. This was the day of His rest.

Adam and the woman would have been a part of that Sabbath rest in the garden. They enjoyed the finished work of God. They were partakers of the rest of God. But they threw it all away when they sinned. When sin came...

- ♦ They were thrown out of the garden.
- ♦ The earth was cursed.
- ♦ The creation-rest was turned to unrest.

Another work had to be accomplished. It was the work of Christ on the cross. It was a work that was done on our behalf. And by trusting in that work, we can now come back into God's rest.

In verse 6 we read that *those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience.*

This points to the fact that there have been those who heard the message of God's rest and who failed to enter into that rest. They failed to enter in because of disobedience. They were the children of Israel who sinned in the wilderness. They were the ones who heard the pessimistic report of the spies who had searched out the land and who said that it was a strong land inhabited by giants. They did not believe that God was strong enough to conquer the giants in the land. And so, they rebelled against God. They decided to return to Egypt. They decided to return to their former slavery. And they turned their back on the rest of God.

I don't want you to miss what is happening here. This is addressed to Jewish Christians who are in danger of repeating the mistakes of their forefathers. They have left the bondage of their sin. They have been promised a place of eternal rest. The work of God has been accomplished on their behalf. But before they can enter into that land of rest, they must trust God as they face the giants.

The giants that the Hebrew Christians are facing is a period of intense persecution. They are being tempted to forsake Christ and to return to the bondage of their Judaism. To do this will be a disobedience of the same sort that condemned their forefathers to die in the wilderness.

A SABBATH REST REMAINS TODAY

There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. 10 For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. (Hebrews 4:9-10).

There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. This is not speaking only of that which was seen in the days of Joshua. This is a promise for you today. You can enter into that rest which is promised.

Up to this point, the author has used *καταπαυσιν* [*katapausin*] to refer to the concept of “rest.” But now he changes and speaks of *σαββατισμός*, [*sabbatismos*] a “Sabbath rest.”

We have already seen how this rest is similar to the rest that was promised to the children of Israel in the wilderness. There is a parallel between their situation and that which we face today.

The Rest Promised in the Wilderness	The Rest Promised Today
Israel had formerly been in bondage in Egypt	You were formerly enslaved to sin.
Israel was delivered from Egypt through the plagues and the Passover	Christ delivered us from sin by becoming our Passover Lamb.
Israel was faced with the threat of giants in the land.	The church is faced with the problem of persecution.
Israel was commanded to trust God and to enter into the land.	You have been commanded to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Having noted these similarities, we should also note that the rest of God is similar to the rest which God Himself experienced after His work of creation. You remember the account. Genesis 1 tells us of how God created the heavens and the earth in six days. On the seventh day He rested. It was not because He was tired. It was because the work of creation was finished. There was nothing else which remained to be done.

Creation Rest	Canaan Rest	Continued Rest
Provided for God at Creation	Israel did not enter in	A rest remains for us
A rest for God	Physical rest	Spiritual rest

God finished the work of Creation	They lost their rest and died in the wilderness	Christ finished the work of salvation for us
God promised a further rest	They did not believe God	We can enter in through faith.

Have you been trying to win God's favor through your own efforts? You need to know that there is a place of rest for you. Have you been trying to work up enough good works to earn your salvation? There is a place of rest for you. Have you been trying to put those problem sins from your life so that God will not judge you for them? There is a place of rest for you.

The place of rest is in Christ. It involves trusting in the perfect work that He accomplished on the cross. You cannot add to that work. You cannot make it any better than it already is. You can only trust in Him. You can only rest from your own futile works and trust in the work that He has done on your behalf.

A CALL TO ENTER THE REST

Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall through following the same example of disobedience.

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. (Hebrews 4:11-13).

This is the climax of this chapter. Everything the writer has said has been building up to this point. It is a warning. The warning is against doing what the Israelites did in the wilderness. It is a warning against following their example. It is a warning against failing to enter into the rest of God. There are three reasons that this is so important.

1. It is important because it is possible for one to fall by following the Israelites in their example of disobedience (4:11).

2. It is important because the Word of God is alive and powerful and is able to judge the heart. It will make the determination as to whether you are really a believer or not and you will be judged on that basis (4:12).
3. It is important because there is no creature hidden from the sight of God. He sees your every action and your every thought and He will judge accordingly (4:13).

Have you entered the rest of God? Have you placed your faith in Christ? I cannot see inside your heart. I cannot tell if a true conversion has taken place. But the word of God is able to do just that. There is coming a day when the God who sees all things will pass judgment. There will be only one place of safety. It will be that place of rest. It will be in Christ.

JESUS - THE GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Hebrews 4:14-16

Surely our griefs He himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. (Isaiah 53:4).

Within the religion of the Jews, there was no more exalted position that could be held among men than that of the high priest. In the days of the New Testament, the office of high priest held significant power. He was the head of the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of Israel. He was the visible representative of God upon earth.

But the most important task of the high priest took place on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. It was on this day that the high priest would enter into the innermost part of the temple and make a sacrifice for the sins of the nation. It was on this day that a man would enter the place that was reserved for the presence of God.

Picture the scene. As the first rays of the morning sun break across the Mount of Olives, a priest standing on the Pinnacle of the Temple sounds the trumpet. This is the signal that the morning sacrifices are about to begin. A total of fifteen animals are sacrificed on the massive altar that stands before the Temple. In the presence of thousands of witnesses, the high priest slaughters these animals with a ceremonial knife. The court runs red with the blood of the slain animals. A portion of the blood is poured into a cup.

Other sacrifices are made and other ceremonies are observed. Then at the appointed time, the high priest takes the cup and enters into the Temple.

Passing through the outer doors, he finds himself in the Holy Place. To his left is a golden lampstand, casting its soft light through the room. To his right stands the table of shewbread. Before him stands the altar of incense, its coals still warm from the morning offerings. Beyond the altar of incense is the great double veil. Normally no man is permitted to pass beyond the veil. But on this day, the high priest passes through the veil to enter into the Holy of Holies.

Dominating this room is a single piece of furniture. It is the Ark of the Covenant. It is a wooden chest overlaid with gold. It has a lid of pure gold. This lid is known as the Mercy Seat. On each end of the Mercy Seat is the golden figure of a cherub, an angel, bowed inward and facing the center of the Mercy Seat. This Mercy Seat represents the throne of God.

Here in the dim light of the Holy of Holies, the high priest sprinkles blood onto the Mercy Seat. In doing so, he is providing an atonement for the sins of the people.

OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. (Hebrews 4:14).

Over the years there had been many high priests. Generation after generation had served this exalted office. Each year, for over a thousand years, a high priest had entered the Temple and offered a sacrifice. It had to be repeated each year with a never-ending regularity. Last year's sacrifice was never enough for this year.

By contrast, we have something unique. We have something that the Jews never had. We have a great high priest. There are two things that make Him great.

1. He is a great high priest because He has passed through the heavens.

The high priest of the Jews passed through the veils into the inner part of the Temple once each year. But our high priest has gone much further. Our high priest has passed through into heaven itself. As exalted as the position of the high priest of Jerusalem was considered

to be, the position of Jesus Christ is much higher.

2. He is a great high priest because He is the Son of God.

This is the title that is given to Jesus. He is called “Jesus the Son of God.” No high priest was ever able to take for himself the title of the Son of God. At best, the priest was a servant of God and a temporary mediator between God and men.

Because of these two truths, we are given an exhortation. It is an exhortation to hold fast to the faith. The reason that this exhortation is given is because the readers were being tempted to abandon their faith.

Hard times had come upon the church. Believers were being persecuted for their faith. Some were beginning to think that it might be easier if they put aside their beliefs about Jesus and went back to their Judaism with its ceremonies and rituals. After all, they had worshiped God in the past through the sacrificial system and the temple ceremonies. Why could they not turn back the hands of time and worship God in the way they had always worshiped God?

The answer will point to the fact that we have a great high priest and that will bring about an exhortation. The exhortation that is given here will be repeated in verse 16. They are essentially the same. There is a real parallelism here. It is known as a chiasm. It moves from the call to hold fast our confession to the call to draw near with confidence.

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God...

Let us hold fast our confession

Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses...

[BUT]

One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

What is this confession to which we are to hold fast? It is the faith that we

profess. It is the gospel. It is the faith that is centered in Jesus (Hebrews 3:1; 10:23).

A SYMPATHIZER IN OUR WEAKNESS

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15).

The writer of this epistle has gone to great lengths to picture Jesus as the exalted Son of God. He has shown Jesus to be the ultimate revelation of God.

- ♦ He is better than the angels.
- ♦ He is better than Moses.
- ♦ He provides a better rest than the one offered to Joshua.

Now a question arises. If Jesus is so high and exalted, how can I possibly relate to Him? Even if He is the high priest who entered into heaven, what good is He to those who remain on earth? How does the deity of Christ ever meet the humanity of man? How does He relate to me? The answer is that He is God who became man and who continues to remember what it is like to be man. The uniqueness of the Christian faith is that God has not stayed “up there.” He has taken on flesh and He has come near.

Steve Brown tells the story of a man who applied for a job in a zoo. The manager said, “We don’t have any normal job openings, but our gorilla died recently and we haven’t been able to obtain another one. You can have a job if you are willing to wear a gorilla suit and stay in the gorilla cage.”

The man realized that this wasn’t much of a job, but he had been out of work for a while and it did provide all the bananas he could eat and he decided to take it. Over the next few days, it got to be rather fun, climbing the tree that was in the cage, shaking the bars and roaring at the people who came to look at him.

One day, as he was climbing up the tree in his cage, the branch on which he was swinging broke. To his horror, he fell into the lion cage. As he scrambled to his feet, he saw the lion leap across the cage toward him.

Terrified, he began clawing at the bars and screaming, “Let me out! Let me out!” As the lion loomed over him, it leaned over and whispered, “Be quiet or we’ll both be out of a job.”

You need to know that the Lion of the Tribe of Judah has put on flesh and blood and entered into the cage of man. This truth is stated in both a positive and a negative manner.

1. The Truth Negatively States.

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses... (Hebrews 4:15).

There is nothing worse than cheap sympathy; someone who says, “I understand” when it is obvious that they do not. But the sympathy of Jesus was not cheap. He got down off His throne and got down and dirty. Even to this day He is not removed from His humanity. This is important for you to know when you are going through hard times. He went through them, too.

2. The Truth Positively Stated.

...but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus was really tempted. He never gave into that temptation, but the temptation was no less real for Him. But that is not all. His temptation was universal in its scope. He was tempted in every area that you have been tempted. He knows what it is like to be tempted. Because He knows what it is like to be tempted, He is able to give us real help.

HELP IN OUR TIME OF NEED

Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16).

Here is a call to action. It is essentially the same call that we saw in verse 14. There we were told to hold fast our confession. Now we are told to draw near

with confidence. These are not two separate actions. They are connected. The way that you hold fast your confession is by drawing near to Jesus with confidence. And when you draw near to Him, you will find yourself holding fast your confession. There will be two things available to you are you do this: mercy and grace. These two qualities are two sides to the same coin. They both relate to salvation and God's dealings with us.

Mercy	Focuses upon the negative. It looks at our sin and it forgives that sin.	When you are pulled over by a police officer and he doesn't give you a ticket, that is mercy.
Grace	Focuses upon the positive. Gives God's riches to you in spite of the fact that you are undeserving.	When that same policeman invites you to his home for a sumptuous banquet, that is grace.

Are you going through a time of need? Are the circumstances in your life threatening to engulf you? There is a light at the end of the tunnel, and it isn't the light of an oncoming train. It is the One who is the Light. He brings with Him mercy and grace.

JESUS - THE PEOPLE'S PRIEST

Hebrews 5:1-10

So the priest who is anointed and ordained to serve as priest in his father's place shall make atonement: he shall thus put on the linen garments, the holy garments, 33 and make atonement for the holy sanctuary; and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar, He shall also make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly. (Leviticus 16:32-33).

You have heard the expression that “clothes make the man.” I suppose that there is some truth to this. Certain things come to mind when you see the uniform of a police officer or a soldier or a fire fighter. This was also true of the high priest.

Within the religion of the Jews, there was no more exalted position that could be held among men than that of high priest. The most important task of the high priest took place on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

On this day, he would be arrayed in a white linen robe over which he wore a blue robe, a breastplate with 12 stones, and a golden frontlet. On this day, he would enter into the innermost part of the temple and make a sacrifice for the sins of the nation. On this day, he was the official representative of the people before their God.

We have already seen the message in the book of Hebrews that Jesus is better.

- ♦ He is better than the angels.
- ♦ He is better than Moses.
- ♦ He is better than Joshua.

- ♦ He provides a better rest than was ever seen in the Promised Land.

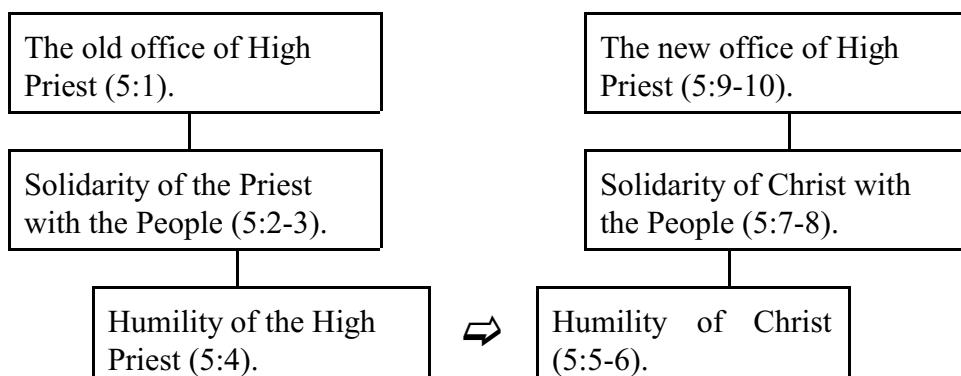
Now we come to a new aspect with regards to the truth that Jesus is better. It is that Jesus is a better priest than Aaron.

THE CREDENTIALS OF THE PRIEST

For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; 2 he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; 3 and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. (Hebrews 5:1-3).

The writer closed the previous chapter with the statement that we have a high priest in the person of Jesus. The Jew would immediately object, “Hold it right there! It takes certain rigid qualifications to be a priest. Not just anyone can take that title to himself.”

The writer anticipates this objection and so, he pauses to examine three particular aspects of the high priest. Then, in verses 6-10, he goes back over those same aspects in reverse order, applying them to Jesus. This chiastic parallelism can be charted like this:



1. A Godly Calling: *For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God (5:1).*

The main function of a priest was not to teach or preach. His main

function was to act as a mediator between men and God. A mediator is one who comes where there is division and brings that which is divided together.

The fact that men need a mediator to approach God implies that there is something wrong with men. After all, man was originally created in the image of God. What is the problem? Why can't men approach God without the benefit of a mediator? It is because of sin. Sin places a barrier between men and God. It takes the work of a mediator to overcome the barrier of sin.

2. A Ministry of Mediation.

Jesus is a mediating priest. He has crossed the gap between God and man. He has provided a reconciliation so that the enmity which once separated God and man has been put away. He is the people's priest. If you ever want to know God, you need a priest. The best priest I know is Jesus.

3. A Ministry of Gentleness: *He can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness (5:2).*

Jesus is not only a mediating priest; He is also a gentle priest. The reason that He is gentle is because He knows what it is like to be vulnerable.

The best kind of comforter is one who has gone through the pain and anguish and who can empathize with you. He understands because He has been there. It has been said that you should never let your hair be cut by a bald barber. He can't identify with your needs. But Jesus has identified with you.

THE CALLING OF THE PRIEST

And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was.

So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, "Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee"; 6 just as He says also in another passage, "Thou art a priest forever according to the

order of Melchizedek.” (Hebrews 5:4-6).

We have seen that Jesus is a mediating priest and a gentle priest. Now we see that He is also an appointed priest. His appointment was not self-generated. No priest was ever a self-made man. Aaron did not say to himself one day, “I think that I shall go to priest school and obtain a degree in Priesthood and become a priest.” It did not even help that he had an “in” with his brother Moses. The only way that Aaron became a priest was because God chose him to be a priest.

Jesus is like that. He was chosen by the Father to be a priest to the world. He did not act on His own initiative. His life was one of obedience to the Father.

Jesus therefore answered and was saying to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.” (John 5:19).

“I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge, and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.” (John 5:30).

The authority that Jesus acted upon was not His own authority. The miracles which He brought about were not by His own power. The message which He preached was not independently His own. Everything that He did was from a higher authority. Everything that He did was from the Father and the Spirit. When He was baptized by John, He did not say, “Look everyone, I’m the Son of God!” Instead, it was the Father’s voice from heaven who made this announcement. Jesus always acted from the authority of God.

We are called to act the same way. We act on the authority of Jesus. The message we proclaim is not one of our own invention. The authority of the church is vested in its head - the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus has often been portrayed as though He was some sort of revolutionary or rebel. But this is not true. Jesus was always submissive to proper authority. He paid taxes. He obeyed the laws of the land. Only when those who were in authority went directly against the higher authority of the Father did Jesus turn against the lower authority to submit to that higher authority.

You need to know this because you are called to follow the same example. Christians are people who are called to obey authority. We have subjected ourselves to the God of the universe and we are called to submit to the authorities He has established.

THE SUFFERING OF THE PRIEST

In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. (Hebrews 5:7).

We have seen that Jesus is a mediating priest, a gentle priest and an appointed priest. He is also a suffering priest. When we think of the suffering of Jesus, we are drawn to the pain of His beatings during the trials, the crown of thorns and the scourging and later the torture of the crucifixion with the nails in His hands and feet. But the suffering which is viewed in this verse is different. It is not the suffering upon the cross. I want to suggest that it is the suffering that preceded the cross. It is the agony of Gethsemane.

Do you remember the prayer that Jesus prayed in Gethsemane? He asked that the cup of death might be taken away. He asked that He might be saved from death. This tells me something about the death of Christ. It was no easy thing. It was experienced with real pain and affliction. It brought a cry from the lips of the Savior that all of the whips and beatings had been unable to solicit: “My God! My God! Why have You forsaken Me?”

There is one kind of crying out that just wants attention. But there is another kind when you put your hand on a hot stove or when you are nailed to a cross. It is a cry of pain. Jesus cried out with that kind of cry. Because He did, He will listen when you cry out. He can help because He first has hurt.

There is a lesson here. It is that you have to hurt before you can help. It is difficult for me to counsel people who are on drugs because I’ve never been on drugs. There are certain areas in which I have never been tempted. But someone who has fought those battles and who has overcome is able to give good counsel.

It has been said that the Christian army is the only one that shoots its own wounded. We dare not do that because it is only those who have been

wounded who can help us find wellness. The pattern started with Jesus. He was wounded so that we can be well. He was the wounded healer.

If you are having problems, don't waste them. They are brought into your life for a reason. You are becoming a partaker in the sufferings of Jesus. Now you can use those hurts to heal others.

THE OBEDIENCE OF THE PRIEST

Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. 9 And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, 10 being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 5:8-10).

We have seen that Jesus is a mediating, a gentle, an appointed and a suffering priest. He is also an obedient priest. A lot of people have a problem being under authority. We are a nation of rebels. And Jesus has been characterized as a rebel and a revolutionary.

But that misses the point that He was one who was obedient to authority. The only question was which authority.

Notice also that He was not only under authority, He also learned obedience to that authority: *Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered (5:8).*

Did you ever stop to think that God never knew what it meant to be obedient? It is impossible to be obedient until there is a higher authority which you are required to be obedient to. Only in the incarnation was the Lord ever placed under authority. Because He has been obedient to authority, we are also called to be obedient. That obedience begins when we obey the gospel. You might hear me say that and think, "John, I know that we are supposed to hear the gospel and that we are supposed to believe the gospel, but where does the Bible ever say that we are to obey the gospel?"

Paul speaks of how Jesus shall return *dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus (2 Thessalonians 1:8).*

In the same way, Peter warns that *it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of Christ? (2 Peter 4:17)*. The same principle is taught here. The writer to the Hebrews states that, *having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation” (5:9).*

Jesus was a perfect priest. This isn't speaking of His character. It is looking at His perfect life and His perfect work. That work had its perfection or its completion in His atoning death on the cross. The work of Jesus was perfect and complete. It accomplished exactly what it was designed to accomplish.

Jesus was a successful priest. He did what He set out to accomplish. We have described Jesus as a mediating, a gentle, an appointed, a suffering, and an obedient priest. But all of that wouldn't help me at all if He were not also a successful priest. If a man can only identify with my problems and care for me, but is powerless to help me, he does not do much good.

This is the God of Rabbi David Kurshner. He reasoned that if God is both a good God and an all-powerful God, then bad things would never happen. He concluded that God is good but that He is not all-powerful. His God is over-worked and under-paid and would like to help us out with our problems but just isn't up to the task. Jesus just didn't do His best. He succeeded at what He set out to do. The cross worked!

But notice that it only works *to those who obey Him*. Does this mean that obedience is necessary to obtain eternal life? Yes, it does! Eternal life is given to those who obey the command of God, specifically, the command to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

They said therefore to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” 29 Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.” (John 6:28-29).

THE DANGER OF NOT GOING ON TO MATURITY

Hebrews 5:11 - 6:12

So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.

But when the fulness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. (Galatians 4:3-5).

Do you remember the story of Peter Pan? He was the little boy who decided that he never wanted to grow up, that he would rather remain a little boy forever. Many people seem to suffer a Peter Pan Syndrome when it comes to spiritual matters. They don't mind having a little religion once in a while as long as it is confined to the proper building and held on the proper day of the week. It mustn't begin too early and must never go beyond a certain time. But anything more than this kind of short religious interlude is in danger of being labeled fanaticism. After all, we can't live all out lives in the Bible. We have to come back to the real world. The book of Hebrews is written to a group of people who suffered from the Peter Pan Syndrome.

- ♦ They were Jews.
- ♦ They had a heritage that was rooted in religion.
- ♦ They had grown up going to synagogue every week.
- ♦ They had read the Old Testament Scriptures.
- ♦ They had offered sacrifices and offerings to the Lord.

Then they became Christians. They heard the message that Jesus had died for sins and had risen again from the dead. They believed that message and

joined the local group of believers which followed the teachings of Jesus. But then persecutions began to arise. They began to wonder if they wanted to be Christians after all. After all, they had been happy when they had been under the spiritual infancy of the Law. And so, they decided to go back to the Law. Like the storybook character, they decided not to grow.

THE NEED FOR MATURITY

Concerning Him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.

But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.
(Hebrews 5:11-14).

Throughout the fifth chapter of Hebrews, the writer has been showing that Jesus is a priest of a better priesthood than that which came from Aaron.

Aaron	Jesus
Aaron was a High Priest.	Jesus was the Great High Priest.
Aaron was tempted in the same way we are.	Jesus was tempted in the same way we are, yet without sin.
Aaron offered sacrifices.	Jesus offered Himself as the ultimate and final sacrifice.
Aaron was a member of an ancient priesthood.	Jesus is a member of an eternal priesthood.

Now, as we come to verse 11, there is a change. The writer will insert a parenthetical warning. He will pause from what has been his main theme to address an important issue.

1. A Parenthetical Warning: *Concerning him we have much to say, and*

it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing (5:11).

This verse introduces a parenthesis. The writer has introduced the subject of Melchizedek and he is going to amplify his teaching on the subject of this one named Melchizedek. But first he is going to give a warning.

The book of Hebrews is not merely a collection of really neat truths which have been thrown together for the benefit of those who get a fiendish delight in the study of doctrinal trivia. This book is practical. It is written to change your life. It has truths in it that will enable you to live differently. It is not to be read only on Sunday and then forgotten. Its truths apply to Monday through Saturday and Sunday, too.

What is the nature of the warning which will be given? It will be a warning against remaining in immaturity. As soon as you hear those words, a pre-conceived idea comes to mind that is at odds with what the writer is actually saying.

2. The Nature of the Warning: *You have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God (5:12).*

What are the elementary teachings about Christ? In the context of which this is given, it is the teachings of the Messiah (that is what the word “Christ” means) as seen in the Old Testament. Messiah was seen in an elementary way in the Old Testament, but He is seen in a complete way in the New Testament. This is what Hebrews is all about. The epistle begins with the premise that God spoke at many different times and in many different ways, but in these last days, He spoke by a Son.

These Jews had heard the message of the gospel. They had come to Christ. They had joined the ranks of the Christians. They had pledged themselves to Jesus Christ. But now they are turning away. They are turning back to their former Judaism. They are turning back to their previous religious system and telling themselves that it will be okay because it is still the same God. But, in doing this, they are ignoring the oracles of God. They are ignoring the fact that their Old Testament Scriptures which they are trying to return to are the very ones which bear witness of Jesus Christ.

3. The Need of the Warning: *You have come to need milk and not solid food (5:12).*

These Jews are likened to babies. At a time when they should have been teachers, spreading the gospel to others, they needed to be fed the milk of the gospel. The reason they need milk is because milk is crucial at their stage of spiritual development.

Now I want you to notice something. Being a baby does not necessarily refer to an immature believer. It merely describes one who is unlearned and helpless. Indeed, in both 1 Corinthians 3:1 and Galatians 4:1-3 it is used to describe an unbeliever.

I want to suggest that the same thing is described in our passage in Hebrews. This is written to Jews who had heard the gospel and who had initially accepted it but who have now turned away. These were Jews who need to be taught the ABC's of the Old Testament. At a time when they ought to have been teaching in the Jerusalem Bible College, they needed to go back to spiritual kindergarten.

THE CALL TO PRESS ON TO MATURITY

Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, lest we press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of instruction about washings, and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3 And this we shall do, if God permits. (Hebrews 6:1-3).

This passage has been greatly misunderstood. It has been taught that this is a call for believers to grow and to mature and to become more knowledgeable in the Scriptures. But such an interpretation is completely at odds with the context. Up to this point, there has been a series of contrasts showing that Jesus is better...

than the angels.
than Moses.
than Joshua.
than the priesthood.

As we come to chapter 6, the contrast still remains. It is a contrast between the elementary teachings about the Christ versus going on to maturity. We tend to think that the “elementary teachings” are the basics of salvation while the “mature” things are some special teachings which transcend salvation. But that isn’t so. You never get more mature than the cross. There is nothing deeper than salvation.

When the Hebrew readers are told to "go on to maturity" they are being told to hold to Jesus rather than all of the shadows and types of the Old Covenant which merely pointed to Jesus. The opposite of going “on to maturity” would be “laying again the foundation” of all of the things listed. These are all doctrines which were taught in the Old Testament. There is nothing wrong with these doctrines. They are all things which we believe. But they are only the foundation of what we believe. Unless we come to see Jesus as the One who is set upon that foundation, then the foundation is in itself of no benefit to us.

These were not merely baby believers who needed to grow. These were people who were turning from the faith. These were Jewish converts who were returning to their Judaism.

They were turning from Christ and now they were going back into the Temple and offering their sacrifices and trying to please God by keeping all of the Old Testament ordinances.

1. Elementary Teaching versus Maturity: *Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, lest we press on to maturity (6:1).*

These Jews are advised to leave the elementary teaching about the Christ. This is not a call to abandon Jesus. Rather, it is a call to abandon the elementary teachings about Messiah and move on to the more advanced teachings of Messiah.

What are the elementary teachings about the Messiah? They are the same as *the elementary principles of the oracles of God* described in Hebrews 5:12 (the same words are used in the Greek text). They are the types and shadows and the prophecies on the Old Testament. These all looked forward to Christ. They are the ABC’s of the Messianic truths.

These Jews who had initially come to Jesus and had then turned away

were going back to the elementary teachings of Messiah. They were going back to the Temple sacrifices and the rituals which pictured the Messiah who was to come. They need to leave these things. They need to move on. They need to graduate to “Jesus 101.” They need to go on to maturity. What kind of maturity is this? Is it spiritual maturity? Is it some kind of spiritual level that a Christian attains to by doing all of the right things like praying and witnessing and giving money and Bible study? No. It is simply a reference to the salvation which is found in Jesus Christ. This “maturity” is a description of the man who has come to Christ in faith. This will be seen when we come to chapter seven.

Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? (Hebrews 7:11).

The word “perfection” in this verse comes from the Greek root word τελιος (*telios*). It is the same word which is translated “mature” in Hebrews 5:14 and “maturity” here in Hebrews 6:1. Elsewhere, it has been translated “complete, finished, fulfilled.”

The point of the passage is that perfection never came through the Levitical priesthood. Therefore, if you want to reach that perfection, you need to leave that Levitical priesthood behind and hold to that which is perfect and complete, Jesus Christ. We could chart it like this:

Old Testament Symbols	Jesus Christ
You have need that someone teach you again the elementary principles of the oracles of God (5:12).	By this time you ought to be teachers (5:12).
You have come to need milk (5:12).	You are not eating solid food (5:12).
Milk is for babies (5:13).	Solid food is for the mature (5:14).

Leave the elementary teachings about Christ (6:1).	Press on to maturity (6:1).
Approaching God on the basis of the Old Covenant.	Approaching God on the basis of the New Covenant.

The Jews are to leave their past heritage of infancy behind and to hold to that which is the fulfillment and the completion of all of the Old Testament types and shadows. They are to leave behind their Old Testament sacrifices and their Old Testament rituals and they are to hold to Jesus.

2. Former Foundations: *Not laying again a foundation (6:1).*

We must always remember that this is written to Jews. They had a spiritual heritage. That heritage is the foundation for the gospel. But, now that the gospel has come, it is time to leave the foundation and hold to the gospel.

These Jews were doing just the opposite. They were abandoning the truth of the gospel and returning to the Old Testament foundation on which the gospel was built. This foundation was made up of a number of teachings. There are six mentioned here.

- ♦ Repentance from dead works.
- ♦ Faith toward God.
- ♦ Instruction about washings.
- ♦ Laying on of hands.
- ♦ The resurrection of the dead.
- ♦ Eternal judgment.

Each of these six teachings was an Old Testament teaching. Each one of these teachings had a legitimate use. But each one is wrong if it is used to detract attention away from Jesus Christ.

There is an important lesson here. Anything which takes my attention away from Jesus Christ is wrong. It might be a good thing. But it is being wrongly used if it takes me away from the Lord. Even a thing from the Bible can be wrongly used if it takes me from the One who gave us the Bible.

THE DANGER OF FALLING AWAY

For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame. (Hebrews 6:4-6).

Now we are faced with a serious warning. I want you first to notice to whom this warning is directed. This is spoken to those who...

- ♦ Have once been enlightened.
- ♦ Have tasted of the heavenly gift.
- ♦ Have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit.
- ♦ Have tasted the good word of God.
- ♦ Have tasted the powers of the age to come.

These people had originally worshiped the Lord through the Old Testament sacrificial system. They had believed in a future coming messiah. But then they heard the gospel. They heard about Christ and the salvation that He brings. They trusted in Him as their Messiah. They witnessed the power of the Holy Spirit. They heard the preaching of the Word of God. They saw miracles. Then hard times came. In the midst of those hard times, they are being tempted to abandon their faith and to return to the way things used to be. They are being tempted to return to the Old Testament sacrifices and to wait for a future messiah.

Here is the warning. There is nothing left for them. They cannot go back to the Levitical Law and expect God to honor their worship because doing so would mean turning from the One who fulfilled the Law. They cannot go back to the Temple and offer a sacrifice, since they have already rejected the Ultimate Sacrifice. It is impossible to find God's approval in the observance of the sacrifices of animals when one has been offered and has rejected that to which all the animal sacrifices pointed.

They again crucify to themselves the Son of God (6:6). This is spoken to Jews who are in danger of turning away from Jesus. They are trying to leave the cross and go back to the temple sacrifice. They are trying to leave the

reality and go back to the type. In doing so, they are turning their backs upon Jesus. Less than forty years earlier, another generation of Jews had turned from Jesus. They had manifested their hatred of Jesus by crucifying Him. Now, these Jewish people are in danger of doing the very same thing.

Summary: This is written to Jews who have heard the gospel and have accepted Jesus as the promised Messiah. They are told that if they now reject the Messiah and fall away from the gospel, it is impossible for them to repent and return to the Law and thereby renew their old pre-cross relationship with God, since to do so would be to crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame.

THE PROMISE OF JUDGMENT

For ground that drinks the rain which often falls upon it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned. (Hebrews 6:7-8).

These two verses form an illustration. They serve to illustrate the truths that have just been taught. The rain represents all of those things which God has sent in verses 4-5 to convince men of the truth of the salvation that Jesus provides. This rain has been offered to all. But it has a different effect in some areas than it has in others. In some areas, it bears fruit and is blessed by God. In other places, it bears thorns and is destroyed by God. The following chart shows both the illustration and that truth which is demonstrated by the illustration:

Illustration	Truth that is Illustrated
Rain falls from heaven.	Truth has been given from heaven.
The rain lands on everything.	The gospel has been given to all men.
When the rain brings forth vegetation, it results in a blessing.	When the gospel is believed and brings salvation, it results in a blessing.

When rain brings forth thorns and thistles, it is worthless and ends up being burned.	When the gospel is not believed, the result is a curse.
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Note that the reference to “thorns and thistles” is meant to take the reader back to the image of the first curse as this phrase is taken from Genesis 3:18 where Adam was told that the earth would grow thorns and thistles because of the curse. The warning is clear. What kind of ground are you? Are you holding fast to Jesus Christ? Or are you abandoning Him to chase the wind? If so, then you run the danger of experiencing the full force of the curse that was given at the fall of mankind.

THE ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.

For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Hebrews 6:9-12).

Having seen the impossibility of returning to the law as a means of approaching God, a route the readers of this epistle had been tempted to travel, there is a pastoral change in the voice of the epistle. The writer feels certain that there is more to these Hebrew Christians than the “thorns and thistles” mentioned in the previous verses.

He knows that they are being tempted to depart from the faith, but he does not think that they have done so yet. He knows there is the temptation of seeking to return to the old covenant and he has pointed out the impossibility of such a path, but he also realizes that it is a path they have not attempted. Why? Because he has witnessed the evidence of their salvation.

This tells me something about the nature of faith. Though faith is an inner

quality, it always provides an outward expression. I cannot see your faith. I do not know that you are a believer by looking at your faith. I can only see the results of that faith. The actions in your life are an evidence of what you believe.

For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name (6:10). These Hebrews had come to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. Since they had come to Jesus, their faith had produced corresponding works in their life. These works were not the cause of their salvation. Rather, these works were the evidence of their salvation. God does not forget that evidence. He has promised to keep those who are His. They will not be permitted to fall away because He will hold on to them.

Now let's make this personal. How do you know whether your faith is real? God does not say, "Trust in Me and I will make you wait for the rest of your life wondering if you are really Mine." Instead, He gives you three kinds of evidence of assurance.

1. The Evidence of Your Life: *For God is not unjust so as to forget your work (6:10).*

We read that God will not forget your work. This relates specifically to your life. If you want to know if you are a Christian, then look from where you have come and look at the direction in which you are going.

Are you a practicing atheist? If you woke up tomorrow and found out that Christianity wasn't true, would it make a difference in your life? What is it in your life that can only be explained in terms of the supernatural? When you see a turtle on a gatepost, you know that he didn't get there by himself.

2. The Evidence of Your Love: *For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name (6:10).*

Jesus said that people would be able to identify His disciples by their love. The problem is that we started defining love as an emotional feeling that you get; something akin to heartburn. But love in the Scriptures is always an action word. The way that you love your neighbor as yourself is by treating him the way you want to be treated.

3. The Evidence of Your Diligence (6:11).

Verse 11 encourages us to “*show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end.*” A Christian is not someone who never falls down. A Christian is someone who keeps getting back up again. The Christian race is a marathon and the prize only goes to those who have crossed the finish line.

4. The Evidence of Your Faith: ...*so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises* (6:12).²

How do you enter into this relationship with Christ? Verse 12 tells us that it is through faith and patience that we inherit the promises. Which promises are these? They are the same promises that were given to all of the Old Testament saints. They are the promises which were given to Abraham. They are the promises of a heavenly inheritance.

There is a promise here for you. God has you in His hands. If you have come to Him in faith, then you are His special child. He will never let go of you. If you begin to slip, He will not forget. If you fall into sin, He does not ignore the past evidence of your salvation. He will continue to hold you so that you can realize the full assurance of hope until the end.

² The Greek words used for the term “sluggish” is *nuthros* (νυθρώς). It is the same Greek word that was used in Hebrews 5:11 to describe the readers as having become “DULL of hearing.”

THE OATH OF GOD

Hebrews 6:13-20

And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham a second time out of heaven, 16 and said, “‘By myself have I sworn,’ saith the Lord, ‘because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld your son, your only son, 17 that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is upon the seashore. And your seed shall possess the gate of his enemies. (Genesis 22:15-17).

Promises. It is a fascinating commentary on the human race that the idea of a promise has come into being. What is a promise? It is an assurance that you give to another that the thing which you say will be true. The reason that this is so interesting is that it implies that there might be other things which are said by you that do not have that same standard of truth.

- ♦ In the secular world, we write contracts so that the promises which we make will be even more secure.
- ♦ In the courtroom we swear an oath that what we say will be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

The Bible teaches us that God has promised certain things to men. God's words have always been true. He does not tell lies. One of His titles is "The Non-lying God" (Titus 1:2). One of the things that distinguishes Him from all of the false gods is that He is the God who cannot lie. But that is not all, God has made promises to man. He did not have to make a promise. He could have merely spoken and His word would have been enough because He does not lie. But He chose to seal His word with a promise. Possible the most vivid example of this is seen in the covenant that God established with

Abraham.

And Abram said, “O Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”

And Abram said, “Since Thou hast given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.”

Then behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “This man shall not be your heir; but one who shall come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.” (Genesis 15:2-4).

Abram has a problem. God has told him that he would have a son, but as time passes and Abram grows older and older, he still does not have a son. Abram has already written a will and he has made his chief steward, Eliezer of Damascus, the heir to his fortune. But now God speaks to Abram and promises that he will be given a son of his own. What is the reaction of Abram to this promise? It is a two-fold reaction:

1. Abraham Believes the Promises of God.

Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6).

Abram responded in faith. He believed that he would be given a son. He also believed that God would give him and his descendants the land as their possession. But that is not all. Abram also went on to ask the Lord for some sort of assurance that the promise would be fulfilled.

2. Abraham Asked for Assurance.

And he said, “O Lord God, how may I know that I shall possess it?” (Genesis 15:8).

Abram believed the promises of God, but he also asked the Lord to give him a source of assurance on which to base that belief. He said, “I believe, but help me to have an assurance in that belief.” God answered that prayer by going through the legal formality of a covenant.

So He said to him, “Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.”

Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds. (Genesis 15:9-10).

In the ancient world, when two kings wanted to enter into a legally binding contract, they went through the formal ceremony of a Suzerain treaty. They would take several animals and kill them and then cut the carcasses of the death animals into two parts. The parts would be separated so that they formed two rows of bodies.

Now the two kings who were binding themselves to the treaty would walk arm in arm down the row formed by the bodies of the animals. As they passed between the carcasses, they would recite the terms of the covenant.

In Hebrew grammar, you do not write or sign a covenant. You cut a covenant.

The implication of this formality was that, if either party were to break the terms of the treaty, then might his own body be torn apart in the same way that these animals had been killed and torn apart.

Here is the point. God made a promise and God doesn't break His promises. As we come to this section of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the writer directs our attention to the fact that God has not only made a promise, but has bound Himself to that promise with an oath. In doing so, He has bound His word to His very existence. This will be shown in three parts:

Hebrews 6:13-15	Hebrews 6:16-18	Hebrews 6:19-20
The example of God's promise to Abraham	The fact that God has sworn an oath	The hope that we have as an anchor of the soul

THE EXAMPLE OF GOD'S PROMISE TO ABRAHAM

For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, 14

saying, “I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply you.” 15 And thus, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. (Hebrews 6:13-15).

The writer to the Hebrews takes us back to the days of Abraham. He sets forth the instance when God entered into a covenant with Abraham. It was a part of the ceremony of the oath to swear by something. The thing by which you would swear would be to most important thing in your life. If, for example, you swore on the life of your son, you were thereby indicating that your son’s life would be forfeit should you fail to keep your promises. But oaths often went deeper than that. Men would also swear by the greatest and most sacred and immovable object they could imagine.

Jesus warned against the practice of swearing. He pointed out that it is silly to swear by the Temple when you have no control over the Temple. Indeed, even to swear by your own head it an exercise in futility, since you cannot change your own head (Matthew 5:34-37). The best policy for us is not to swear at all, but to be such people of our word that we do not need to swear.

But the Lord did enter into an oath. He swore. When He made His covenant with Abraham, He looked about for the very greatest thing by which He could swear. The greatest and most immovable thing was Himself. That is what He did. He swore by Himself.

WHEN GOD SWORE

For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute.

In the same way God, desiring even more to show the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, 18 in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us. (Hebrews 6:16-18).

When a witness gives his testimony in a court of law, he binds himself to an oath, swearing to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth “so help me God.” That kind of testimony is used to determine innocence or

guilt is legal matters.

Verse 18 says that God did two things to demonstrate that His promise to Abraham would not be broken.

God's unchangeableness is mentioned both in verses 17 and 18. If you have ever longed for the "good old days" you know that nothing ever remains the same. But God does not change.

1. His non-lying character.

Of course, the problem is that a man is only as good as his word. If he is a liar, then all the promises in the world will not change him into an honest speaker. But when we see God making a promise, it is a promise made by the One who always speaks truth.

2. His binding oath.

When God wanted to show Abraham the truthfulness of His promise, He went beyond the truthfulness of His character. He bound Himself with an oath. He said, "I swear to God." And in doing so, He was saying that if His word does not come to pass, then may He cease to exist.

There is a place of refuge here for those who are troubled by an uncertain world. This refuge is found in *the hope set before us*. Hope, by its very nature, is unseen. Our generation has a motto: "Seeing is believing." People often are willing to "give Christianity a try" in the same way they would test drive an automobile before buying it. But in Christianity, believing leads to seeing. As we shall see in chapter 11, without faith it is impossible to please God.

This is the lesson of Abraham. He believed God, but it was not until much later that he received the fulfillment of the promise of God. Faith comes first; fulfillment comes later. In the meantime, we are called to hold onto our hope.

AN ANCHOR FOR THE SOUL

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul. A hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, 20 where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of

Melchizedek. (Hebrews 6:19-20).

In Hebrews 2:1 we saw the danger of drifting. What causes a boat at sea to drift? It is the lack of an anchor. Water is a slippery substance and only when you latch onto something solid can you stop drifting.

Life is also slippery. You try to build a life and it can be like formless Jell-O. My wife once tried to make a triple decker Jell-O mold. She brought it out to our Bible study group and set it on the dining room table. But all of a sudden it began to drop and push out beyond the confines of the plate. She cried out for everyone to grab a spoon in a vain attempt to stop this tidal wave of Jell-O.

We have something that stops the drifting of our soul. It is the hope that we have in Christ. It is the hope which is based in one who has served as our high priest, entering the presence of God.

Notice that Jesus *has entered as a forerunner for us*. We will all one day have to stand before the Lord to give an account of our lives. But the good news is that Jesus has already gone in our place as our forerunner. He said to His disciples, “I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:3). He is our trailblazer. He has gone before us so that we can go, too.

THE MELCHIZEDEK PRIEST

Hebrews 7:1-28

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High.

And he blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth; 20 and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” And he gave him a tenth of all. (Genesis 14:15-20).

Genesis 14 is a chapter from the family history of the origins of Israel. It tells the story of how Abraham's nephew, Lot, was swept up into the military doings of the ancient world and of how Abraham himself played a role in that history.

Lot and Abraham had parted company. Uncle Abraham had given Lot free reign to choose whichever part of the land he wished and he chose the Valley of Siddim, known today as the Dead Sea. But it was not dead in that day. Rather it was a lush, fertile valley, reminiscent of the Garden of Eden. It was also home to several cities, among them the infamous Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot settled in Sodom, the sin city of antiquity.

Then a day came when a messenger arrived at the tent of Abraham with terrible news. A coalition of kings from the east had invaded and had taken Sodom and enslaved all of its inhabitants including Lot. Abraham could have gloated over the misfortunes of his wayward nephew, but he did not. Instead he immediately organized a rescue party. In a brazen display of faith and courage, he caught up with the raiders and attacked them by night, putting them to route and recovering not only his nephew, but all of the wealth and

citizens of Sodom.

However the most unusual part of this tale took place on the return journey. It was here that Abraham was met by a new figure; a mysterious priest-king known as Melchizedek. The Scriptures tell us that they met, that Melchizedek brought bread and wine and a blessing, and that Abraham rewarded him with a tenth of all. That is all. Melchizedek is not mentioned again in the rest of Genesis nor anywhere in any of the historical books of the Old Testament. And although there is a veiled prophecy in the Psalm concerning him, the significance of this figure is an unsolved mystery. Until now.

The writer to the Hebrews has already made mention of Melchizedek and that Jesus is a priest after that ancient order (Hebrews 5:6; 5:10; 6:20). The last such mention was in the last verse of the previous chapter. This time, the writer will explain fully what he means.

INTRODUCING MELCHIZEDEK

1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, 2 to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace.

3 Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually. (Hebrews 7:1-3).

The theme of the epistle to the Hebrews is that Jesus is better. He is better than the prophets and He is better than the angels and He is better than Moses and He provides a better rest than that which was promised by Joshua. In the last several chapters, we have seen that Jesus is a better high priest. This automatically brings a objection: How can Jesus be a better priest if He is from the tribe of Judah? All priests in the Old Testament were required to be of the tribe of Levi and specifically from the descendants of Aaron. The answer to this objection will be that Jesus is of a priesthood which predates that of Aaron, one which goes back all the way to Abraham.

We don't know a lot about Melchizedek. He emerges from the pages of antiquity to have his brief encounter with Abraham, he pronounces a blessing, accept Abraham's gift, and then once again disappears into the pages of history. We don't know much about Melchizedek, but there are several things that we do know.

1. His name: *By the translation of his name, king of righteousness* (7:2).

The name “Melchizedek” is a compound of two Hebrew words which have been joined together.

- ♦ *Melech* (מלך) is the Hebrew word for “king.”
- ♦ *Zedek* (צדיק) means “righteousness.”

What's in a name? When we name children, it is often only because we like the sound of it. But names in the ancient world were full of meaning, especially among the Jews. Names were given to tell something about the character of the person.

This is why you occasionally see a person whose name is changed. This was the case of Abraham. His name was changed from Abram (“father of high places”) to Abraham (“father of a multitude”). It was also true in the case of Jacob (“con-artist”) whose name was changed to Israel (“prince of God”).

2. His Domain: *King of Salem, which is king of peace* (7:2).

“Salem” was evidently one of the ancient names for the city of Jerusalem. Before this city became the capital of Israel, it belonged to a people known as the Jebusites. Their city was alternately known as “Jebus” and “Salem.” Its name today reflects a composite of these two names: Jeru-salem.

Names have meaning. The meaning of which we are reminded is the fact that it was named as a city of peace. That is an interesting name for Jerusalem, for the history of this city has been a history of war and of conquest. It has been anything but a city of peace, with one notable exception. It was the city where the Prince of Peace came to present Himself. It was the city where the God of Peace located His

temple.

The kingship of Israel could only trace their roots back to David. The priesthood of Israel could only trace their roots back to Aaron. But there was a priest-king residing in Jerusalem, the city of God, long before the time of either David or Aaron. And He is a pattern of God's true priest-king, Jesus Christ.

3. His Genealogy: *Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually (7:3).*

The past kings of Israel before the Babylonian captivity traced their genealogy back to king David. The priests of Israel traced their genealogy back to Aaron. Those priests returning from Babylon who could no longer give evidence of their genealogy were not permitted to serve any longer as priests. But the first priest-king had no genealogy. He appears from obscurity out of the pages of history. We know nothing of his origins and we know nothing of his death. In this he is likened to the Son of God.

You might be thinking, "Wait a minute, Jesus had a genealogy! How can you say that Jesus is like Melchizedek because he has no genealogy?" The answer is found in the pre-existence of Jesus. Though he has a human genealogy, He also existed before He was born. He appears in the very beginning: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (John 1:1). That same chapter goes on to describe how the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). It is a reference to Jesus. Though He had a birth, He did not have a beginning because He was present at the beginning.

Here is the point. The priesthood of Jesus is a better priesthood because He never had a beginning and His priesthood has no end. He will always be our high priest. He will always be the basis for our forgiveness and our fellowship with God.

This is the basis for our disagreement with Islam. Muslims believe that Jesus was a prophet from God, but that they have a better prophet in Mohammed. But the Bible teaches us that the priesthood of Jesus is an eternal priesthood. It will never go out of date. It will never be

superseded the way that the Old Testament priesthood has been superseded.

MELCHIZEDEK AND THE TENTH

4 *Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils.*

5 *And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham.*

6 *But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises.*

7 *But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater.*

8 *In this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on.*

9 *And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, 10 for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him. (Hebrews 7:4-10).*

The superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood is evidenced by the fact that Abraham gave a tithe, a tenth of all the spoils of war. Why did Abraham give this offering to Melchizedek? It was because Abraham recognized in Melchizedek a priest of the Most High God.

Now we come to the point of comparison. Both Melchizedek and the Aaronic priesthood are legitimate priests of God. But the most that you could say about the Levitical priests is that they receive tithes from the children of Abraham. They never received tithes from Abraham himself. But Melchizedek did.

Sons of Levi	Melchizedek
Descendants of Aaron.	No father or mother mentioned.
Priests of God.	Priest of God.

They receive tithes of the descendants of Abraham (7:5).	He received a tithe from Abraham (7:6).
The Israelites were commanded to give a tithe (7:5).	Abraham voluntarily gave a tithe.
They are mortal - subject to death (7:8).	He lives on (7:8).
They can be said to have paid tithes while being “in the loins of Abraham.”	He never paid tithes to anyone.

Abraham was special to the Jews. He was the Patriarch, literally, the “first father.” Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, was blessed by Melchizedek and responded to that blessing by giving to him a tithe of all of the spoils. This is significant. It is significant because of the underlying principle of blessing. The principle is that *the lesser is blessed by the greater* (7:7). We see this principle illustrated in our relationship with God.

You might bless God in the sense that you praise His name. But you are not able to do anything for God to assist Him or to help His condition or to improve His situation. You aren’t big enough to do anything to help God. But God is able to bless you. He is able to bless you because He is greater than you are. When He blesses you, then you stay blessed.

Verses 8-10 give another reason why Melchizedek is a better priest than the sons of Levi. It is because they can be said to have paid tithes to Melchizedek in the sense that Abraham paid those tithes and they were in the loins of Abraham.

THE SUPERIORITY OF MELCHIZEDEK

11 *Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron?*

12 *For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also.*

13 *For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar.*

14 *For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests.*

15 *And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, 16 who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life.*

17 *For it is attested of Him, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” (Hebrews 7:11-17).*

When verse 13 speaks of “another tribe,” it uses the word ἑτερας (eteras) which describes “another of a different kind” in contrast to ἀλλος (allos) which would have been “another of the same kind.” The point is that the priesthood of the Messiah was not to be of the same kind as that of Aaron.

The principle here is that the Levitical priesthood was always meant to be temporary. It did not bring perfection or completeness (τελειωσις). The reason that we know that it was meant to be temporary is because the Old Testament Scriptures promised a future priesthood in Psalm 110:4, one who would be *a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek*.

Now if there was to be a change of the Old Testament priesthood, and such a change was promised in that same Old Testament, then it follows that there was also to be a change in the Law which mandated the that Old Testament priesthood (7:12). This is why the Lord could be of the tribe of Judah instead of from the tribe of Levi.

To hold that we can still approach God under the terms of the Old Covenant would be to say that it is still in effect. If it still in effect, then Jesus cannot serve as our high priest since the Old Covenant mandated that priests must come from the tribe of Levi. The fact that Jesus came from the tribe of Judah is evidence that the Old Covenant has been replaced by a better covenant.

Is it a problem that Jesus was not of the tribe of Levi? It is not a problem if the new Melchizedek priesthood is *not on the basis of a law of physical requirement* (7:16).

The priests of the Aaronic priesthood had no moral or spiritual qualifications to pass in order to become priests. That is evident when you look at some who served as priests. God struck dead two of the sons of Aaron for using

improper methods of worship. He condemned the immoral acts of the sons of Eli who were turning the Tabernacle into a brothel. The only requirement for the Aaronic priesthood was that the priest must be able to trace his ancestry back to Aaron. Priesthood was a “family business.” One became a priest because he was born into a priestly family.

What then is the requirement for the Melchizedek priesthood? Can simply anyone claim to be a Melchizedek priest? After all, the Mormons make exactly that claim. What is to stop such a claim? The answer is seen at the end of verse 16. The requirement for belonging to the Melchizedek priesthood is *the power of an indestructible life* (7:16).

We read in the Bible of the death of Aaron, of his sons, and of every other priest. But the Scriptures are silent regarding any death for Melchizedek. And though Jesus died upon the cross as our sacrifice for sins, He has risen from the dead and has demonstrated *the power of an indestructible life*. It is because of the resurrection that we can say of Him that He is a priest *after the order of Melchizedek*. He has been shown by the power of His resurrection to have an indestructible life.

PERFECTION AND A PROMISE

18 *For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness 19 (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.*

20 *And inasmuch as it was not without an oath 21 (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him, “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘you are a priest forever’”); 22 so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. (Hebrews 7:18-22).*

The writer continues to contrast the priesthood of the Old Covenant with the priesthood of the New Covenant. It is a contrast between a priesthood that was passing away versus a priesthood that was both older as well as without end.

Old Covenant Priesthood	New Covenant Priesthood
A priesthood of the descendants of Aaron	A priesthood after the order of Melchizedek
<i>On the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness</i>	<i>On the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God</i>
They became priests without an oath.	His priesthood was sealed with an oath from God.

In what way was the Law “weak and useless”? It was weak and useless in that it did not accomplish that which it mandated. The only thing that the Law was able to do was to condemn the transgressor of that Law. It could only drive men away from God. But Jesus is able to do that which the Law could never do. He is the One through whom we are able to draw near to God.

Furthermore, the priesthood of Jesus is a better priesthood because it was accompanied by an oath. We saw in the last chapter that when the Lord could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself (6:13). He did not do this lightly. And He did not do this often. There are not a lot of oaths which the Lord swore. But one of those oaths was regarding the Melchizedek priesthood. The priesthood of Aaron was never accompanied by an oath. But the priesthood of the Messiah was. And this means that Jesus is our guarantee that the Lord’s promise of a better covenant has come to pass.

PERMANENT VERSUS TEMPORARY

²³ *The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, ²⁴ but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently.*

²⁵ *Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:23-25).*

Someone might want to advance the argument that the priesthood of Aaron

was better because there were so many priests. Isn't it better to have a history of hundreds of high priests rather than to only depend upon one?

But the reason there were so many high priests throughout this history of the Old Covenant is because they kept dying out. The high priest would die and then it would be necessary to find a successor to become the high priest. And then he would grow old and die and they would need another. And another and another.

The Levitical Priesthood	The Melchizedek Priesthood
They existed in greater numbers	There is only Jesus.
They were prevented by death from continuing	He continues forever, holding His priesthood permanently

There is no replacement for Jesus. None is needed. Though He died upon the cross, He arose from the dead and ever lives to perform His priestly duties.

SINLESS VERSUS SINFUL

26 *For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.*

28 *For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever. (Hebrews 7:26-28).*

The final point of comparison between the Levitical Priesthood versus the priesthood of Christ is a moral comparison. We have a high priest who is *holy, innocent, and undefiled*. Though He was identified with our sins upon the cross, He is *separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens*. This is in contrast to the Levitical Priesthood. We can see the contrast between these two in the following chart:

The Levitical Priesthood	The Melchizedek Priesthood
Before any high priest entered into the temple, he first had to offer up a sacrifice for his own sins.	Jesus was without sin and so was able to enter, not an earthly tabernacle, but heaven itself.
<i>For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak.</i>	<i>The word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.</i>

Both Aaron and Melchizedek served as a type of Christ. But there is nonetheless a difference between the two. Aaron served as a type of Christ with regard to his position as High Priest. Melchizedek served as a type of Christ with regard to his person.

Gundry points out that the Melchizedek Scroll from the Dead Sea Scrolls sees Melchizedek as one who was to come again and proclaim liberty and free men from their debt to sin as well as prosecuting the vengeance of God's judgments (2003:468).

The point of all of these comparisons is to show that Jesus is better. His priesthood is better than anything that was ever known in the Old Testament. Because He is better, you can trust in Him.

HIGH PRIEST OF A NEW COVENANT

Hebrews 8:1-13

Central to the structure of God's relationship with men was the concept of the covenant. A covenant was more than just a treaty. It was both a legal contract and a formalized bond of life and death sealed with an oath. The mediator of such a covenant was the priest. He was the one who would represent man to God and God to men. He officiated over the sacrifice and he brought the blood to the altar. He went into the presence of God on behalf of men.

In the last chapter, we saw that Jesus was our high priest. His priesthood was not of the Aaronic priesthood, for he was not a descendant of Levi. His priesthood was of a much older line of priests. It was one that went all the way back to the days of Abraham. His was of the Melchizedek priesthood.

A BETTER HIGH PRIEST

Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, 2 a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. (Hebrews 8:1-2).

Everything that has been said in Hebrews up to this point has been to bring us to this one main point. We have a high priest in the person of Jesus. We saw at the very beginning of this epistle that God has spoken in a Son who sat

down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. This is now repeated nearly word for word. We have come full circle to see Jesus.

It is one thing to see Jesus as our high priest. It is quite another to see Him as our high priest who has taken His seat. The one thing that no Old Testament priest ever did was to take his seat. Priests in the temple always stood. There were no seats in the temple or the tabernacle. The only seat was God's seat; the mercy seat. This was the lid of the Ark of the Covenant and no priest would ever have dreamed of even touching the Ark let alone actually sitting on it. But Jesus did exactly that. He is the priest who sat down. And notice where it was that He sat: *at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.*

Just in case you didn't hear that, it is repeated for us in verse two. The place where Jesus sat as our high priest was not in any earthly tabernacle or temple. His place of honor was in heaven itself.

We will be seeing a contrast in the next two chapters between that which is in heaven verses that which is on earth.

On Earth	In Heaven
High priest after the order of Aaron	High priest after the order of Melchizedek
Never sat down, but was constantly ministering in the temple	He has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens
An earthly temple built by human hands	The true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man

There are two things of which we ought to take note with regard to Jesus sitting at the right hand of God.

1. To be seated at the right hand was to be seated in the place of honor. The right hand was used for fellowship and for eating. The left hand was used for more mundane tasks. Jesus has been given the place of honor in heaven.
2. In the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of Israel, it was the custom for two scribes to sit on either side of the judges of that court. The scribe

who sat on the right hand side would write the acquittals. The scribe who sat on the left hand side would write the condemnations.

Jesus has been given the seat of pardon. His ministry has been one of bringing pardon and forgiveness to men. But that is not all. In Revelation 3:21 Jesus promises that *to Him who overcomes, I will grant to sit with Me in My throne*. There is coming a day when we shall not only see Jesus seated at the right hand of God, but when we shall sit with Him. This is not because we are good or deserving, but because He has been good and deserving in our place.

The place of Christ's ministry is *in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man* (8:2). This is in contrast to the tabernacle which Moses erected in the wilderness.

The Earthly Tabernacle	The Heavenly Tabernacle
The sanctuary and tabernacle which Moses pitched in the wilderness	The sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man
The shadow	The real after which the shadow is patterned
Old Covenant	New Covenant

This will be more fully developed in the next chapter. The point is that the Tabernacle which Moses built and the Temple which eventually replaced it were only scale replicas of the true heavenly reality.

Does this mean that there is a literal temple in heaven? It might. You go to the book of Revelation and look over John's shoulder to see what he saw in his heavenly vision and you will see a description of the Temple. But more importantly, the Tabernacle and the Temple both pictured the heavenly reality of what Jesus has done in our salvation.

- ♦ You want to know about redemption? Look at the Tabernacle, for it is pictured there.
- ♦ Propitiation is represented on the altar.
- ♦ A substitutionary atonement is seen in the sacrifice lamb.

The Tabernacle had a lampstand. Jesus is the light of the world. The

Tabernacle had a table of shewbread. Jesus is the bread of life. The Tabernacle had a veil. Jesus' glory was veiled to the world and He passed through the veil into the presence of God on our behalf. The Tabernacle had an altar. Jesus is our sacrifice offered on our behalf. By His blood we are healed. Everything in and about the Tabernacle was representative of the spiritual reality that we have in Christ.

A BETTER SACRIFICE

For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer. (Hebrews 8:3).

The major function of any priest was the administration of gifts and sacrifices. That was in their job description. Sometimes these were big sacrifices like an oxen or a bull and sometimes they were little sacrifices like a pigeon or a dove. But they always offered sacrifices.

For Jesus to be a priest means that He also had to offer a sacrifice. But He did not offer an animal. He offered Himself. He took the place of the animal upon the altar. He is the high priest who sacrificed Himself, placing Himself upon the altar of God's holy condemnation. When did He do this? It was when He went to the cross.

A BETTER TABERNACLE

Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; 5 who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "See," He says, "that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain." (Hebrews 8:4-5).

The realm of Jesus' priesthood is not on earth. This is evident because there already exists an earthly priesthood and Jesus did not fit the criteria for that priesthood. He was from the wrong tribe. He was from the tribe of Judah while all priests descended from the tribe of Levi. The reason we can say that

Jesus is a legitimate priest is because His priesthood is heavenly in nature. The contrast that was introduced in verse 2 continues here.

The Earthly Tabernacle	The Heavenly Tabernacle
The sanctuary and tabernacle which Moses pitched in the wilderness	The sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man (8:2)
The shadow (8:2)	The real after which the shadow is patterned
Old Covenant	New Covenant
A copy and shadow of the heavenly things (8:4)	The reality after which the earthly things were copied
The pattern which was shown to Moses on the holy mountain (8:5)	The reality from which the pattern is derived.

The earthly Tabernacle and Temple were nothing but shadows. A shadow has no independent substance or existence. When a shadow exists, it is evidence of a reality which created that shadow.

When Moses was given the directions for building the Tabernacle, they were extremely precise as to the dimensions and the building materials. He was warned not to deviate from this pattern. Why was this so important? It was because it was all a shadow of a spiritual reality. The shadows of the Old Testament were designed to point to the reality that is in Christ. He is the real thing which gives the shadow its shape and form. He defines the shadow.

Did you ever see the stage play version of Peter Pan? He was the little boy who had determined not to grow up. We have already likened the Hebrews to that little boy in their desire. They wanted to remain in the babyhood of the Old Testament Covenant. But here is another likeness. In the stage play, Peter Pan attempts to capture his shadow and to sew it back onto himself. It is rather silly to our way of thinking, because that is not what you do with shadows. But it was equally silly on the part of the Hebrews, for they were attempting to “sew back on” their shadow of the Old Covenant stipulations.

A BETTER COVENANT

But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. (Hebrews 8:6).

The priests were the mediators of a covenant. God had established His covenant with the nation of Israel. There were stipulations to this covenant relationship and it was the duty of the priest to mediate the sacrificial and ceremonial aspects of these stipulations.

There is nothing wrong with the Old Covenant. It was made between a holy God and His covenant people. But today there is a better covenant, a New Covenant. When you use the word “new” in the Greek language, you can use one of two words:

- ♦ *Neos* (νέος): New in the sense of production - “I have a new car.” You might have a new car, but it only means that it is new in the sense that you have it and you did not have it before.
- ♦ *Kainos* (καίνος): New in the sense of quality - “This is a new invention.” This is new in the sense that it has not been previously known.

The New Covenant is described here as being new in the *καίνος* sense. It is a new thing which was previously unknown. God has done something new in Christ that He had never done before. It is both new and it is better. What makes the New Covenant better? It is better because it *has been enacted on better promises*. What those promises are we shall see in just a minute. But the first and most obvious promise of the Old Covenant is that there would be a New Covenant to replace it.

THE OLD COVENANT ASSUMED A BETTER COVENANT TO COME

For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second.

For finding fault with them, He says, “Behold, days are coming,” says the Lord, “when I will effect a new

covenant with the House of Israel and with the House of Judah; 9 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not continue in my covenant, and I did not care for them,” says the Lord. (Hebrews 8:7-9).

One of the Old Covenant promises was that there would eventually come a day when a New Covenant was established. The promise of this coming New Covenant can be found in several places in the Old Testament. The fact that a New Covenant was promised which would replace the Old Covenant assumes that there is a problem in the Old Covenant which needs to be remedied by the New Covenant. You've heard the old saying, "If it's not broken, don't fix it." If the Old Covenant was not somehow lacking, then there would have been no need for a New Covenant to be given to take its place.

The fact that a New Covenant was promised while the Old Covenant was still in effect assumes that there was a need for something better than the Old Covenant that was in place. The writer to the Hebrews points this out by quoting a portion of the promise:

The Old Covenant	The New Covenant
<i>If that first covenant had been faultless...</i>	<i>...there would have been no occasion sought for a second</i>
<i>For finding fault with them...</i>	<i>“Behold, days are coming,” says the Lord, “when I will effect a new covenant with the House of Israel and with the House of Judah...”</i>
<i>“...not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not continue in my covenant, and I did not care for them,”</i>	This will be a continuing covenant which will last forever.

The very fact that there was a promise of a coming New Covenant was an

indication that it was to be better than the previous Old Covenant.

WHAT MAKES THE NEW COVENANT BETTER

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the House of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 11 And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, ‘know the Lord,’ for all will know Me, from the least to the greatest of them. 12 For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.”

When He said, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear. (Hebrews 8:10-13).

We have already noted that the New Covenant is better than the Old Covenant. Now we shall see four specific reasons why this is so.

1. The New Covenant is Better because it is an Internal Covenant: *I will put my laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts (8:10).*

Notice with whom the New Covenant is made. It is made with the same people with whom the Old Covenant was made. It is made with the House of Israel and with the House of Judah. How then are we a part of that covenant? We are a part of that covenant through faith. It is through faith that we become a part of “spiritual Israel.”

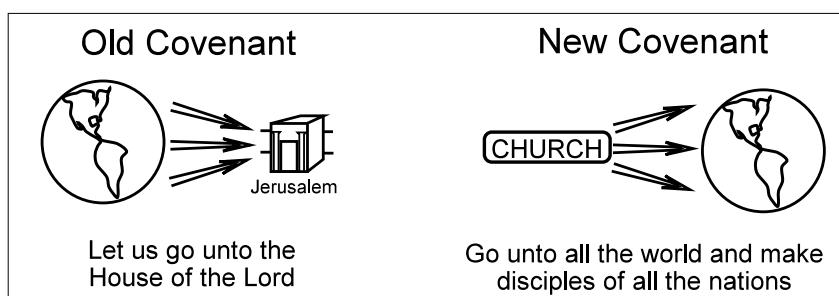
The participant in the New Covenant has something that the believer of past ages never had. He has the Holy Spirit living within him. He has the Keeper of the Covenant indwelling him. And that makes a big difference. It means that God has gifted His people in a special way, working from the inside out.

2. The New Covenant is Better because it is All-Inclusive: *And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, ‘know the Lord,’ for all will know Me, from the least to the*

greatest of them (8:11).

The Old Covenant was primarily Jewish in scope. It was focused upon the land of Israel and upon the sacrifices that took place in Jerusalem. If you wanted to enter the Old Covenant and were not Jewish, you had to proselyte to Judaism. This called for circumcision and an adherence to the Law.

But this changes with the New Covenant. Even though it is made with the House of Judah and with the House of Israel, it looks outward to the world to invite all men to enter the Kingdom.



3. The New Covenant is Better because it Forgives Sins: *For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more* (8:12).

The Israelites broke the Old Covenant. God wrote His commands on tablets of stone and when the Israelites disobeyed, Moses took the tablets and shattered them. But the New Covenant is not written upon tablets of stone. It is written in men's hearts. And because it is written in men's hearts, it brings with it the means of fulfilling its obligations.

How can you possibly fulfill the obligations of the New Covenant? It is only by trusting in the One who fulfilled them on your behalf. That is what verse 12 says: *For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.*

This was the greatest failure of the Old Covenant. It could not forgive sins. It could temporarily cover sins with animal sacrifices that looked forward to a future fulfillment. But the blood of sheep and goats can never take away sin. For this there needed to be a New

Covenant relationship.

4. The New Covenant is Better because it does not become Obsolete: *When He said, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear (8:13).*

All other things being equal, new is better than old. A new dress versus an old dress. A new loaf of bread is better than an old crusty one. People naturally gravitate to that which is new. The fact that a New Covenant was promised indicates that the Old Covenant would be rendered obsolete.

Notice the tense which the writer uses. It is the present tense. It denotes continuing action in the present time. As he was writing these words, something was taking place on the horizon that was making the Old Covenant obsolete and which would eventually cause it to disappear. What is this things that was going to happen? It would be the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. Within a few short years, the Roman legions under General Titus would besiege the city and take it. The temple would be burnt to the ground. The sacrifices and all of its ceremony and ritual would cease.

The days of the Old Covenant are gone. We are to live by the Spirit, trusting in His power and walking in the light of His teaching. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law and has brought us into a New Covenant relationship with Himself. Therefore we are called to hold onto Jesus.

A PRIEST, A SACRIFICE, AND A TABERNACLE

Hebrews 9:1-14

When our daughter was born, we were planning to have the delivery through natural childbirth. Nowadays this sort of thing is quite commonplace, but in our era it was considered to be quite an innovation. I was to be in the delivery room with Paula.

As Paula was prepped for the delivery, I was stopped by a door with a big sign which ordered, “Keep out!” Before entering, I was required to go through an elaborate ritual. I had to put on the backwards paper pajamas. I had to spend five minutes washing my hands clear up to my elbows. Why? What was the necessity for all of this? After all, I was fairly well-dressed and sincere. What more was needed? Why did I need to go through all of this? It was because of something that I couldn’t even see. Something called germs.

There was a place in the Bible life that. It was a place that was restricted; a place with a big “Keep Out” sign. It was a place that only the high priest could enter and then only once a year and then only after an elaborate washing ritual. It was the Holy of Holies. It was the very presence of God. The big “Keep Out” sign was in the form of a great veil that separated this most holy place from the rest of the world.

THE EARTHLY SANCTUARY

Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary.

For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place.

Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, 4 having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant; 5 and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail. (Hebrews 9:1-5).

The Old Testament is very explicit as to how the elements of worship were to be composed. Worship in the Old Testament revolved around the Tabernacle. The word “tabernacle” simply means “tent.” It was often known as the “tent of meeting.” It was the place where God would come to meet man.

The regulations for the Tabernacle are given in great detail in Exodus 25-27. These three long chapters give detailed instructions as to the dimensions, the composition of the building materials and how they were to be put together. Then if that were not enough, Exodus 35-39 recount in even greater detail how those instructions were carried out point by point.

The fact that the Old Testament is so explicit as to its regulations on how God is to be worshiped means that we are not free to worship God in any way we please. We are to worship Him in the manner in which He has ordained.

At first glance, this kind of repetition seems unnecessary. After all, Moses could have merely written, “God told us how to build the Tabernacle and we followed His instructions.” That would have been one verse instead of the eight chapters which are devoted to this subject. Why such attention to detail? Was it merely filler that was needed? Was Moses getting paid by the word? Was this a homework assignment which required a certain number of pages? No, I believe that there was a special reason for this great detail. It is because the entire Tabernacle and all of the ordinances therein were a giant picture of Jesus. Let’s look at it.

9:2	There was a tabernacle prepared	<i>And the Word became flesh and dwelt [literally “tabernacled”] with us... (John 1:14).</i>
	The lampstand	<i>“I am the light of the world...” (John 8:12).</i>

	The table and the sacred bread	<i>“I am the bread of life...” (John 6:35).</i>
9:3	The second veil	Represented the body of Jesus.
	A golden altar of incense	Represented prayers of intercession.

1. The Tabernacle.

The word “Tabernacle” simply means “tent.” The Tabernacle was a portable meeting place; a place where God would meet with His people. It was first established while the Israelites were in the Sinai wilderness. As such, it had to be portable because the Israelites were constantly on the move.

Do you remember what happened when the Tabernacle was completed? The presence of God came and moved into the Tabernacle.

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. 35 And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. (Exodus 40:34-35).

Many years later, the Tabernacle was replaced by a more permanent structure. Although built to the same general specifications, the Temple was made instead of wood and stone. When it was completed, the same thing happened as had happened in the wilderness. The presence of God came.

And it came about when the priests came from the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, 11 so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord. (1 Kings 8:10-11).

The thing that made the Tabernacle and the Temple so special was the presence of God. Without that, they were just another building. The prophet Ezekiel records a number of visions which he had concerning

the glory of the Lord. At the beginning of these visions, the glory of the Lord is seen residing within the Temple and specifically between the cherubim (Ezekiel 9:3). As Ezekiel watches, the glory of the Lord moves to the threshold of the Temple (Ezekiel 9:3; 10:3). From there it moves to the east gate (Ezekiel 10:19) and finally out to the mountain which is to the east of the city (Ezekiel 11:23). This was a sign of God's judgment. The glory of the Lord departed and it was not long after this that the Temple was destroyed.

Here is the point. Do you remember how Jesus came to Jerusalem on the week in which He was crucified? The Biblical account is very specific. He came by way of the Mount of Olives, the mountain directly east of the city; the mountain over which the glory of the Lord had last been seen in Ezekiel's vision.

The coming of Jesus to the Temple was the return of the King to His sanctuary. He came cleansing the Temple. But more importantly, He came to provide a cleansing for all men. In this sense, He not only cleansed the Temple, He IS the temple. It is in Him that men are able to approach God.

2. The Outer Tabernacle.

The Sanctuary proper was divided into two parts. There was an inner part and an outer part. They were separated by a thick inner veil. The outer Tabernacle was the scene of daily activity. Into this section would come a priest each morning and each evening.

3. The Lampstand.

When we think of the Lampstand, we normally think in terms of a menorah. The Lampstand within the later Temple almost certainly had this appearance. It is shown in such a manner on Titus' Arch of Triumph in Rome which pictures Jewish captives being forced to carry the golden lampstand as a part of the Roman spoils of war.

But the original lampstand in the Tabernacle may have looked quite different. It was formed in the shape of a tree.

Then you shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The lampstand and its base and its shaft are to be

made of hammered work; its cups, its bulbs and its flowers shall be of one piece with it.

Six branches shall go out from its sides; three branches of the lampstand from its one side and three branches of the lampstand from its other side.

Three cups shall be shaped like almond blossoms in the one branch, a bulb and a flower, and three cups shaped like almond blossoms in the other branch, a bulb and a flower -- so for six branches going out from the lampstand; 34 and in the lampstand four cups shaped like almond blossoms, its bulbs and its flowers. (Exodus 35:31-34).

Notice the reference to bulbs and flowers and almond blossoms. The lampstand represented a living thing. Even the stylized lampstand of later years had the same representation. What did the lampstand represent?

- ♦ It represented the One who is the light of the world (John 8:12).
- ♦ It represented those who follow that light. This can be seen in John's vision in the book of Revelation. John first hears a voice at the beginning of his vision and he turns and he sees a lampstand.

And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; 13 and in the middle of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His breast with a golden girdle. (Revelation 1:12-13).

Notice that in John's vision there is not a single lampstand with seven branches, but seven separate lampstands. This symbolism is explained in verse 20.

As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are

the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. (Revelation 1:20).

Do you see who the lampstands represent? They represent you. They represent the churches of God.

The lampstand brought light to the Temple. But the lampstand itself was not the source of the light. The source of the light was the oil which was retained in the various bulbs and cups and flowers on the lampstand. These were oil lamps. The Jews had an annual celebration called Hanukkah - the Feast of Lights. It was a time of commemoration of the cleansing of the Temple in the days of the Maccabees. The story was told of how there had been only enough oil to last for a single day, but how it had miraculously lasted for an entire week until more could be brought.

The lampstand did not provide the light. It only held the oil that provided the light. And in the same way, the church does not in itself provide the light. It is only as the church is filled with the oil of the Holy Spirit that light is provided.

4. The Table and the Sacred Bread.

The table of shewbread was a wooden table overlaid with gold. Onto this table, the priests would lay out 12 loaves of bread. Why twelve? I believe that it was because these also served a double representation.

- ♦ On the one hand, they look at the One who would be the Bread of Life (John 6:41). Jesus is that One who provides spiritual nourishment for our souls. His body which is broken for us is represented by broken bread which is eaten. It is not by chance that He was born in Bethlehem, a town whose name means “the House of Bread.”
- ♦ On the other hand, these 12 loaves also represent the 12 tribes of Israel, God’s people, the church. We collectively are the body of Christ as we are in union with Him.

5. The second veil.

The reason that this is called the second veil is because there was a first veil. The first veil was located at the door of the Tabernacle. It separated the outside from the inside. Beyond this veil and past the golden lampstand and the table of shewbread was the second veil. It served to separate the Holy Place from the innermost sanctum, the Holy of Holies.

Embroidered on the veil were the images of cherubim. They served as guardians of the veil, keeping even the priests from entering in. They are reminiscent of the cherubim stationed at the entrance to the Garden of Eden. They were stationed with a flaming sword in order to keep out all who might enter.

Hebrews 10:20 tells us that Christ has made a way for us to pass through the veil, that is, through His flesh.

Do you remember what happened to the veil when Jesus died? It was torn from top to bottom (Luke 23:45). The Scriptures do not say who did the tearing, but the fact that it was from top to bottom tells us that it was no human hand that did this. It was the hand of God who was letting us know by this outward sign that the way into the presence of God had been opened. It was opened because the death of Jesus removed that which formerly separated us from the presence of God.

6. The Holy of Holies.

When you want to emphasize something in Hebrew, you do it by means of repetition. You can find a number of examples of this:

- ◆ “Truly, truly” (John 3:3).
- ◆ “Woe, woe” (Ezekiel 16:23).
- ◆ “The song of songs, which is Solomon’s” (SS 1:1).

This was a designation for the most holy place of all. It was the holiest of holies. It was the innermost sanctum of the Tabernacle. Its dimensions were in the form of a perfect cube measuring 10 cubits by 10 cubits by 10 cubits.

Notice that these are essentially the same dimensions of the New Jerusalem as described in Revelation 21:16. Instead of 10 cubits on a side, it is 12,000 stadia by 12,000 stadia by 12,000 stadia. It is the

same shape as the holy of holies, only a great deal larger. We are meant to recognize this shape. The point that is symbolized by that shape is that it is a most holy place, a place where God Himself dwells.

7. The golden altar of incense.

The altar of incense was a cubit wide and a cubit long and two cubits in height. It was overlaid in gold. Although technically it was located outside the veil which separated the holy place from the holy of holies, it was associated with the veil and the ark.

“And you shall put this altar in front of the veil that is near the ark of the testimony, in front of the mercy seat that is over the ark of the testimony, where I will meet with you.

“And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it; he shall burn it every morning when he trims the lamps.

“And when Aaron trims the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense. There shall be perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations.” (Exodus 30:6-8).

Incense was offered upon this altar every morning and every evening. This incense created a sweet-smelling aroma. It would sweeten the entire Temple. The smoke of this incense represented the sweet prayers of God's people ascending to heaven.

8. The Ark of the Covenant

...the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant; 5 and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail. (Hebrews 9:4-5).

The Ark was the most holy part of the Temple. It was called the ark of the covenant because it held the covenant tablets within. It also

held the rod of Aaron which had budded and thereby given evidence that it was Aaron's household who were to serve and the priests of Israel. It held a golden jar of manna, the food with which God had preserved His people in the wilderness.

THE INNER TABERNACLE

Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship, 7 but into the second, only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. (Hebrews 9:6-7).

Priests entered into the Temple every morning and every evening to offer the morning incense and the evening incense. Once a week they would enter to change the bread on the Table of Shewbread. These were acts of prayer and of worship. But these priests were not permitted to go any further than the inner veil. Only one priest was allowed to pass beyond the veil. He was the high priest. And he was only permitted to do so once a year.

It would be on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement that the High Priest would pass through the veil and into the holy of holies. He would approach the Ark of the Covenant. Upon the top of the Ark was a lid of solid gold. This was known as the Mercy Seat. The images of two cherubim face the center of the Ark. They were silent guardians of the presence of God. The high priest would sprinkle the blood of sacrificed animals upon the Mercy Seat. By this he was providing an atonement for the sins of the entire nation.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SACRIFICE

The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, 9 which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, 10 since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.

(Hebrews 9:8-10).

Now we come to the significance of the ritual which was practiced each year by the Jewish high priest. The fact that the blood of an animal served as a continuing sacrifice meant that the way into the presence of God had not yet been made open. No mere animal's death could ever take away sins. No mere animal's blood could ever take away guilt. Such rituals were only temporary, looking forward to *a time of reformation*.

The word translated “symbol” in verse 9 is from the Greek παραβολή (parabole). It is related to our word “parable.” You know what a parable is. It is an earthly story thrown up along side a spiritual reality to further illustrate it.

That is what the Tabernacle was all about. The Tabernacle was a physical structure which was built to teach spiritual realities. It was a physical parable of Jesus and the cross. But once you have learned the truth behind the parable, it is inappropriate to reject that truth while holding only to the parable.

A BETTER TABERNACLE AND BETTER BLOOD

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; 12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. (Hebrews 9:11-12).

Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system. He did what the high priest could only symbolize. He entered into heaven itself. As such, He is seen in strong contrast to the high priest:

High Priest	Jesus Christ
A high priest of the old Aaronic priesthood	The High Priest of the good things to come

Entered the Tabernacle made with hands	Entered the greater and more perfect tabernacle
Entered with blood of goats and calves	Entered with His own blood
Every year he had to repeat the same sacrifice	He entered the holy place once for all

Jesus entered *through the greater and more perfect tabernacle*. What is this greater and more perfect Tabernacle?

- ♦ It is that tabernacle that was not made with hands.
- ♦ It is that tabernacle which is not of this creation.

It is heaven! The earthly tabernacle is merely a copy and a pattern of the heavenly reality. Every picture that we are given in the Bible of heaven is described in terms of the tabernacle and the temple. When you read in the book of Revelation of a throne before a crystal sea, it is using the language of the temple, for the laver of water before the temple was known as the “sea.” When you read of souls under the altar in Revelation 6, it brings to mind the picture of the temple and its altar of incense.

Jesus is described here in terms of a high priest, but Jesus did something that no other high priest ever did. He entered into heaven itself to minister a sacrifice. He not only came with the sacrifice; He was the sacrifice. He ministered as both the priest and the offering. The blood which He offered was His own. The offering and the One bringing the offering was one and the same.

A CLEANSING THAT CLEANSES

For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:13-14).

Now we come to our last comparison. It is a comparison of the weak and the

strong. The point is if that which was intrinsically weak was able to accomplish something, then how much more will that which is intrinsically stronger be able to accomplish.

That which is Weak	That which is Stronger
If the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling...	How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered Himself...
Sanctifies for the cleansing of the flesh.	Cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

The old system provided an outward cleansing of the flesh, a ritual cleansing. But the New Covenant provides much more. It cleanses from the inside out. It cleanses your conscience. It provides a real and lasting forgiveness. It changes a man's very nature.

- ♦ The old system said: “If anyone will make a sacrifice, he can become ritually cleansed on the outside.”
- ♦ The New Covenant says: “If anyone be in Christ, he has become a new creature.”

Notice the movement of the passage. It goes from death to life. The most that the Law could ever do was to bring about a ritual cleansing. But Christ does so much more. He cleanses you from the inside out. The result is not that you might go out and “live as you please” but rather that you might go out and live as He pleases; that you might serve the living God.

SIGNED, SEALED, & DELIVERED **Hebrews 9:15-28**

So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.” (Exodus 24:8).

I have been involved in quite a few contracts in my day. As a husband, I entered into a marital contract in the sense of being a co-signer with my wife in a marriage certificate. As a home buyer, I entered into a contract to purchase our house. And in my years as a fire fighter, I negotiated and signed labor contracts with various employers.

In some cases, the negotiations which led up to those various contracts was a pleasant affair. At other times, the negotiations could be rather strained. In one particular instance, an arbitrator was called in to mediate between the opposing positions.

As we come to this section of Hebrews, we find that an arbitrator has been called in to mediate the covenant between God and men. The mediator is Jesus Christ. He is the One who serves as a “go-between.”

MEDIATOR OF AN INHERITANCE

For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. (Hebrews 9:15).

Jesus is our representative. He is the one who stands in the gap between God and men. He represents God to men and He represents men to God.

The priests served as a type of mediator under the Old Covenant, but their mediation was never completed because they could not actually approach God. They were kept from the presence of God by the veil. Even the high priest who was permitted to do once a year into the presence of God could not serve as the ultimate mediator since their atonement was only sufficient for that one year and since the blood of bulls and calves cannot really take away sin. It took something better. It took a redemption of transgressions.

What are the *transgressions that were committed under the first covenant*? They are the sins of the Old Testament saints. Has anyone ever asked you, “How were people saved in the Old Testament?” Here is the answer. They were saved by the redemption that was purchased on the cross.

This is important. People in the Old Testament were never saved by keeping the Law. That type of salvation has been likened to a man who had fallen down a well. He was treading water at the bottom of the well, calling for help, when someone came along and dropped a sheet of paper to him containing, “Ten rules on how to keep out of wells.” Christ does not give us advice on how to save ourselves. He is the rope which draws us up out of the well.

THE NECESSITY OF DEATH IN A COVENANT

For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. 17 For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives. (Hebrews 9:16-17).

The New International Version (NIV) has translated the word “covenant” in this passage as “last will and testament”, in spite of the fact that the same Greek word (*diatheke*) is found in the verses immediately prior and immediately after these verses in a context that evidently demands the translation “covenant.” I do not mean to attack the NIV. Its easier style of reading makes it enjoyable and a delight. There is nothing wrong with a translation being somewhat interpretive IF the interpretation happens to be correct. However, let me suggest another possible interpretation to this passage.

Since the beginning of the book, the writer to the Hebrews has been

contrasting the Old Covenant of Moses with the New Covenant of Christ (see verse 15). I want to suggest that in these verses he continues to do exactly the same thing. Let's look at the passage:

For where there is a covenant... (9:16).

To understand the idea of a covenant, you must go back to the Old Testament where God established a relationship with His people. The word “covenant” first appears in Genesis 6 when the Lord says that He is going to make a covenant with Noah and his family.

This concept is developed more fully when God entered a covenant with Abraham. One of the most dramatic scenes in the Old Testament takes place in Genesis 15 when Abraham sacrifices some animals, cuts their bodies into two parts and then falls into a deep sleep while God's presence passes between the parts.

The implications of this act must be understood in light of ancient customs. When two men desired to enter into a covenant, they would kill an animal, cut it into two parts, and pass between the parts as they recited the terms of the covenant. The implication was that they were swearing a curse upon themselves. If either party broke the covenant, he was saying, “May I also be killed as this animal has been killed and torn apart.”

As God passed between the pieces, He was putting a curse upon Himself (that is what an oath is) that He would be cursed before He would break His covenant with Abraham.

So strong was this idea, that throughout the Old Testament you rarely see anyone described as “making” a covenant; instead, they always CUT a covenant. Indeed, there are times when the word “covenant” disappears altogether and only the verb “cut” remains to signify that a covenant has been made (you will not see this in most English translations as the translators have usually added the word “covenant” for the benefit of our understanding).

I am suggesting that when Hebrew says in verse 16, *“For where a covenant is...”* the writer is still speaking of a covenant - not a last will and testament. Let's continue...

For where a covenant is, THERE MUST OF NECESSITY BE THE DEATH OF THE ONE WHO MADE IT (Hebrews 9:16b).

Once again, our English translation is lacking, although this lack is made up in the form of footnotes in some Bibles. This literally says: *For where (there is) a covenant, death is needed to be offered of the covenant-maker.*

Note: The Greek word *phereshai* is the passive infinitive participle of *phero* and because of the passive can be translated “to be brought or offered” or even “to enter into.”

Thus, we could also translated it as: *For where (there is) a covenant, it is necessary for death to be entered into with reference to the covenant-maker.*

Let's continue to verse 17...

For a covenant is valid only when men are dead... (Hebrew 9:17a).

Once again, we have an unfortunate translation. A more literal one would be: *For a covenant over dead bodies is firm — διαθηκη γαρ ἐπι νεκροῖς βεβαία.*

This cannot be a reference to a last will and testament. Neither the context nor the words themselves will permit it. Rather, it is a reference to the fact that a person entering into a covenant does so upon the basis of the death of another and that only as he is identified with that death does the covenant take place.

What am I proposing? That the making of a covenant involves the one who is making it entering into a relationship which identifies him with death.

- God did this when He entered into a covenant with Abraham. When He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself. He was saying in effect, “I swear to God and hope to die!”
- Israel did this at the Mosaic covenant, swearing themselves to life and death (Exodus 24:4-8). We shall see this more fully developed in just a moment.

- Christ did this on our behalf by dying a death with which we are identified so that we can enter into a new inheritance of life in him (this is introduced in verse 15, explained in verses 16-17 and then illustrated in verses 18-22).

Thus, verses 16 and 17 are demonstrating that there MUST be DEATH in the making of a covenant. The death of a lamb was not enough. It took the death of the Lamb of God - Jesus Christ the righteous One.

Interpretation #1: Speaking of a Last Will & Testament	Interpretation #2: Speaking of Identification with Death in making a Covenant
Author changes his meaning in the use of the term “covenant”	Consistent use of the term “covenant” throughout the chapter
Ties in with the verse 15 which speaks of <i>the promise of the eternal inheritance</i>	We do not receive our inheritance as a last will and testament, but because of our union with Christ — we are co-inheritors with Him
This does not fit with the verses which follow that speak of the people of Israel being sprinkled with blood.	The concept of being identified with death carries over to the following verses where the Israelites were sprinkled with blood and identified with death.

THE EVIDENCE OF THE FIRST COVENANT

Therefore even the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood. 19 For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, 20 saying, “This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you.”

And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood.

And according to the Law, one may almost say, all

things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. (Hebrews 9:18-22).

The importance of death in a covenant runs through all the covenants of the ancient world. Even today we speak of signing your name in blood. What do we mean by this? We mean that it is an unbreakable signature.

All covenants in the ancient world were signed with blood. They involved a sacrifice. Animals were cut into two pieces. The parties of the covenant would walk between the pieces of the animals while reciting the terms of the covenant. This is illustrated in the case of Moses.

Remember when Moses had come back down from Mount Sinai with the Law of God? He read that Law to all of the people of Israel and then bound them in their relationship with God by means of a covenant. To accomplish this required a ceremony of blood. Several animals were killed and their blood was taken and sprinkled on the people and the tabernacle and the vessels and even the book of the Law. Imagine this bloody mess! After all, there is nothing that stains as much as blood. There was blood on nearly everything. Nor was this an isolated instance. The writer sums up in verse 22 - whenever you have cleansing, there is blood. And whenever you have forgiveness, there is blood.

No Blood = No forgiveness

In all of the Old Testament, there was never a covenant made that did not involve a sacrifice and the taking of a life. When sins were forgiven, it was only on the basis of a slain animal.

THE EVIDENCE POINTS TO A PRINCIPLE

Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. (Hebrews 9:23).

The premise that we saw in verses 16-17 is that all covenants require a death. This was illustrated in verses 18-22 in the case of Moses who sprinkled the people and the tabernacle and nearly everything in blood. Now we come to

a resulting principle. It is that the New Covenant required the shedding of blood.

9:16	9:18	9:23
Premise	Illustration	Resulting Principle
All Covenants require death	Illustrated by Moses in the wilderness	The New Covenant required death

Once again we see the concept of the earthly copies versus the heavenly realities. It is bound in the truth that the earthly physical ordinances were only symbols of a spiritual reality.

The Old Covenant	The New Covenant
<i>Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these... (9:23).</i>	<i>...but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these (9:23).</i>
<i>For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one... (9:24).</i>	<i>...but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us (9:24).</i>
<i>Nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own... (9:25).</i>	<i>...but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (9:26).</i>
<i>And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment... (9:27).</i>	<i>...so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him (9:28).</i>

Here is the principle. The Old Testament required the shedding of blood and the taking of a life. For the New Covenant to be a better covenant, it required the shedding of better blood and the taking of a better life.

THE REAL THING

For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; 25 nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own.

Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. (Hebrews 9:24-26).

This section contains two negative and two corresponding positives. It tells us what Christ did not do versus what He did do.

1. When we speak of Christ making a sacrifice for sins, we are not to understand that he entered into a tabernacle or a temple in the same way that the high priest did. The place of His sacrifice was not in the earthly realm but in the heavenly realm.
2. Neither are we to understand that the sacrifice of Jesus would have to be repeated on a regular basis. His offering was once and for all. This is the basic problem with the Roman Catholic view of the Eucharist. They view it as the regular unbloody sacrifice of Christ. But His sacrifice was once and for all. It needs never to be repeated.

Notice that the death of Christ is said to have taken place *at the consummation of the ages*. There was something completing about the death of Christ. It has brought us into the realm of the last days. The past ages have been consummated in Him.

A CONTINUING PROMISE

And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, 28 so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him. (Hebrews 9:27-28).

We now come full circle with regard to our discussion about the sacrifice of Jesus. We have seen its necessity, its location and its sufficiency. Now we see its continuing result.

9:23	9:24	9:25	9:27
Necessity of the Sacrifice	Location of the Sacrifice	Sufficiency of the Sacrifice	Result of the Sacrifice
If the copies needed a death, then the reality behind the copied needed a more significant death.	Not in an earthly place of worship, but into heaven itself.	Not once a year as the high priest is accustomed to do, but once and for all.	Christ has come the first time to bear sins; He will return the second time for salvation without reference to sin.

The eschatology of the Old Testament is very simple. They were not divided into Amillennial or Premillennial or Post Millennial. There was not a Pretribulational Rapture or a Post Tribulational Rapture or any other kind of Rapture. There were only two points to their eschatology:

- (1) You die.
- (2) Then comes the Judgment.

The writer to the Hebrews affirms this eschatology. It applies to men in general and it also applies to Jesus Christ. However we are not merely told that Jesus died and that He will one day return in judgment. Rather we see that these two points were combined for Jesus on the cross.

The Principle for Men in General	The Principle for Jesus
It is appointed to men once to die...	Christ died upon the cross
And after this the judgment	He was offered to bear the sins of many

Do you see the point? The eschatology of Jesus with regard to sin and judgment was completed upon the cross. We look forward to His Second Coming. And that coming will be in contrast to His first coming.

Christ's First Coming	Christ's Second Coming
He came to be an atonement for sin	He will come without reference to sin
He came to purchase our salvation	He will come that we might realize the fulness of our salvation

This is not true for everyone. There will be some for whom Christ's future coming will be with reference to judgment. The same coming that will be salvation for some will mean judgment for others. What makes the difference? It is how you perceive Christ. Is He just a man, or is He your Lord and Savior? Do you eagerly await Him? Are you looking for the salvation that He provides?

FORGIVEN & FORGOTTEN

Hebrews 10:1-18

Have you ever wished for a return to the “good old days”? One of the signs of the encroachment of middle age is a growing nostalgia. You begin to remember how things used to be. I can remember when we attended Paula’s 40th high school reunion. It was a time of seeing old friends and of remembering old events. The problem is that memory tends to be selective. If we were suddenly to be transported back to those “good old days,” we might find that they were not so good after all.

The Epistle to the Hebrews is written to Jewish Christians who were beginning to think in terms of the “good old days.” They found themselves being persecuted for their faith and they began to remember how things were before they heard the message of the gospel. There was none of this controversy about a Galilean carpenter-turned-rabbi. Life was so simple then. You went to the temple and you offered your sacrifice and you got on with the business of life. Just like their forefathers had longed for the beauties of Egypt, so now they are beginning to long for the Old Testament sacrificial system. It is for this reason that they are going to be taken on a tour of exactly what it meant to be under the law.

THE INABILITY OF THE OLD COVENANT SACRIFICES

For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by

the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.

Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?

But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year.

For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. (Hebrews 10:1-4).

Plato's Republic depicts an allegory in which people find themselves living within a cave, having been chained in such a position that they cannot turn their heads to look out at the opening of the cave, but instead, can only see the shadows that are cast upon the back wall. Living their whole lives in shadow, they have little inkling of the reality of that which is casting such shadows.

In his allegory, a man is set free and brought out of the cave and into the light. He looks in amazement at those actual things that gave form to the shadows. There is the sun. And here is a tree, a real tree and not merely the shadow of a tree. There is a bird. Here are people of warmth and flesh and blood. Our problem is that we are still in the cave and all we see is the shadow.

The writer to the Hebrews uses similar terminology. He speaks of how the Old Testament prophets saw reality only in terms of shadow. They had a promise of what God was going to do in the future, but they did not know how it all fit together. They had the sacrifices and they had the temple and they had the priesthood and they looked forward to a coming Messiah, but they did not know how it was all to work together.

Then Jesus came. They heard the gospel, the good news that a Galilean Rabbi from Nazareth had lived and died and rose again from the dead, just as the prophets of old had foretold. They believed the good news, the gospel. They trusted in Jesus as the promised Messiah and sought to follow Him. They came to define reality, not in terms of a shadow, but in terms of a person.

But then hard times came. Persecutions began to arise against those who were followers of Jesus. In the midst of these difficult times, these Jewish believers began to face a temptation to leave Jesus and to go back to their Old

Testament way of doing things.

This is why the book of Hebrews was written. It is to tell us not to depart from the faith because Jesus is better. He is better than...

- ♦ The angels.
- ♦ Moses or Joshua
- ♦ He is a better high priest.
- ♦ He has offered a better sacrifice.
- ♦ He has established a better covenant.

It is not that the Old Covenant was bad. After all, it was given by God. But it was designed by its very nature to be temporary. In the language of Plato, it was a shadow.

1. Those Sacrifices were only a Shadow: *For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things* (10:1).

There is nothing wrong with a shadow. But a shadow lacks substance. You can look at a shadow and you can get some idea of what is the reality behind the shadow, but the shadow is no substitute for the reality.

If I invite you over to eat a Sunday lunch, you will be sorely disappointed if you sit down at the table and see only a shadow of a meal and not the actual meal itself. A shadow doesn't fill your hunger and it does not assuage your thirst.

When I hit the age of thirty, my dear wife threw me a surprise birthday party. She has a real flair for the dramatic and when it came time to open the presents, I opened a little box and inside was a small model of a gold Pontiac Firebird. As I turned the model over, a key was taped beneath and suddenly a real Pontiac Firebird was being driven up the driveway. A friend leaned over my shoulder and whispered, "It sure takes the edge off being thirty."

But imagine if, in the days to come, I never got into the real car and drove it, but only contented myself with the model. You would have come to the conclusion that something was seriously wrong with my perception of reality and you would have been right because a model is not to be more highly valued than that after which it is modeled and

a shadow is no substitute for substance. A shadow is not a bad thing. It can be a good thing. But a shadow has no independent substance. It is only the reflection of reality, not the reality itself. The Law was like that. The best that it could be was a reflection of that which was to come after. Because of this, it could not offer lasting forgiveness.

This is simple to prove. If the sacrifices of the Law could bring permanent forgiveness, then they would have ended long ago. A sacrifice would have been given and it would have been good enough and another would never need to be established. A worshiper would make a one-time offering and it would last for all eternity. But that wasn't the case.

2. Those Sacrifices could never make one Perfect: *For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near* (10:1).

If those sacrifices had been able to make one perfect, it could have done so and then ceased. The very fact that sacrifices continued year after year after year was in itself a sign of the inability of those sacrifices.

- ♦ What the Law would have done had it been able: *Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?* (10:2).

The sacrifices were endless. A sacrifice was offered every day. Day after day, week after week, year after year. Another year. And another dead lamb, its hot blood staining the altar and the sacrificial knife. Year by year and lamb by lamb. A never-ended parade. Each lamb that was ever slain bore mute and bloody testimony that the blood of lambs can do nothing with regard to cleansing sins.

- ♦ What the Law did do because it was not able: *But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year* (10:3).

The fact that there was a never-ending need for a sacrifice was a reminder that the issue of sin was never fully resolved. It

was only delayed. Every time you went back to offer another sacrifice, it served as still another reminder.

Reminders are a good thing, but sometimes a reminder can get you down, especially when it is a reminder of your own inadequacy. James likens the law to a mirror. You look into it and it shows you the dirt on your face, but it doesn't clean it up. The law was a reminder that sin remained. The only permanent thing the law ever did was to impress upon one how temporary it was.

3. Those Sacrifices cannot take away sins: *For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins* (10:4).

In the final analysis, the killing of a sheep was unable to have any effect upon sin. A lamb cannot die for human sin. If this is the case, then why did God require animal sacrifices? Why would God give something that did not work? Why did God give the law? There are three reasons.

- ♦ First, the law was given as a shadow of good things to come (10:1). Each and every ceremony of the tabernacle pointed directly to the person of Jesus.
- ♦ Secondly, the law served as a reminder that God hates sin. The law showed man what sin is and how it stands in contrast to the holiness of God. Thus the law serves to diagnose the sinful condition of man and show his need for a Savior.
- ♦ Thirdly, the law presents to us the righteousness of God. To you want to know what God is like with respect to His holy character? Look at the law.

THE ABILITY OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICIAL BODY

The temporal quality of the law is not exclusively a New Testament teaching. It is rooted in the Old Testament. We see this in a quotation from Psalm 40:6-8.

1. God Prepared a Body: *Therefore, when He comes into the world, He*

says, “Sacrifice and offering You have not desired, but a body You have prepared for me; 6 in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have taken no pleasure.” (Hebrews 10:5-6).

I am reminded of a sermon title that I once heard: “God in a Bod.” It did not sound very reverent. Indeed, it sounded rather profane. But then again, the very concept is a bit profane. If the title makes you feel a bit uncomfortable, it should. It should because God left the comfort of heaven to do that which was completely and utterly profane.

The very idea of the holy and majestic God of the cosmos coming to take upon Himself the form of a baby with soiled diapers and then growing up to walk our dirty streets and live in our dirty world and to die upon our dirty cross. Drab. Irreverent. Simply profane. God in a human body. Unthinkable. But that is exactly what the Bible teaches.

- ♦ God became man to communicate with men. That is how the book of Hebrews begins when it tells us that God spoke in times past in many ways and at many times, but has now spoken to us in His Son.
- ♦ God became man to identify with men. We have a great high priest who understands every temptation we face because He faced them, too.
- ♦ God became man to die in place of men. God cannot die. For God to die would be the end of the universe and everything. Therefore One who was God took one flesh and was born as a baby so that He could die in our place.

2. God took Pleasure in a Body

- ♦ He took no pleasure in sacrifices: *In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast taken no pleasure* (10:6).

The concept of God taking no pleasure in sacrifices and in offerings is a common one in the Old Testament.

Isaiah 1:11. “*What are your multiplied sacrifices to*

Me?" Says the LORD. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams, And the fat of fed cattle. And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs, or goats."

Jeremiah 6:20. For what purpose does frankincense come to Me from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a distant land? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, and your sacrifices are not pleasing to Me.

Hosea 6:6. For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Amos 5:21-22. I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. 22 Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; and I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings.

The point of these passages is not that God hated sacrifices, but that He does not want only sacrifices and that He does not want them forever. They were designed, by their very nature, to be temporary and to be anticipatory of that which would come later.

- He took pleasure in the one who came to do His will: "*Then I said, 'Behold, I have come (In the roll of the book it is written of Me) To do Thy will, O God'*" (10:7).

The writer is still quoting from the Psalms. It is a psalm about fulfilling the will of God. What is it that God wants? Not sacrifices and offerings. God finds no pleasure in the death of animals. What does God want? He wants Jesus. He prepared for Him a body. Jesus came to do the will of God. It is by this will that we are saved.

The Son came to do the will of the Father and to accomplish that which would ultimately give pleasure to the Father. Do you remember what took place at the baptism of Jesus? A voice was heard from heaven: "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased*" (Matthew 3:17).

- ♦ The pleasure of God's will was accomplished in Christ: *After saying above, "Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast not desired, nor hast Thou taken pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the Law), 9 then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Thy will." He takes away the first in order to establish the second. 10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.* (10:8-10).

The writer of the book carefully cites the prophecy from Psalm 40 and then he goes back through it to pick out the part he wants to underscore. The portion he wants to emphasize is that the coming of the Messiah as a replacement to the Old Testament sacrifices was a part of the will of God. Now that Christ has come, the Old Testament sacrifices are no longer needed.

3. This Body was to Supersede the Law: *He takes away the first in order to establish the second* (Hebrews 10:9).

We are no longer under the Old Covenant. It has been taken away. Indeed, it was designed to be taken away. It contained a promise that it would be taken away. The reason it would be taken away is so that something new could be established in its place. The Old Covenant does not co-exist alongside the New Covenant. If the New Covenant has come, then the Old Covenant has passed away and has been replaced by that New Covenant.

4. This Body results in our Sanctification: *By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.* (10:10).

The law was about making you holy. It was all about setting you apart from the other nations of the world and making you into someone special who was to have a special role in God's kingdom. It required a never-ending supply of animal sacrifices. But that has all been replaced by the offering of the body of Christ. Instead of the shadow, you now have the substance behind the shadow. Instead of having the promise, you now have the fulfillment of that promise.

THE COMPLETED NATURE OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE

And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; 12 but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, 13 waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. 14 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. (Hebrews 10:11-14).

There was an incredible monotony to the Old Testament when it came to the sacrificial system. A sacrifice would be offered every morning. Another sacrifice would be offered every evening. Each year there would be an atonement made for the sins of the nation. The following year it had to be repeated. Year after year would be the same. Every year, another atonement. Day after day. Year after year. Time after time. Thus it continued until the coming of the better priest.

1. The Sacrifice of Christ was a Single Sacrifice: *He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time... (10:12).*

The sacrifices of the Old Testament were many. There was a sacrifice for sin. There was an offering for dedication. There was a sin offering and a guilt offering and a trespass offering. These sacrifices were in constant need of repetition.

By contrast, the sacrifice of Jesus was a single sacrifice. Because it was a single sacrifice, it needs never to be repeated. This is one of the issues that I have with the Roman Catholic Church. That church teaches that Jesus is offered again and again in the elements of the Eucharist; that the Lord's Supper involves an "unbloody sacrifice." But the Bible teaches that the sacrifice of Jesus is one sacrifice for all time.

2. The Sacrifice of Christ was a Completed Sacrifice: *He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God (10:12).*

We have already noted the significance of Jesus sitting down at the

right hand of God. This epistle opened with the statement that Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3). The reason He could sit down is because His sacrificial work was completed.

One thing the priest in the temple never did was to sit down. There were no chairs in the temple. There were lampstands and altars and tables, but no chairs. The priests of the temple were always standing. There was always another sacrifice to be made, another offering to officiate. Jesus is the priest who sat down. He sat down because His work was completed. The place of His sitting down was at a place of greatest glory. He sat down at the right hand of God.

3. The Sacrifice of Christ was a Victorious Sacrifice: *Waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet (10:13).*

A cross is not a symbol of victory. To the contrary, it is a symbol of death. To hang on a cross is to suffer defeat and agonizing death. Yet we see that Jesus was able to turn defeat into victory. He was able to turn that which symbolized death and to make of it the entrance into life.

The cross was a great victory, but the totality of the victory is not yet realized. We still await the time when the enemies of Christ might realize their final defeat. This promise is pictured in graphic terms. There is coming a day when His enemies shall be made a footstool for His feet.

The sign of complete conquest in the ancient world was when the enemies of a conquering king were brought before him and made to prostrate themselves upon the ground. The victorious sovereign would then place his foot upon the neck of the vanquished. It was a picture of complete victory. Jesus won the victory at His death and burial and resurrection, but the final aspect of that victory has not yet been completed. It still awaits its final culmination.



A COMPLETED COVENANT

And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying, 16 “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws upon their heart, and on their mind I will write them,” He then says, 17 “And their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” 18 Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin. (Hebrews 10:15-18).

We are now given another testimony to the truth of the completed sacrifice of Christ. It is the testimony of the Holy Spirit. This does not refer to some tingling feeling. It refers to the testimony of the Spirit as given in the pages of the Old Testament. Do you want to hear what the Spirit says? Go and read the Scriptures. The passage that is cited here is from the pages of Jeremiah. The author to the Hebrews has already cited it once. Back in Hebrews 8, he quoted from Jeremiah about how God would put His laws into His people's mind, and write them in their hearts (Hebrews 8:10). He now quotes that same passage again. It is a passage about the New Covenant.

1. The New Covenant has an Internal Application: *I will put my laws upon their heart, and on their mind I will write them (10:16).*

The promise of the New Covenant was that God would do a work on mankind from the inside out. The Old Covenant was a work that was to go from the outside in. It was written on tablets of stone. It told you how you ought to live and how you ought to love. It dealt with all of life.

The New Covenant also deals with all of life, but it is much more than a mere series of rules. It involves that which God's Holy Spirit is doing inside the lives of His people. It contains a promise of a spiritual presence within those who are God's people.

2. The New Covenant means that Sins have been Forgotten: *He then says, 17 “And their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more” (10:16-17).*

It is one thing to forgive an infraction, it is another thing to forget that

infraction. We have a promise of both forgiveness and forgetfulness. God says, “It will be as though I have forgotten your sin altogether.” It is not that God is having a case of Alzheimer’s. Nor is He a computer program that erases information from a hard drive. But He promises to act toward us as though He had indeed forgotten our sin. Someone has said, “God throws our sins into the depths of the sea and then He plants a sign that says, ‘No fishing.’”

3. The New Covenant means we need no further Offering for Sin: *Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin (10:18).*

You don’t need to make an offering for sin when that sin has been forgiven. You don’t need to try to get someone to forgive you if that forgiveness has already been granted. Those who were trying to approach God on the basis of their Old Testament sacrifices were accomplishing nothing of value.

Have you been attempting various schemes to approach God? Have you been trying in vain to be good enough or holy enough or spiritual enough to come into His presence? There is good news here for you. It is news that brings a sigh of relief. Forgiveness has already been given. God accepts you, not the way you are, but the way Christ is. When you come to Him in faith, He accepts you with the same acceptance with which He accepts His only begotten Son.

A CALL TO ENCOURAGEMENT

Hebrews 10:19-25

The book of Hebrews was written to Hebrews. That sounds like I am stating the obvious and perhaps I am, but it needs to be underscored if we are to understand the passage before us. The author of the epistle is unknown. He is unknown to us but the last chapter of the epistle makes it clear that he was indeed known to the recipients of the epistle. But what is known and what is very evident, not only from the title, but also from the text itself is that this epistle is addressed to those who had originally been under the law.

This passage contains a doctrinal truth and it also contains the practical application to that truth. Like so many of the epistles that begin with a teaching of what you are to believe and then proceed to how you are to live on the basis of what you believe, this passage moves from the principle to the practical. It moves from that which you are to believe to that way in which you are called to live as a result of that which you believe. It moves from the doctrinal to the practical. Doctrine is like that. It always takes us to the practical. There is not a single truth given in the Bible that is divorced from a practical application. Jesus never sat His disciples down to teach them, “Take this stuff down and put it in your notebooks for a rainy day; it will help you to win a game of Trivial Pursuit.”

The doctrinal section is stated in verses 19-21 and it is stated by way of a conclusion. We see this in the opening phrase when he says: “Since therefore...” The author has written the previous nine and a half chapters of the epistle to bring you to this point and now he concludes.

19 Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God... (Hebrews 10:19-21).

His conclusion is that we have two things:

First, we have confidence. This is not self-confidence. Now there is nothing wrong with self-confidence unless it is a misplaced self-confidence. If self-confidence is misplaced then it is a bad thing. We don't have self-confidence to enter the holy place because we are not holy. Instead, we read that we have confidence to enter the holy place *by the blood of Jesus*. He is the source of our confidence. He accomplished for us that which we could not accomplish for ourselves. He lived the life we should have lived and then He died the death we should have died and He served as our legal representative as He lived and as He died.

God looks at us now as though we had lived the life that Jesus lived. He looks at our sins as though they had been nailed to the cross on which Jesus died. Because of that, we now have a new confidence. That new confidence flows over to how we are to live. This is important. Faith always leads to works. Good theology always leads to good living. Right attitude leads to right action.

There is in this passage a call to action. It is a call to respond to the grace of God. The Bible tells us that, because of that which has been provided for us through the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf, we are to take action. Because God has provided, we are to respond. The action we are called to take is given in what initially sounds like five parts, but which is really two:

Verse 22	We are called to draw near	This speaks of our relationship with God	You shall love the lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind (Mt 22:37)
Verse 23	We are called to hold fast		
Verse 24	We are called to stimulate one another to love and good deeds		You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Mt 22:39)
Verse 25	We are to encourage one another		

Notice how the climactic point of this passage is a call to encouragement. The writer to the Hebrews calls us to a ministry of encouragement.

There is a false perception of encouragement to which we sometimes hold. Maybe you've seen it. Maybe you've even bought into it. It is the perception that encouragement is a thing to be avoided. This false perception takes a number of forms:

- ♦ The idea that we don't want to come across as too encouraging in our comments because that might lead to pride and pride is wrong, so therefore we will withhold our encouragement in order to prevent the rise of pride.
- ♦ The thought that our encouraging words might be taken as a form of flattery and so therefore we withhold such encouragement because we don't wish to be seen as a flatterer.
- ♦ The feeling that our encouraging words might bring glory to people instead of bringing glory to God. In such a way, there is an attempt to sanctify this absence of encouragement and to make it sound as a more spiritual approach. The problem is that it is not biblical because the Bible itself says some very encouraging things about people.

While it is true that there is such a thing as man-centered encouragement that promotes those things that ought not be promoted, that does not negate the value or the necessity of a true God-centered encouragement that sees value in people because they are made in the image of God.

The book of Genesis tells us that mankind was created in the image and likeness of God. Even though man fell into sin and even though that image has been distorted by man's sin, that image has not been destroyed. There continues to be within mankind an image and likeness of God. That is to say that you can look at man and you can see God pictured in a way that He is not pictured in a rock or a tree or a dog or a cat.

While this is true of all mankind, it is especially true of believers because there is a process going on within us called sanctification. That is a big word that means God is producing within us the untarnished image of Jesus. He is at work within us to make us like Christ. That means I can look into the life of the believer and I can begin to see the very character of Christ beginning to emerge. It is not fully formed. There are days when it is hard

to see it at all. But it is a process that the Bible teaches is taking place.

When I encourage others in this sense, I am bringing glory and honor to the Lord because I am encouraging His likeness and His image in others. The encouragement of that likeness and image unleashes and stimulates a power of godliness in a person's life.

THE BASIS FOR ENCOURAGEMENT

The basis for encouragement is seen in verses 19-21. It is introduced in verse 19 by the word therefore. There is an old adage about Bible study that says when you see the word "therefore," you need to look to see for what it is there for. Such a word is a summation. By using this clause, the writer is going to sum up everything that he has said in Hebrews 1-9. We have in these three verses the Reader's Digest Version of the book of Hebrews.

19 Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God... (Hebrews 10:19-21).

This passage tells us that we have two things. First, it tells us that we have confidence. This is not self-confidence. Now there is nothing wrong with self-confidence unless it is a misplaced self-confidence. If self-confidence is misplaced then it is a bad thing. We don't have self-confidence to enter the holy place because we are not holy. Instead, we read that we have confidence to enter the holy place *by the blood of Jesus*. He is the source of our confidence. He accomplished for us that which we could not accomplish for ourselves. He lived the life we should have lived and then He died the death we should have died and He served as our legal representative as He lived and as He died. God looks at us now as though we had lived the life that Jesus lived. And He looks at our sins as though they had been nailed to the cross on which Jesus died. And because of that, we now have a new confidence.

The second thing that we have is a great high priest. Verse 19 says, "Since we have confidence," and verse 21 continues on and says, "And since we have a great high priest."

This passage says we have two things, but really we have only one. We have Jesus. He is our confidence and He is our great high priest. That is temple language. It calls to mind the temple that stood in Jerusalem, the place where God was worshiped. No one was allowed in the temple except the priests. And into the innermost part of the temple, into the holy of holies, not even the priests were permitted. There was only one exception and it took place only once a year. The high priest would enter on the Day of Atonement to make a sacrifice for the nation. Then he would have to do it again on the following year and again the next year. Year after year, decade after decade, century after century in a never ending succession of sacrifices.

We have a great high priest who entered, not into a temple made with hands, but into heaven itself. The blood that was offered was not a mere animal, but the lifeblood of the Son of God. He is both high priest and sacrificial lamb and temple. All those images are fulfilled in Jesus. He calls us today, not to an altar, but to a table of remembrance. The sacrifice was made and never needs be repeated. Instead we are called to come and to remember and to partake by faith of that which was offered on our behalf.

THE PROXIMITY OF ENCOURAGEMENT

...let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:22).

We are to be encouraged as we draw near. To whom are we to draw near? We are to draw near to the Lord. He calls us to come close. The reason we can come close is because He first drew near to us.

It is hard to draw near to a holy God when you are not holy yourself. You will recall the actions of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden after they had eaten of the forbidden fruit. They heard the sound of the Lord in the Garden and they immediately sought to hide themselves. They drew away. They ran. They hid. What was the response of the Lord? He called to them. He drew them near. We can draw near because we have been cleansed. It is a cleansing that penetrates down to the depths of our hearts. But it does not stop there. It is a cleansing that affects both conscience and even our bodies.

THE HOPE OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful (Hebrews 10:23).

We are called to hold fast. The use of the present tense suggests a continuity of action. We are being urged to continue holding fast the confession of our hope. We saw in Hebrews 7:19 that this was a “better” hope. It is better because it is a hope in the One who was only promised in the Old Testament but who now has come and who has fulfilled that which was previously seen only in shadow.

At the same time, it is called “hope.” What is hope? It has been defined as “faith in the future tense.” We have a hope today and the reason we have a hope is because we still await a final consummation in the future.

As oxygen is to the body, so is hope to the soul. Hope is like a trapeze artist who hopes the hands will be there to catch him. There is a confident assurance as he lets go his secure perch and flies through the air, but there is also a momentary gap as he hurtles through the air and just prior to the connection of the hands of safety and security. It is in that time of hurtling that you find hope. – T.J. Campo.

We are called to be unwavering in our hope. That is a difficult thing, especially in this age of skepticism. The reason we can hold onto our hope is because *He who promised is faithful*. Our hope is strengthened by knowing the faithfulness of the One in whom our hope resides.

THE POWER OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another (10:24-25).

Notice that encouragement is the result of considering how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. That is, the result of encouraging one another will be that we are stimulated to show love and to engage in good

deeds. Conversely, if we look at the best way to engage people with the love of Christ and the good works for which He has created us, we will find it to be through encouragement.

There is great power in encouragement. Instead of serving as a deterrent to love and good deeds, encouragement helps to stimulate such things. Encouragement is a motivator and we see from this passage that it is a biblical motivator.

When I think of encouragement, my mind goes back to the Barcelona Olympics of 1994. I'm not much of a fan of spectator sports, but I recall the day when Derek Redmond was running the 400 meter race when he pulled a hamstring and crumpled on the track. The rest of the runners sped by and the race was won. The medics were on the scene and they came out with their stretcher, but Derek waved them away and got up and proceeded to hobble down the track in an effort to cross the finish line.

The crowd was in amazement as Derek began his slow and painful way along the remainder of the course and they were even more amazed when Derek's father was seen climbing down from the stands to come up to his son, put his arm around him and help him along the way.

"I'm here, son. We'll finish together." As the father and son limped down toward the finish line, 65,000 fans began to applaud and the applause turned into a roaring cheer of encouragement that did not end until they had crossed the finish line.

There is great power in such encouragement. If you have found yourself taking such a role, then I can say with Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:11, "*Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.*" There are some for whom the ability to encourage comes easily. There are others for whom it is more difficult. We all need to be engaged in a ministry of encouragement because that is a part of what makes us the church. We see that in our next point.

THE PLACE OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another (10:25).

Notice that the command to encourage one another is given in parallel and with contrast to the command not to forsake our own assembling together. These two are to be understood as opposites.

That means the place in which you are to encourage one another is when you assemble together. Where does this take place? One of the places where this takes place is when the church meets together on the first day of the week in corporate worship. But I submit to you that this is not the only time this is to take place and while it may indeed be a time when we encourage one another, I submit that it is not the only time when this takes place. How do I know that? Because I have the example of the early church. Indeed, I have the example of the very church to whom this epistle is addressed.

The epistle to the Hebrews is addressed to the Hebrews and since every other church of which we know in the New Testament was composed of both Jew and Gentile and because the recipients of this particular epistle seem to be exclusively Jewish, that suggests this epistle is addressed to the Hebrew believers who resided in Jerusalem and Judea.

We know something about the church that was at Jerusalem. It was the mother church. It was the first local church from which all other churches eventually sprang. You remember the story. Jesus had ascended into heaven and His disciples had gathered together to pray and the Holy Spirit came and there was a sound like a mighty, rushing wind and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and there were manifested flaming tongues of fire to accompany the supernatural proliferation of languages that burst forth in their midst. Neighbors and nay-sayers gathered around to see what was going on and Peter preached a sermon explaining how these things all testified of the risen Jesus who had purchased our salvation through His death and burial and resurrection. As a result, 3000 people were baptized and joined the church.

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42).

We read not only that they were teaching and fellowshipping and breaking bread and praying, but that they were devoting themselves to these things. These activities were not merely engaged if and when they happened to fit into a convenient schedule, but they instead became a priority.

Verse 46 goes on to say...

Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:46-47).

Do you see it? These spiritual disciplines were embraced day by day. There was a regularity to these activities. They took place in the temple and they also took place from house to house. I am a strong believer in the importance of small groups that meet together for ministry, for growth, and yes, for encouragement. Indeed, I would go so far as to suggest that one who is not involved in a small group of some sort is not really involved in a church and therefore is missing out on a vital part of what it means to be a member of the church.

If all you do is to come to church on Sunday morning and maybe even if you are really spiritual, on Sunday evening, but have no small and intimate connection with a smaller group within that church, you are disconnected to an important part of the functioning part of the church.

I am not saying that to try to make you feel guilty; I am saying that so you can find the encouragement you so desperately need. There may be some here who have never experienced that sort of encouragement because you have never been a part of such a small group where that takes place.

On the other hand, there may be those who have been a part of such a group and then other things began to get in the way and edge out your small group involvement. That is what happened here in the book of Hebrews. There had been a time when the entire church was involved in a connection that took them both to corporate worship as well as to a fellowship that went “from house to house,” but then something happened so that now we read that there were some who were actually forsaking the assembling of themselves together.

What happened? I don’t know. Perhaps it was persecution. In our own day, it is more likely to be, not persecution, but pleasures that pull us away. No matter what the situation, it is needful and necessary for you to be in a place where you can receive encouragement and where you can give encouragement to others.

THE PROGRESSION OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near (10:25)

There is to be an increase in our encouragement as we see the day drawing near. To what day does this refer? We are not told. The most obvious conclusion is that it is speaking of the day of Christ's return. When Jesus left planet earth, He said that there would be a day in which He would return. We don't know when that is. I have to laugh when I hear people speculating as to when will be the Second Coming of Christ. Jesus Himself said that no one knows when that will be and He said that He did not even know when it will be. But we do know one thing. It is closer today than it was back then. The day is drawing nearer. As that day does draw closer, we are to be more and more involved in a ministry of encouragement. Why is this? What is the connection between encouragement and the return of Christ? Why is it necessary to encourage all the more *as you see the day drawing near?*

First we have to ask ourselves what it means to *see the day drawing near*. If that refers to bad things taking place (and the Bible makes some hints about bad things taking place that precede the return of Christ), then this would be a reason why more and more encouragement is needed.

On the other hand, there is a sense in which *you see the day drawing near* in a personal sense as you go through life. The day when you shall finally stand before Christ is closer today than when you first believed. When you are young, you tend to look at life through one paradigm as you have your entire life before you. But there comes a time in life when you are struck by the realization that there are more years behind you than are ahead of you before you will see the day finally arrive. Whichever sense we take this term, we need to be encouraged because our time on earth is limited and eternity is eternal and what we do today counts for tomorrow.

DANGEROUS DIGRESSIONS

Hebrews 10:26-39

One of the more sober stories of the Old Testament is the narrative of Lot's escape from the city of Sodom. The destruction of the city had been foretold and the Lord sent two angels to warn Lot. Their reception in the city was anything but hospitable, but Lot took them at their word and left the doomed city with his wife and daughters in tow. The parting warning was that they should not look back, for to do so would prove to be fatal. Obedient to the warning, Lot and his daughters averted their eyes from Sodom as the fiery judgment of God descended upon it. But Lot's wife looked back. She had been saved from the destruction, only to share in that destruction as she turned back.

There is a danger in digression, especially when you are returning to that from which you have initially been delivered. That is the danger that was facing the Hebrews to whom this epistle was addressed. They had grown up in Judaism with its rituals and its sacrifices and its promises of a coming messiah. Then one day they heard of Jesus, the rabbi from Galilee who healed the sick and restored sight to the blind; who walked on water and fed the multitudes; who was crucified, dead, and buried, but who rose from the dead. They heard of Jesus and they believed. They trusted in Him as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies.

But now, after coming to the knowledge of the truth, they are being tempted to abandon Jesus. They are being tempted to return to the "good old days" of Jewish sacrifices and religious rituals. For the last ten chapters, the message has been that Jesus is better. That message finds its climax in these verses.

Chapt 1-2	Chapt 3-4	Chapt 5-7	Chapt 8-9	Chapt 10	Chapt 11-13
Jesus is Better...					
Than the angels	Than Moses or Joshua	As a High Priest	Providing a better Covenant	Offering a better Sacrifice	As a way of Living
Why we are to hold to Jesus					How we are to live

THE DANGER OF WILLFUL REBELLION

For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. (Hebrews 10:26-27).

This passage cannot be understood apart from the context of the entire book of Hebrews. The book is written to Jewish believers (that is why we call it the Epistle to the Hebrews). These Jewish believers had been brought up in Judaism with its temple and its sacrifices and its rituals which were used for approaching God. But then they heard the gospel. They heard of Jesus and of His death on the cross and of His resurrection. They believed. They associated themselves with the Christian church as it then existed in Jerusalem.

Now persecutions have come. In the midst of these persecutions, they are being tempted to reject Jesus to return to their former Judaism. The book of Hebrews is written in response to this situation. The message of the book of Hebrews is that Jesus is better. He is better than...

the angels (Heb 1).

Moses (Heb 3).

Joshua (Heb 4).

He has a better priesthood. He is a better sacrifice. He has brought about a better covenant. Here is the point of the passage. These Hebrew Christians are in the process of forsaking the assembling together (Hebrews 10:24) so that they can return instead to the Old Testament sacrificial system. After all,

that system was a perfectly legitimate means of approaching God in Old Testament times. The animal sacrifices and the priests and the rituals were all ordained by God.

But because Jesus has come, there is now no going back to those old sacrifices. To do so would be paramount to willful rejection of God. If we “go on sinning willfully” by rejecting the Lord’s Messiah “after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” under the sacrifices and rituals of the old covenant.

There was a time in the past when their faith in a future Messiah had been sufficient. The temple rituals and sacrifices all looked for a coming Messiah. But now they have received a knowledge of Jesus and have recognized Him as the fulfillment of all those Old Testament Messianic promises.

This creates a dilemma. They cannot go back to the Old Testament sacrifices once they have come to a knowledge of the truth of Jesus. Those Old Testament sacrifices do not work any longer. There no longer remains that kind of sacrifice for sins.

When verse 26 speaks of receiving “knowledge of the truth,” the word ἐπιγνώσις (*epignosis*) is used to describe a “full knowledge.”

By now you should start to see where the text is leading. If you reject the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, there is no other sacrifice available. The once for all sacrifice of Jesus Christ is all that there is. If a person rejects the sacrifice of Christ, “there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin.”

This verse is not teaching as so many do that if you “willfully” sin after you are saved you will lose your salvation. In fact, the verse does the opposite. It is speaking to those who would turn away from the once and for all sacrifice of Christ. The Hebrews for whom this was written were still trusting in the blood of bulls and goats to atone for their sins, and the writer was telling them that there was no more sacrifice other than that which the Messiah had accomplished.

At the same time, we cannot leave this warning without taking it and applying it to our own day. Most of us are not tempted to leave Christ in order to return to the Mosaic Law and to go and offer a sacrifice in the temple. But in this age of doubt and uncertainty, we are tempted to depart from Christ and to seek fulfillment in other ways and means. This passage is a warning that it is only in Christ that we shall find our way to God. That

goes against the grain of 21st century Postmodern thinking. But it is in accord with the One who said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6).

THE WARNING OF PAST JUDGMENT

Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10:28-29).

This is a warning from the lesser to the greater. It begins with the lesser situation and shows how important and vital is that situation and then it takes us, by comparison, to see how much more important and vital is the greater situation.

From the Lesser...	...To the Greater
The Law of Moses	The Son of God
Those who ignored the Law	<p>He who has...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ Trampled under foot the Son of God♦ Regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant♦ Insulted the Spirit of grace

It was a serious thing to ignore the Law of Moses. In Old Testament times, one could be put to death for ignoring the Law. That was a great offense. How much greater offense does the one commit who rejects, not just the Law of God, but the very Son of God? Furthermore, to reject the Son of God is not merely a matter of ignoring Him. It is tantamount to...

- ♦ Trampling Him under foot. We have already noted image of placing one’s foot upon the head of a vanquished enemy. To trample someone underfoot is to view them as a conquered enemy. To reject

Christ is to take the side of His enemies who maintained that He deserved to go to the cross. To reject Christ is to endorse the crucifixion of Jesus and to claim that He was worthy of such a death.

- ♦ Regarding His blood as unclean and, by implication, holding the covenant in low regard.
- ♦ Insulting the Spirit of grace. You will remember that Jesus had something to say about blaspheming the Holy Spirit. He said that such a sin is not forgiven. Why is this the case? Because such an action cuts you off from the very One whose work it is to lead you to faith.

THE TERROR OF HOLY CHARACTER

For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." ³¹ It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:30-31).

The writer quotes from the Old Testament to remind his readers of the holy character of God. The passage from which he quotes is Deuteronomy 32:35-36. It is a part of the song of Moses. It is a song that gives a vivid portrait of God as the rock and protector of Israel, but also as the judge of Israel. The same song that gives hope and comfort also gives warning and a specter of that which is terrifying. The point is that God is very big and very holy and you do not want to find yourself in a position of setting yourself up against Him.

In his book, *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis describes God at the “lord of terrible aspect,” and, at the same time, “the consuming fire Himself, the Love that made the worlds.” He is both of these, equally and together. He is not One with whom you can safely trifle.

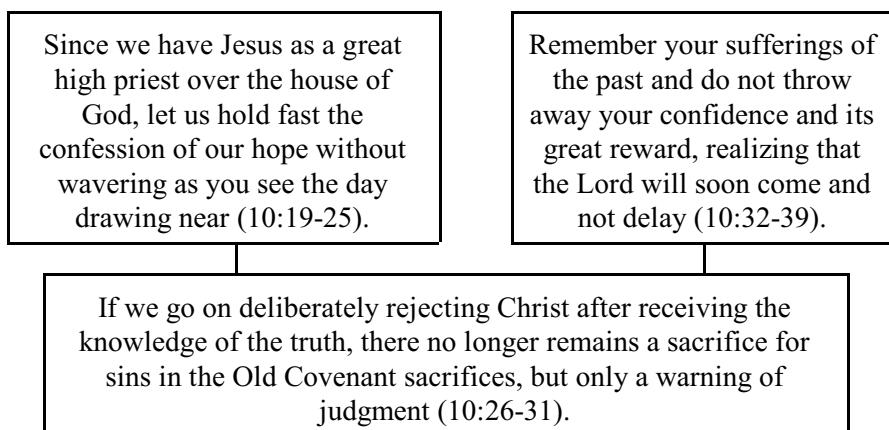
The Bible has quite a lot to say about the fear of the Lord. It is a regular theme in the Scriptures. Theologians correctly point out that such a term can be descriptive of reverence and awe. But I am not certain such language goes far enough. God is worthy of our reverence and our awe, but He is also One whom we are called to fear because *it is a terrifying thing to fall into the*

hands of the living God.

THE MEMORY OF PAST FAITHFULNESS

But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, 33 partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. 34 For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. 35 Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. (Hebrews 10:32-35).

It cannot be denied that this paragraph brings with it a change in tone. It is not that the message has changed, but that we are seeing the rest of the call that has been presented throughout this entire chapter. The general flow of thought can be seen in the following illustration:



At this point, there is a dramatic change as we go from severe warning of God's terrifying judgment to a joyful reminder of past devotion. The author of the epistle now calls upon his readers to remember their own past relationship with the gospel. There had been a time when they had heard the good news of Jesus, how He came to earth and died on the cross and rose

The readers are taken on a journey through their past experiences because those experiences show the reality of their past faith relationship with Christ.

again, all in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. They had believed the gospel and their lives had demonstrated the reality of that faith. Indeed, they had suffered for their faith: *You endured a great conflict of sufferings* (10:32). We go on to read of the extent of their sufferings.

- ♦ They were *made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated* (10:33).
- ♦ They *showed sympathy to the prisoners* (10:34), evidently referring to those who were imprisoned for their faith.
- ♦ They accepted joyfully the seizure of their property (10:34).

How could they have endured such trials and, even more to the point, how could they have endured such things with a joyful attitude? It was because they believed they had *a better possession and a lasting one* (10:34). They are therefore urged to continue in the faith in which they had begun because endurance in the truth brings a reward. This brings us to the next point.

THE NEED FOR PRESENT ENDURANCE

For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. 37 For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. 38 but My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him. 39 But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul. (Hebrews 10:36-39).

Endurance is important. It is what keeps you alive from day to day. You were born and you started to breathe and to eat and to sleep and everyday you have to get up and do it all again. Life is about endurance. That is true in the physical world and it is also true in the spiritual world.

To make this point, the author quote from the Old Testament. He does not say he is quoting from the Old Testament, but his readers will pick up on this because of their own familiarity with the Old Testament Scriptures. The

quote is taken from Habakkuk:

*For the vision is yet for the appointed time;
It hastens toward the goal and it will not fail.
Though it tarries, wait for it;
For it will certainly come, it will not delay.
4 Behold, as for the proud one,
His soul is not right within him;
But the righteous will live by his faith. (Habakkuk 2:3-4).*

What was true in Habakkuk's day is still true today. God's timetable is still on track and all of history is moving toward an appointed time, hastening toward a final goal. In the meantime, there has been some tarrying. From the time of Habakkuk to the New Testament was a tarrying of 500 years. Since that time, we have been waiting another 2000 years. But we are to continue to wait and understand that the promise will be fulfilled. Who is the One who is coming? It is the Lord. He is coming and we are to await His coming.

At this point, you can do one of two things. There are one of two reactions you can have to the present distresses and in light of the future promises:

A Righteous One	One who Shrinks Back
He shall live by faith	The Lord has no pleasure in him
He has faith to the preserving of the soul	He abandons the faith to the loss of his soul
He believes the gospel	He rejects the gospel

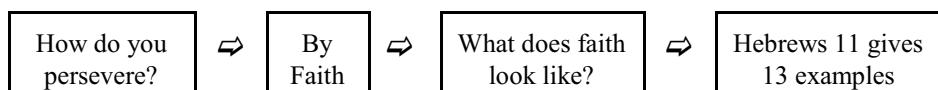
THE HALL OF FAITH

Hebrews 11:1-40

It was following the American War Between the States that a day was instituted as the American Memorial Day. It is a time for remembering those who have fallen. There is something good and noble about remembering. Hebrews 11 is a Christian memorial. It stands as a memorial to those who took a stand in faith.

The Christian life is a life of faith. But it is not an ethereal faith in nothing or a faith in faith. The faith to which we hold is anchored in reality. It is a faith which is rooted and centered in the person of Jesus.

Throughout the previous chapter, we have been impressed with the importance of holding on to Jesus rather than submitting to the temptation to turn away from Him. It is in this vein that the author says that *we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul* (Hebrews 10:39). He now goes on to define and to illustrate that faith.



FAITH DEFINED

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1).

In the English language, we have several different yet related words in the terms: “Faith”, “Trust” and “Belief.” The Greek language sums up all

three of these concepts in the simple word *πιστις* (*pistis*). That term is now defined in two ways:

1. *Faith is the assurance of things hoped for.*

The word translated “assurance” is the Greek word *ὑποστασις* (*hypostasis*). It is a compound word made up of the joining of two Greek words:

- (a) *ὑπο* (*hupo*) - under
- (b) *στασις* (*stasis*) - to stand.

Faith is not a wistful longing or merely a hope that something good might happen tomorrow. It is a firm certainty in the future.

It describes a foundation upon which you stand, hence, an assurance. It is translated as “confidence” or “assurance” in 2 Corinthians 9:4; 11:17 and Hebrews 3:14.

This is a good definition of faith. It is a confident assurance that we shall one day possess those things for which today we can only hope. This brings us to the second point of this definition.

2. *Faith is... the conviction of things not seen.*

There is an unseen quality about faith. You don’t use faith when you can use your senses. If I hear your voice behind me, I am not exercising faith when I come to the conclusion that you are there.

Do you remember the case of Thomas? He had been away picking up hamburgers when Jesus made His first appearance to the disciples following the resurrection. Thomas had come back to find the other disciples excited about having seen Jesus. But he did not believe. He was more sophisticated than that. He would not be swayed by an optical illusion. He would not believe unless he felt the nail holes and the wound in the side of Jesus.

And then, a week later, Jesus was standing there. And Thomas saw. And Thomas believed. But was it real faith? It was, but not in the sense that we have described here. Jesus Himself drew the distinction:

Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen

Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.” (John 20:29).

Once you have seen, it is easy to believe. Real faith is believing without seeing. It is the conviction of things not seen. And it is living on the basis of that conviction. That is going to be the message which we shall see throughout this chapter. Christians believe God to the point of banking their lives upon His promises.

FAITH APPROVED

For by it the men of old gained approval. (Hebrews 11:2).

The reference to *men of old* (οἱ πρεσβυτέροι - *hoi presbuteroi*) is literally “the elders.” It refers here to the believers of the Old Testament and more specifically to the forefathers, both physically as well as spiritually, of those to whom this is addressed.

At first glance, we might be inclined to think that this is saying that the Old Testament believers found approval in the eyes of God by means of their faith. However, that is not what is being described. The phrase *gained approval* is an unfortunate translation.

Εμαρτυρηθησαν is the aorist passive indicative of μαρτυρεω (*matureo*), “to witness.” The idea here is that the actions of the Old Testament saints bore witness of their faith in God. Here is the principle: Real faith will always produce a resulting faithfulness.

FAITH AND CREATION

By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. (Hebrews 11:3).

We believe that God created the heavens and the earth. Why do we believe such a thing? It is not because we were eyewitnesses to such an action. It is a matter of faith. It is a matter of believing that which we have not seen.

There are two views regarding the existence of the universe. The first view states that it was created by God. The second view states that it came about in some other manner. There is no third view.

What is the difference between a creationist versus an evolutionist? It is simply this. The difference is a matter of faith. The evolutionist would rather believe in a humanistic and artificial philosophy than to believe in God. It doesn't take a lot of faith to believe that God created the heavens and the earth. That is the point being made. Nearly everyone has a certain measure of faith. Most people believe that there is someone who is bigger than them who made the heavens and the earth. But that is not saving faith. That is not life-changing faith. And that is only the first step toward the faith which is described in this chapter. If you believe that God exists and that He created the heavens and the earth, you do well. But you are in the company of the devil and his demons as they also believe that. There is a higher faith to which you are called.

THE EXAMPLE OF ABEL

By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. (Hebrews 11:4).

Beginning here in verse 4 and throughout the rest of the chapter, we will be treated to examples of Old Testament believers who exhibited faith. It is a virtual Hall of Faith. Notice that all of these examples have one thing in common. In each case, faith led to a resulting action.

- ♦ Abel offered (11:4).
- ♦ Enoch was taken up (11:5).
- ♦ Noah prepared an ark (11:7).
- ♦ Abraham obeyed by going out (11:8).
- And he lived as an alien (11:9).
- ♦ Sarah received ability to

The character of your life will determine the legacy you leave to others. Bible scholar James Moffatt wrote, "Death is never the last word in the life of a ... man. When a man leaves this world, be he righteous or unrighteous, he leaves something in the world. He may leave something that will grow and spread like a cancer or a poison, or he may leave something like the fragrance of perfume or a blossom of beauty that permeates the atmosphere with blessing."

conceive (11:11).

- ♦ Abraham offered up Isaac (11:17).
- ♦ Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau (11:20).
- ♦ Jacob blessed each of the sons of Joseph (11:21).
- ♦ Joseph gave orders concerning his bones (11:22).
- ♦ Moses was hidden for three months by his parents (11:23).
- ♦ Moses chose to endure ill-treatment with the people of God (11:24-25).

And he left Egypt (11:27).

And he kept the Passover (11:28).

- ♦ The Israelites passed through the Red Sea (11:29).
- ♦ The walls of Jericho fell down (11:30).
- ♦ Rahab welcomed the spies in peace (11:31).

In each of these instances, the person or persons who had the faith demonstrated that faith by means of a corresponding action. Here is the principle. Faith always produces a resulting action.

Take the case of Abel. He had faith in God. How do we know this? Because of the action that he took in offering a better sacrifice than Cain. You remember the story. Cain and Abel both come to worship the Lord. They both offer a sacrifice to God.

1. Cain offers the fruit of the ground. This is only natural, since his chosen profession is that of a farmer.
2. Abel offers the firstlings of his flock. He is a shepherd and when the first lambs are born among his flock, he takes them and offers them as a sacrifice to the Lord.

We read in Genesis 4:4-5 that *the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering' but for Cain and for his offering He had not regard.* Why was this the case? What made the difference? There are several things that we might note:

- ♦ Abel offered the firstlings of his flock. We do not read that Cain offered the best or the firstfruits of his crop. Abel's faith was of a type to offer to the Lord the very best of what he had.
- ♦ Abel's offering involved a life that God provided rather than something that was the toil of his own hands. A farmer has to

cultivate the land and then plant the seed and then water and weed. A shepherd does none of these things to produce a lamb.

- ♦ Abel's offering involved the death of an innocent substitute. A lamb died as a result of his sacrifice. We have already seen the principle that *without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness* (Hebrews 9:22).

Cain is the story of man's effort to approach God in man's way. Abel is the story of a man's faith in that which God has provided.

Cain	Abel
Man's effort	God's grace
Fig leaves in the Garden	Coats of skin in the Garden
Offered the fruit of the ground	Offered the firstlings of his flock

Abel's sacrifice was a better sacrifice because of each of these reasons. It was from the best that he had, it was untarnished by his labor, and it was a perfect picture of the ultimate sacrifice which would be made by God's Messiah, Jesus Christ.

THE EXAMPLE OF ENOCH

By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; and He was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.
(Hebrews 11:5-6).

We are not told a lot about Enoch in the Old Testament. There are only a few verses in Genesis 5 that speak of him. But what we are

The phrase translated "taken up" is the aorist passive indicative of μετατιθημι. It can be translated "take up" (Acts 7:16) or it can also describe that which is intrinsically changed (Hebrews 7:12 - the priesthood is changed).

told is quite extraordinary. Enoch did not die. Instead he was taken up by God.

In verse 2 we saw that it was through faith that the men of old “gained approval.” It was their faith that bore witness ($\mu\alpha\rho\tau\upsilon\rho\epsilon\omega$) to the fact that they were accepted by God. Now we see that Enoch’s faith bore witness (perfect passive indicative of $\mu\alpha\rho\tau\upsilon\rho\epsilon\omega$) to the fact that he was pleasing to God.

We have a similar promise. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:51 that *we shall not all sleep* - we shall not all die. Those who are still alive when Jesus returns in His second coming will never see death.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first.

Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

I do not know when Jesus is coming back. Nobody does. It could be thousands of years in the future. Or it could be today. But those believers who are alive when He returns shall be like Enoch. They shall never see death.

Enoch did not die. The fact that he did not die is an indicator that he was pleasing to God. What was it about Enoch that made him pleasing to God? It was his faith. This brings us to a principle. The principle is clearly stated in verse 6.

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6).

Here is the principle. It is that faith is the necessary ingredient in pleasing God. That was the secret of Enoch’s success. His being taken up was a witness to the fact that he had lived a life that was pleasing to God. And the necessary ingredient which accomplished that was his faith. Notice that there are two parts to such a faith:

1. *He who comes to God must believe that He is.*

This is more than a general belief in the existence of a supreme being. Neither is it a belief in the God of Islam or of Buddha or some other religious system. This is a belief in the God of the Scriptures.

Rabbi David Kerstner wrote the popular work, “Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?” He postulated that because bad things happen to good people, then God must either be all-powerful or else He must be all-good, but that He cannot be both. Kerstner chose to believe in a good God that is not all-powerful and who is not able to stop bad things from happening to good people. But this is not the God of the Bible. Such a belief is not in the God who is.

2. *He who comes to God must believe that... He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.*

What is the reward of those who seek God? It is that they find Him. But that is not all. When you find God, you find that you have found a lot more beside. Jesus said this on His sermon on the mount: “*Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you*” (Matthew 6:33).

This is a promise that those who seek will find. Man’s problem is not that he has sought for God and has been unable to find Him. Man’s problem is that he has not really sought for God. He has not engaged in a true search.

This brings us to a question. If faith is so important, then how do you get it? You don’t get it by wishing for it. If you are going to get faith, then you have to get it from someone else because it is not something that you have intrinsically. When you see a turtle on a gatepost, you know that he didn’t get there by himself. When you see the kind of faith described in this chapter, you can know that it was not generated through self-effort. I believe that faith is a gift from God. It is bestowed by grace.

That means if you want faith, you can go to God and ask Him for it. We have the example of the man who brought his son to Jesus and, when he was asked about his faith, he replied, “Lord, I do believe. Help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24).

There are people in this chapter who are undeserving. There are prostitutes and murderers and liars in this chapter. They are real sinners who committed real sins. They didn't get faith by being good. They became good because of faith. They received that faith from the hands of a faithful God.

THE EXAMPLE OF NOAH

By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. (Hebrews 11:7).

In the opening verse of this chapter, we saw that faith is *the conviction of things not seen*. Now we read that Noah was warned of things which had not yet been seen. Of what was Noah warned? He was warned that it would rain and that it would result in a world-wide flood.

The implication of the Scriptures is that there was no rain upon the earth in the days of Noah. Genesis 2:5 says that *the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth* and it is possible that this situation continued until the coming of the Flood. If this is the case, then Noah was promised something that had never before taken place -- rain!

1. Noah's Ark was an Evidence of Faith: *By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark.*

Can you imagine what it would have been like to be Noah? He receives the warning from God and he begins to build this giant structure in his back yard, miles away from the ocean. It is not long before his neighbors begin to comment and then to join in open mockery. "Noah's folly," gains notoriety throughout the land and people laugh at the mad prophet. And it doesn't stop. For 120 years Noah labors and the people laugh. What kept him going? It was his faith.

There was nothing except the promise of God to tell Noah that a storm was coming. He acted by faith.

It is much like the image of a radar screen that shows a coming hurricane. You take the warning seriously based upon how you deem the promise to be trustworthy.

How can you see whether the warning is taken seriously? By the actions of preparation. Noah did not believe because he was righteous; rather he was declared righteous because he believed and you can see the evidence of that belief by what he did.

2. Noah's Ark was an Example of Endurance.

It is one thing to have faith for a day or a week or even a month or a year. But the promise of the Flood was given 120 years prior to its coming. Noah had to spend these years in preparation without seeing a single drop of rain.

The subject of faith was introduced in the last chapter when the writer stated to his readers: “*You have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised*” (Hebrews 10:36).

When we come to chapter 12, it will be this same quality of endurance which will be highlighted. In light of all those Old Testament believers who endured, we are also called to run with endurance as we fix our eyes on the One who endured the cross on our behalf.

3. Noah's Ark was an Exercise of Reverence: *Noah... in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household.*

The word translated *reverence* is the aorist passive participle of *εὐλαβεομαι* (*eulabeomai*). It can be translated as either “fear” (Acts 23:10) or “devotion, piety or reverence.” Hebrews 5:7 and 12:28 translate *εὐλαβεια* in this manner. It is not a blinding fear that instills panic, but it is a godly reverence. It is a quality akin to worship.

That is not to discount fear. The Bible has a great deal to say about a proper fear of the Lord. More than a mere healthy respect, when we realize just how big God really is, our natural reaction will be a good healthy dose of fear.

But this particular term seems to place more of an emphasis upon the quality of reverence toward God. And that tells me something significant about Noah. It tells me that the construction of the Ark

was viewed as an act of worship. Here is the principle. Real faith will lead to real worship.

4. Noah's Ark was an Edict of Condemnation: *Noah... prepared an ark... by which he condemned the world.*

2 Peter 2:5 says that Noah was a preacher of righteousness. What kind of sermon did Noah preach? The answer is given here in this passage. Noah's sermon was an ark. Every time anyone looked at that great, ungainly craft, they were reminded that it was a symbol of God's promised judgment against the world. There is a lesson here. Your life is a sermon to others. This is especially true of those with whom you have daily contact. In his first epistle, Peter gives instructions to wives who are married to unbelieving husbands.

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives; 2 as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. (1 Peter 3:1-2).

Do you see it? You are called to preach a sermon, not with words, but with your life. I love the quote attributed to Anselm: "Always preach the gospel; and when necessary, use words." That is what Noah did. His very actions were a sermon of condemnation to the world around him. And your very actions ought to be the same sort of sermon, calling people everywhere to turn to the Lord.

We have not been called to build an ark; but we are called to get into the ark. Just as we have seen Jesus as the better high priest and the better sacrifice, so also we can say that Jesus is the better ark. He is the place of safety in the storms of this life and the next.

THE EXAMPLE OF ABRAHAM

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was

going.

By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; 10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. (Hebrews 11:8-10).

Abraham was the father of many nations. The Israelites, the Edomites and the Arabs all look to him as their ancestor. He was the father of a multitude, but he didn't start that way. He started as a man without a son who was called by God to move to an unknown land. Verse 8 says that *he went out, not knowing where he was going.* That is a step of faith. I've done a lot of traveling and I've even been lost, but I always knew where I was going.

As hard as it was to go to an unknown place, I believe that there was something Abraham did that was even harder. When he got there, he was told to wait. He left his home in the land of Ur to go to the land that God had promised him and when he got there, it was to find that others had gotten there before him. Instead of settling down, Abraham became a nomad, waiting in the land that God had promised him. And he had to wait a very long time. It would not be given to him in his lifetime. Or in his son's lifetime. Or in his son's son's lifetime. Four hundred years would go by and still the promise would not yet be fulfilled. That is a long time to wait.

I hate waiting. I am one of those people who look to see which checkout line in the grocery store is likely to move faster. I avoid rush hour traffic. I fret when I have to stand in line for any length of time. My pet peeve is waiting in a doctor's or dentist's office. I hate waiting. But there are times when God calls us to stop and to be still and to wait.

*My soul, wait in silence for God only,
For my hope is from Him. (Psalm 62:5).
Though youths grow weary and tired,
And vigorous young men stumble badly,
Yet those who wait for the Lord
Will gain new strength;
They will mount up with wings like eagles,
They will run and not get tired,
They will walk and not become weary. (Isaiah 41:30-31).*

Waiting is hard work. Our nature is usually made up so that we want to do something now. There is a popular quip that say, “Man’s greatest instinct is to sit down and stay seated.” But it isn’t so. Man was made for work and he wants to be about his business, even when he is busily engaged in frolic or the pursuit of pleasure.

The only portion of the promised land that Abraham ever actually owned was the small parcel on which he and Sarah were buried (Genesis 23).

Abraham was called to wait. In the interim, he and his son and his grandson were nomads, living in tents. It wasn’t that they did not know how to build a city. It is that they were waiting for God to build a city for them.

What city was this for which they were waiting? You might be tempted to answer, “Jerusalem.” After all, this was the city of David and the location of the temple. But you would be wrong. Jerusalem was not built by God. It was a Canaanite city. It was originally built by Canaanites.

The city for which Abraham and his descendants were looking was not an earthly city in an earthly country. Verse 16 says that *they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one.* And it is in such a country that the Lord has prepared for them a city. It is a city which is yet to come.

For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come. (Hebrews 13:14).

We continue to look for a city. It is a city in which we hold our citizenship (Philippians 3:20). We are nomads living in a foreign country. Our citizenship is in heaven. And on this earth, we are ambassadors for Christ.

THE EXAMPLE OF SARAH

By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised.

Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. (Hebrews 11:11-12).

Sarah is not normally known for her great faith. Indeed, the first time that she was told she would bear a son, her reaction was to laugh. But God set out to have the last laugh and her son was named Isaac, literally, “laughter.” Sarah may not have believed at first, but she came to have faith.

There is an interesting translation issue in Hebrews 11:11. It can be seen when we compare some of the leading translations:

KJV	<i>Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.</i>
NAS	<i>By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised.</i> A footnote indicates that a more literal translation reads: “she received power for the laying down of seed.”
NIV	<i>By faith, Abraham, even though he was past age - and Sarah herself was barren - was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.</i> Once again, a footnote indicate the proper reading being: “ <i>By faith even Sarah, who was past age, was enabled to bear children...</i> ”

Why did the translators change the text and add Abraham’s name to Sarah’s as those who were faithful? Probably because of the word *καὶ* (which can be translated “and” or “even”) seems to indicate that the passage is not speaking only of the faith of Sarah but of Sarah and someone else. The context makes it plain that this “someone else” is Abraham. Thus, while the NIV does not give us a word-for-word translation (it doesn’t claim to), it does have textual support for the reading that it gives.

Abraham and Sarah both exhibited a faith, not in their own bodies which were old and feeble and well past the point of fruitfulness, but in the Lord who is able to bring life where there is lifelessness.

THE QUEST FOR A COUNTRY

13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

14 For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. 15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.

16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:13-16).

Abraham and Sarah and the other Patriarchs never saw the fulfillment of the promise which God had given - the promise of a land and a country and a nation. But it was no earthly country that they were seeking. Otherwise, they could have always retraced their steps to the land of their origin. It is not merely a different country that they were seeking - it was *a better country, that is, a heavenly one.*

Remember to whom this epistle is written. It is written to Hebrews. That is why it is called the epistle to the Hebrews. These Jewish people view Israel as their home country. They are people of the land. But they need to be reminded that the country for which Abraham and the other patriarchs were waiting was no earthly country like Israel or Judea, but rather a heavenly country.

Here is the point. They were so used to the visible elements of their religion, the rituals of circumcision, the sacrifices in the temple, the ceremonies, that when they came to know the One to whom all of those visual elements pointed, they were tempted to leave Him and to return to the earthly ceremonies. When it came time to choose between the rituals that pointed to Jesus versus choosing Jesus Himself, they were tempted to chose the rituals. If offered a heavenly kingdom versus an earthly kingdom, they were inclined to choose the earthly. But God's kingdom is not of this world. Jesus made that very clear when He stood before Pilate. He said, "*My kingdom is not of this world*" (John

It is like the baby who is more interested in the wrapping paper and the box than in the present which they contain.

18:36).

What does this mean for us? It means that we should not be nearly so concerned with building our own little earthly kingdoms. There is nothing in this life that will not end up on a garbage heap.

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal; 21 for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Matthew 6:19-21).

We could perhaps paraphrase this last verse to say: “*For where your treasure is, there will your faith be also.*” Are you having trouble with your faith? Is it harder to believe that it used to be? Take a look at those things to which you are holding. If they are things of this world, then they will only tend to get in the way of your hope for the future.

The result of a life of faith is that *God is not ashamed to be called their God.* Throughout the Bible, the Lord is known as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is your God, too, if you have believed in Him.

THE TESTING OF ABRAHAM’S FAITH

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; 18 it was he to whom it was said, “In Isaac your descendants shall be called.”

He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type. (Hebrews 11:17-19).

The ultimate testing of Abraham’s faith came when he was called by God to offer up his only son as a sacrifice. This was the son for whom he had so long awaited. This was the son of

Isaac is called Abraham’s “only begotten” son. The Greek word μονογενης (*monogene*) has the idea of being “pre-eminent” or “unique.” This is seen in that Isaac was not Abraham’s only son. He had already given birth to Ishmael.

promise.

You remember the story. Abraham is told to sacrifice Isaac and they travel together to Mount Moriah. Leaving the servants at the bottom of the mountain, they go up together to the peak. There they build an altar and lay wood on it. Then Abraham binds Isaac and lays him upon the altar and prepares to take his life. Only then does an angel stop Abraham and allow him to substitute for his son a ram that is caught in a nearby thicket.

Now we learn something new about Abraham's faith. It is found in the words of Abraham to his servants as he and Isaac departed to climb to the top of Mount Moriah.

And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship and return to you." (Genesis 22:5).

Abraham says, "We will worship and we will return." Notice the double use of the plural. Abraham was going up this mountain with the full intention of sacrificing his son, but he also believed that both he and his son would end up coming back down the mountain. He believed this because *He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead.* He believed that he would sacrifice Isaac and that God would then raise him from the dead. When Abraham *received him back as a type*, this points to the parallel between the manner in which Isaac delivered versus the way in which we are saved.

Isaac - The Type	Believers - The Fulfillment
Isaac was bound on the altar.	We were bound in sin.
Isaac was to be put to death.	We were under penalty of death.
Isaac was released and a ram was put to death in his place.	We were redeemed through the substitutionary death of Christ.

But that is not all. There is also a parallel between Isaac and Jesus Christ. The one becomes a type for the other. Just as Isaac was described as Abraham's "only begotten son," so also Jesus is described as the only begotten Son of God:

Isaac	Jesus Christ
Offered as a sacrifice to the Lord.	Offered as a sacrifice for the sins of men.
Taken to Mount Moriah outside of Jerusalem.	Taken to Golgotha outside of Jerusalem.
Carried the wood for the sacrifice up the mountain.	Carried the cross for his crucifixion out to Golgotha.
Bound and placed on the altar.	Nailed to the cross.
It took three days to get to Moriah, the place of death.	Three days after his crucifixion, He rose from the dead.

Of course, the illustration is not completed in Isaac, for at the last minute, the angel of the Lord prevented him from being killed and a ram was offered as a substitute. There was no such intervention on the part of Jesus. He is the substitute who was sacrificed in our place.

ISAAC & THE BLESSING OF JACOB & ESAU

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come. (Hebrews 11:20).

Now we move to the story of Jacob and Esau. This was a story that would be well known to the Jewish readers of this epistle. They were the children of Israel, sons and daughters of Jacob.

It was when he was in his old age that Isaac called his sons to him to bless them. It was here that Jacob tricked his father and cheated his brother in order to obtain the blessing. Pretending to be Esau, he came before his father who was blind and who could not tell the difference between his two sons. Jacob is not commended for that action. But Isaac is commended because of his faith. It was through that faith that he was able to prophesy of *things to come*. This is striking because Isaac was deceived as to the identity of the son upon whom he was bestowing the blessing.

Blessing Given to Jacob	Blessing Given to Esau
<p><i>Now may God give you of the dew of heaven, And of the fatness of the earth, And an abundance of grain and new wine; May peoples serve you, And nations bow down to you; Be master of your brothers, And may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be those who curse you, And blessed be those who bless you. (Genesis 27:28-29).</i></p>	<p><i>Behold, away from the fertility of the earth shall be your dwelling, And away from the dew of heaven above. And by your sword shall you live, And your brother you shall serve; But it shall come about when you become restless, That you shall break his yoke from your neck. (Genesis 27:39-41).</i></p>

Isaac is commended, not for his keen insights or for his rule of his family, but because he demonstrated faith in the Lord. In faith, he gave a blessing that depended, not on his correct understanding, but on God who had orchestrated the events.

JACOB AND THE BLESSING OF JOSEPH'S SONS

By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. (Hebrews 11:21).

In the same way that Isaac had blessed Jacob and Esau, so also as he was dying, Jacob called to himself the sons of Joseph to be blessed by him. Joseph had two sons.

- a. Manasseh was the eldest.
- b. Ephraim was the youngest.

Joseph brought his sons and arranged them so that the eldest was by Jacob's right hand and the youngest was by Jacob's left hand. The right hand was considered the place of honor and Joseph wanted the best for Manasseh, his firstborn.

But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, crossing his hands, although Manasseh was the first-born. (Genesis 48:14).

Joseph was not pleased by this arrangement and he tried to intervene, but Jacob was adamant, insisting that Ephraim would be the greater of the two. Indeed, in later history the name Ephraim came to be synonymous with all of the ten northern tribes of Israel. The examples of these blessings given at the hands of Isaac and Jacob have one thing in common. In both cases, the one giving the blessing acted contrary to the established custom of doing things. In both cases the younger son received the greater blessing. In both cases, this was brought about by faith. It might be argued that Isaac was tricked into giving the blessing to Jacob. This is true. But once given, Isaac refused to retract the blessing and saw these circumstances as something that had been planned by the Lord.

Now at the end of his life, Jacob very deliberately follows the same pattern. Both sons shall be blessed, but the stronger blessing of his right hand shall go to the younger. It is not that the younger is more worthy. It is a sign of grace.

Of all of the possible acts of faith that could have been used, the one that is pointed out is his act of blessing the sons of Joseph. Why is this one in particular used? Perhaps it is because this action sets up a pattern that is seen throughout Genesis in which the younger is blessed instead of the older (Cain/Abel, Ishmael/Isaac, Esau/Jacob, Reuben/Joseph). It is almost as though it was only now that Jacob finally understood that God does not save on the basis of merit, but often chooses the last to be first and the first to be last. It is not that the younger is better, but that God's grace is at work to bless the one who is not deserving. This is a picture of what God does on our behalf. We have an older brother whose name is Jesus. We are not more deserving than our older brother. Nevertheless, our older brother gave up his place of prestige and took upon Himself our sins that we might be made co-heirs with Him.

THE PROMISE OF JOSEPH

By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning

his bones. (Hebrews 11:22).

At the end of his life, Joseph called all of the Israelites together and prophesied that God would ultimately deliver them from Egypt and bring them to the Promised Land. Accordingly, he solicited from them a promise that they would carry his bones with them to be buried in Canaan. For the next 400 years, the bones of Joseph served as a reminder that they would one day be delivered from Egypt and brought to the Promised Land.

The point is that Joseph, even though he had achieved great social standing in the land of Egypt, was looking for that which was better. Egypt was not enough to satisfy his deepest longing. He was looking for something more. He was looking for that which only God can provide.

THE EXAMPLE THE PARENTS OF MOSES

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. (Hebrews 11:23).

Moses was born at a time when there was a death penalty over all Hebrew male children. The Pharaoh of Egypt had instituted an “at-birth-abortion” policy. The policy dictated that the midwives serving the Hebrew mothers were to put all Hebrew male children to death.

The parents of Moses determined to save his life and they risked their own lives by hiding him for three months. It was only after this time that they hid him on the banks of the Nile River. By doing this, they were abiding by the letter of the Egyptian Law. Pharaoh’s decree had been that all male infants were to be cast into the Nile River. They merely took care not to cast him very far and then they set his sister Miriam to watch over him. When he was found by the Pharaoh’s daughter, events worked out that instead of being put to death, the baby was taken and raised as her own son.

How were they able to stand against the will of the mightiest monarch at that time in history? It was because of their faith. They trusted in the God who had made promises. That was enough to cause them to choose life rather than death for their son. It is not that they had no fear of the pharaoh, but

their fear of the pharaoh was outweighed by their faith in the promises of God.

THE EXAMPLE OF MOSES

Moses was one of the heroes of the Jewish faith. If Abraham was the father of the Jews, then Moses was their deliverer and law-giver.

1. The Decision of Moses.

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. (Hebrews 11:24-26).

The Lord's providence had delivered Moses from the decree of death and placed him into the house of Pharaoh where he received all the benefits of being the adopted son of the most powerful monarch on earth. And then Moses gave it all up, not on a whim, but by faith in that same God who had previously delivered him. There came a time in his life when he had to choose between being an Egyptian versus being an Israelite. One brought high rank and privilege, the other brought servitude and suffering. Moses chose to align himself with God's people. This was a step of faith.

There is no mention of the slaying of the Egyptian taskmaster. This act of murder is never condoned in the Scriptures. What is commended is the faith of Moses that brought a determination to stand up for the people of God.

Moses gave up...	Moses chose instead...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ Rank & greatness.♦ Pleasure.♦ Riches.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ Suffering & affliction.♦ The company of a despised people.♦ Reproach and scorn.

Why did he do it? It was because of faith. We are called to the same calling. It is a calling of faith. When we believe, we will be called to give up as Moses gave up and to choose as Moses chose.

As Christians, we are called to choose God before the world (Luke 14:25-27). The only thing that will allow you to make such a choice is faith. Contrariwise, the reason people fall away from Christ is because of a lack of faith. If you really believe the promises of God, you will follow Him.

2. The Departure of Moses.

By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen. (Hebrews 11:27).

This passage brings up a problem. Exodus 2:14 says that Moses was afraid upon learning that his murder of the Egyptian taskmaster was public knowledge. It was this event that led him to flee the presence of pharaoh and to dwell in Midian.

What shall we say in answer to this? Some have suggested that this leaving of Egypt refers to the later exodus from Egypt. But this does not seem to be the case in light of the fact that the Passover is mentioned in the next verse and that would put these two events out of chronological order. A better answer might be to understand that while Moses felt an initial fear over the discovery of his deed, he left his fear behind and he acted by faith as he departed into Midian. This is an important distinction. It means that faith is not the absence of fear. It means that faith involves overcoming the fear that is present.

3. The Demonstration of Moses.

By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them. (Hebrews 11:28).

The word translated “kept” is the Greek word πεποιηκεν (*pepoieken*), the perfect active indicative of ποιεω (*poieo*), “to do.” Because of the perfect tense, it has the idea of that which has continuing results and perhaps we can translate this as, “By faith he

instituted the Passover.”

The story of the Passover is a vivid illustration of the cross. The Lord had decreed that all firstborn were under the sentence of death. It did not matter whether they were Egyptian or Israelite, man or animal. All were going to die. There was only one way of salvation. That would be for a lamb to be slain and its blood sprinkled upon the doorposts and lintel of the house in which they resided.

Jesus is our Passover lamb. When all mankind was under sentence of death, He gave His life that when His blood is applied through faith to the doorposts of our hearts, we are delivered from the condemnation of death and are given His own eternal life.

4. The Deliverance of Moses.

By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned. (Hebrews 11:29).

It took faith to leave Egypt. The Pharaoh had not been in favor of the Exodus and he soon sent his armies to recapture the fleeing Israelite slaves. When the Lord parted the waters of the Red Sea, it took faith for the Israelites to cross.

Notice that the Egyptians had as much courage as did the Israelites. They also attempted the crossing. But they failed. They had courage, but they had no faith. Or if they did have faith, it was placed upon the wrong object.

FAITH AND THE WALLS OF JERICHO

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. (Hebrews 11:30).

We find ourselves skipping over the generation who wandered in the wilderness. We have already seen them portrayed as an example of unbelief. Instead we move forward to the walls of Jericho. It took faith to march

around and around this city, waiting for the Lord to bring down the walls.

There is a lesson here. It is that faith works. The Israelites did not say, “We’ll stay back in camp and give us a call when the walls have come down.” No, they obeyed the command of the Lord to march around the city, no matter how futile such a command may have seemed. Real faith always produces a corresponding action on the part of the one who demonstrates it.

THE FAITH OF RAHAB

By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace. (Hebrews 11:31).

It is striking that Hebrews 11 concludes this hall of faith with reference to a Gentile. She is not just a Gentile, she is also a woman. She is not just a Gentile woman, she is a prostitute. Just in case you forgot that, the writer repeats the mention of her past profession. The point is clear. God uses all sorts of people, even a Canaanite prostitute. That means He can use you, too.

It is interesting to see to what great lengths commentaries have gone to try to explain this away. Some have tried to soften the description of Rahab and have understood her to be a hostess or an innkeeper. But the word here is very explicit. The Greek word πορνή (porne) describes a prostitute. It is from this word that we derive our term “pornography.”

Furthermore, the writer does not see fit to further elaborate Rahab’s background. It is likely that she repented of her past lifestyle and gave herself over to a life of holiness. But there is no passage of the Bible that makes such a claim. The thing for which she is commended is her faith. She believed and her faith was counted for righteousness. It is true that we can see the reality of her faith by her resultant actions, but what is being presented here is that she found life through faith.

The following chart summarizes the acts of faith that we have seen throughout this chapter. The refrain is always the same; God’s people acted in faith and their faith was acceptable and pleasing to God.

By Faith...		
The Worlds	Were prepared	
Abel	Offered to God	Obtained the testimony that he was righteous
Enoch	Was taken up	Obtained the witness that he was pleasing to God
Noah	Prepared an ark	Became an heir of righteousness
Abraham	Going out to a place	Looking for the city whose architect and builder is God
	Lived as an alien	
Sarah	Received ability to conceive	Received descendants
Abraham	Offered up Isaac	Received him back
Isaac	Blessed Jacob & Esau	
Jacob	Blessed the sons of Joseph	
Joseph	Made mention of the exodus	
Moses	Was hidden by his parents	
	Chose the people of God	He was looking for the reward
	Left Egypt	Seeing Him who is unseen
	Kept the Passover	
Israel ("they")	Passed through the Red Sea	
	Walls of Jericho fell down	
Rahab the Harlot	Welcomed the spies in peace	Did not perish

The point has been made again and again that it is through faith that the Old Testament saints were able to approach the Holy God of Israel, not on the basis of their own merit, but because faith is the empty hand that is ready to receive God's blessing.

OTHER GREAT DEEDS OF FAITH

32 And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, 33 who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

35 Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; 36 and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment.

37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated 38 (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

39 And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40 because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect. (Hebrews 11:32-39).

The writer continues to relate account after account of acts of faith from Israel's past. Most of these are found in the pages of the Bible. Some are not and at least one might be of an incident recorded in one of the books of Maccabees. That is not the issue. The point is that faith has been seen all throughout the history of God's people.

The summary statement brings us to the conclusion. It is that all of these examples of faith are examples of people who were waiting for a promise. It was a promise for which they never saw the fulfillment until now. The fulfillment is Christ. Together we enter into that which God has provided. He is the One who is better.

DISCIPLINED ENDURANCE

Hebrews 12:1-11

Hebrews 11 has been called “God’s Super Bowl.” In that chapter we saw a listing of the greatest moments in spiritual history. There was Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and Moses. They were the superstars of the Old Testament. There are a number of places where the Bible uses athletic imagery of a race.

Passage	Point being Made
1 Corinthians 9:24-27	Self control is necessary to win
Galatians 5:7	Something hindered you
Philippians 3:14	I press on for the goal
2 Timothy 4:7-8	I have finished the course

The Christian life is a race. The difference between the races of the Olympics versus this race is that the stakes are a lot higher in this race. The winning of the Olympics brings temporary fame. The Christian race brings results that last for eternity. In this chapter we shall see another such racing image. The point will be made of the need for endurance.

RUNNING THE RACE OF ENDURANCE

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on

Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2).

This passage begins with the word “therefore.” Whenever you see the word “therefore” you want to find out what it is there for. This word is here because of what has been previously stated. The exhortation which is given in this chapter is given on the basis of what has been previously said.

What was previously said? The message of Hebrews up to this point is that Jesus is better. He is better than...

- ♦ The Angels.
- ♦ Moses.
- ♦ Joshua.
- ♦ He provides a better rest.
- ♦ He is a better high priest.
- ♦ He has established a better covenant.
- ♦ He has offered a better sacrifice in a better temple.

The evidence in support of this was summarized in chapter 11. It was a chapter about faith. It was a chapter that taught us that all of the Old Testament saints were looking forward to a promise that was never fulfilled in their era. They were looking forward to the promise that is fulfilled in Christ. Now on the basis of their testimony, we are given an exhortation.

1. The Encouragement: *Since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us (12:1).*

The cloud of witnesses are all of the names who were mentioned as well as those who went unmentioned by name in the previous chapter. They are all of the Old Testament saints.

What does it mean that they are *a cloud of witnesses*? Does it mean that they are watching us to see what we will do? No. It means that they gave witness through the testimony of their lives that there was a

We usually think of a cloud as something that hinders vision. We fly an airplane into the clouds and we can no longer see. But when the Jews thought of clouds, they thought of God. It was a cloud that led Israel through the wilderness. The cloud of witnesses in chapter 11 are given to lead us as well.

future promise which can be obtained through faith. That promise for which they were looking is fulfilled in Christ.

2. The Event: *Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us (12:1).*

The image here is of an athletic event. Specifically it is a race. Such events were common in the ancient world. The Greeks held two different sets of sporting events on a regular basis.

- a. The Olympics.
- b. The Isthmus Games.

The Christian life is likened to a race. Notice that it is not a sprint. I used to run sprints in high school. They are fairly short races, less than a hundred yards. No sooner than it had begun, it was over. You ran really fast and then you stopped. But that is not the picture of the Christian life. How do I know that? Because the Christian life has to be run *with endurance*.

Endurance. The Greek word is ὑπομονῆς (*hypomones*), literally “to remain under, to endure.” It describes that quality seen when you keep on keeping on. Jesus told a parable about short-range faith. It was the parable of the sower. The sower went out to sow and his seed fell on a number of different types of ground with varying results. There was the hard ground that saw no growth at all. Then there was the rocky ground where the fledgling plant was not able to put in roots and it was overcome by affliction and persecution. Next there was the thorny ground where the plant was choked by worry and riches and thereby rendered unfruitful. It was only that seed which fell on good ground which saw enduring growth leading to fruitfulness.

What kind of ground are you? Are you only short-term ground? Are you here today and gone tomorrow? Or is your commitment to Christ of a long-standing nature? You are called to run in a race. It is not enough to make it to the starting line. You are called to run with endurance so that you will also cross the finish line.

3. The Encumbrances: *Let us also lay aside every encumbrance and*

the sin which so easily entangles us (12:1).

Can you imagine someone setting out to run a race while lugging to heavy suitcases? It would be a bit silly. When someone sets out to run a race, they trim down to the very least possible weight. Notice that there are two things which are mentioned as being laid aside.

- ♦ Every encumbrance
- ♦ The sin which so easily entangles us

The fact that these two things are mentioned suggests that there are things which might weigh me down which are not in themselves sinful. It is possible to do all sorts of things which, while not sinful, will still entangle my life and turn me away from the Lord.

James 4:1 warns us of *pleasures that wage war in your members*. We live in a nation that is beset by pleasure against every side. Some are relatively harmless. But they wage war against the soul when they threaten to divert our attention from our Lord.

4. The End: *Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith (12:2).*

When you run a race, the one thing you don't want to do is to look behind you. That is a sure way to lose. Instead, you fix your eyes on the goal. In this case, the goal is Jesus. He is both our leader as well as our objective.

He is called *the author and perfecter of faith*. This can be understood in one of two ways:

- a. Jesus is the One who brings faith in believers (*author*) and he is also the One who matures that faith in them (*perfecter*). The problem is that the word "faith" is accompanied by the definite article. It is a reference to the faith.
- b. Jesus is the One who came to earth and who died on our behalf. In this regard, he is the originator (*author*) of that which we believe. His death, burial and resurrection completed and fulfilled (*perfected*) all for which the Old

Testament prophets looked.

The entire epistle to the Hebrews has been written to those who were being tempted to abandon the race. They were facing persecution and they were being tempted to leave their faith in Jesus and return to their old system of law-keeping. They need to hold to the One who is their author and perfecter of faith.

5. The Example: *Jesus... who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (12:2).*

We have already seen a veritable cloud of witnesses to the life of enduring faith. Now we have one more. It is Jesus Himself. Notice that there were two emotions which he experienced. They are seen in contrast one to the other.

*The JOY set
before Him*



*He endured the cross,
DESPISING the shame*

What was it that allowed Jesus to endure the shame of the cross? It was that He had His eyes fixed upon *the joy set before Him*. Do you see it? He did the very thing that we are called to do. We are called to fix our eyes and He also fixed His eyes.

This brings us to a question. What was the joy that was set before Jesus? Upon what goal did He have His eyes fixed? The passage does not say. But I would suggest that the goal was the church which His death purchased. Do you see it? We are to fix our eyes upon Jesus. While He was on earth, He had His eyes fixed upon us.

JESUS, THE EXAMPLE OF ENDURANCE

For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12:3).

Pain hurts. And it is hard to stand up against hostility. But it is easier when we remember that they were hostile to Jesus first. When you go to Him, you

go to someone who has been there and done that. You go to someone who understands.

The reason that this is told to us is twofold: First it is that we might *not grow weary*. Suffering can wear you down. More than merely a physical weariness, it brings with it a weariness of the soul. Secondly, this is given to us that we might not *lose heart*. The readers of this epistle were being tempted to quit. They had been following Christ for some time now and it was getting difficult. They needed some encouragement.

The story is told of an atheist who had lost his son. When the local pastor came to visit him, he yelled at him, “Where was your God when my son suffered and died?” In a flash of wisdom, the pastor calmly replied, “He was in the same place that He was when His own Son suffered and died.”

Notice the phrase *has endured*. It is translated from the Greek ὑπομενηκοτα, the perfect active indicative of ὑπομενω (hupomeno), describing the action of remaining under adversity. The perfect tense indicates an action that was accomplished in the past and which has continuing results. That describes the sufferings of Jesus. His work on the cross is finished, but its results continue for today.

ESTEEMING DISCIPLINE

You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; 5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reproved by Him; 6 for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom he receives.” (Hebrews 12:4-6).

Did you hear about the farmer who had a sick mule? He called the vet who prescribed some little white pills. He told him that if the white pills did not work, then to try a red pill which he also prescribed. The next day, the farmer was back. “That mule kicked down the stall and ran away.” The vet asked, “Did you catch him?” The farmer replied, “I wouldn’t have if I hadn’t remembered to take the red pill.” This passage has some red pills. It has some teachings which are easily stated but which are hard to live.

Some comfort! Instead of telling them that things will all be better if they will only trust in Jesus, the author tells his readers that things are not as bad as they could be and that they might even get worse. He says, “*You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood...*” The implication is that this will be the next step.

To encourage them, he takes them back to the Old Testament. The passage from which he quotes is Proverbs 3:11-12. It is a quote about discipline. When we talk about discipline, you might be inclined to think of it in terms of punishment, a discipline that comes because you did something wrong. This includes that kind of discipline but is not limited to it. This also includes the discipline instilled by a coach toward the athletes who are training for an event. It is not that they are transgressing. It is that they need training to prepare for what lies ahead.

There is a promise given in the Scriptures which we ought to include. It is found in 1 Corinthians 10:13. It is a promise that your training regime will not be too strenuous for you to bear.

THE LEGITIMACY OF DISCIPLINE

It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. (Hebrews 12:7-8).

Notice that discipline is something of which all have become partakers. It is the very sign of your legitimacy as a Christian. I have never disciplined the kid down the street. It isn’t that he does not deserve it. He could well benefit from some discipline. Why haven’t I disciplined that child? It is because he is not my child. I disciplined my own child when she was growing up. But I did not discipline any of her friends. It wasn’t my place.

Here is the point. The fact that you are disciplined by God is an evidence that you belong to Him. By the same token, if you have never been disciplined by God, perhaps you need to go to the cross and believe in the One who died in your place and make certain that you are a child in God’s family.

THE EXAMPLE OF DISCIPLINE

Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?

For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. (Hebrews 12:9-10).

Discipline is good for us. It brings about a specific result. The result which is mentioned here is holiness. Do you want to be holy? It will hurt. Are you going through hard times? God is producing something in your life. The surgeon's scalpel always hurts, but the result will be a wholeness.

I worked for many years as a fire fighter. The beginning of that career involved going to the fire academy for several months of training. That training included a certain level of physical discipline. It included some heavy exercise and it included carrying some heavy loads. It was not easy, nor was it meant to be. In later years, I was glad of the difficulty of the training and I was glad that the other members of my department had gone through that same intensity of training because it meant I could depend upon their physical and mental abilities in an emergency situation.

THE FRUIT OF DISCIPLINE

All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. (Hebrews 12:11).

Discipline isn't fun. Hard times are not enjoyable. But they do yield a crop which is worth the trouble. Notice what is the crop. It is the *peaceful fruit of righteousness*. Here is the principle. You go through the pain to get to the peace. We've said it so many times that it has become a cliché: No pain, no gain. It is a Biblical principle.

Peace comes after you have walked the rocky path of discipline. Once you go through the harsh times, there is peace on the other side. When our daughter was young and we had to discipline her, we always made it a point

to hug her afterward. The pain hurt, either emotionally or physically. But the hugs and the restored fellowship made it better.

Someone said that the Bible has both good news and bad news. The good news is that heaven is the inheritance of all of God's people. The bad news is that you have to die to get there. In the same way, there are certain blessings that God gives in this life and the only way to receive them is to go through difficult times.

Your biggest problems don't come from the world. They come from God. That isn't bad; that is good. If you are a Christian, then you can take comfort in knowing that nothing comes into your life that does not first go through a nail-scarred hand. When tragedy comes and when things go wrong, the Father says, "It is Me." That sounds like bad news. But it is really good news. It is good news because it means that your Father can bring good out of it. It is good because, after the storm, there will come the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

A HEAVENLY PILGRIMAGE

Hebrews 12:12-29

This is the climactic section of the book of Hebrews. For twelve chapters, we have seen the repeated message that Jesus is better. He is better than the angels, He is better than Moses, He brings a better rest than Joshua. He is a better high priest, He brings a better tabernacle, and He is a better sacrifice for a better covenant. This song of the supremacy of Jesus reaches its highest crescendo in this chapter. Throughout the entire epistle, we have seen that Jesus is better. When we came to the end of chapter 10, we saw the sober warning that was given to those who reject Him as the Messiah and who “go on sinning after receiving knowledge of the truth” (10:26). We were called to listen to the great cloud of witnesses and now the emphasis has been on what to do in light of the truth that Jesus is better. What is the solution? The answer is that we are to hold onto Him.

READINESS FOR THE JOURNEY

12 Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. (Hebrews 12:12-13).

This section begins with a results clause. It begins with the word “therefore.” That takes us back to the previous passage. We are being given the resulting conclusion of what has already said. Hebrews 12 began with an analogy of a sporting event in which we were called to “lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”

Now we come back to that same image. The image is of a body that is in need of strengthening. The hands are weak. The knees are feeble. The limbs are lame. It is a body that has been through a great deal of stress. It is a body that is tired. The body represents us. It represents the church. In this case, it is a reference to the Hebrew believers to whom this epistle is addressed. They are in need of strengthening, not in the physical sense, but in the spiritual sense. They are tired. They are in danger of dislocation. They have been demonstrating their lack of spiritual health as they have been considering an abandoning of Christianity and a return to their old life within Judaism.

The words that are given here are not new words. They echo from the pages of the Old Testament. As such, they would have been familiar to the readers of this epistle. They are taken from the book of Isaiah.

*3 Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble.
4 Say to those with anxious heart, “Take courage, fear not.
Behold, your God will come with vengeance;
The recompense of God will come,
But He will save you.”
5 Then the eyes of the blind will be opened
And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.
6 Then the lame will leap like a deer,
And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy.
For waters will break forth in the wilderness
And streams in the Arabah. (Isaiah 35:3-6).*

We cannot help but to notice how these words of encouragement flow into a vivid prophecy that saw a very literal fulfillment in the coming of Jesus. He is the One who opened the eyes of the blind, who unstopped the ears of the deaf, and whose healing power allowed the lame to leap and the mute to speak. In light of that fulfillment, they are to take heart and strengthen their faith, even as they believe in the One who fulfilled all these wonderful promises.

THE GOAL FOR THE JOURNEY

*14 Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification
without which no one will see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:14).*

This verse gives a command to pursue. It is the present plural imperative of *dioko* (διώκω). It is usually translated “persecute” when found in the New Testament. An example of its varied range of meanings can be found in the third chapter of Philippians.

- ♦ ...as to zeal, a *PERSECUTOR* of the church (3:6).
- ♦ ...but *I PRESS ON* in order that *I may lay hold*... (3:12).
- ♦ ...*I PRESS ON* toward the goal... (3:14).

What does this mean? It means that we are to be unrelenting in our pursuit of peace and of the sanctification which the Lord has provided (note that the definite article is found in the Greek text - “the sanctification”). A further indication of this is the fact that this command is given in the present tense. A command in the Greek present usually carries the idea that you are to keep on doing the thing that is commanded. This is the idea of a continuous action.

We are instructed to engage in a two-fold pursuit. The first of these is a pursuit of peace with all men. This is a general statement and need not be limited to all those who are believers. Jesus pronounced a special blessing on peacemakers. We are to be people of peace and are to encourage that same peace with others. Of course, the only way that peace will ultimately come will be through the Prince of Peace, but that does not mean we abandon the quest for peace in this life. Because we worship the Prince of Peace, we ought to be an influence of peace to this world.

The second pursuit described here is the pursuit of “the sanctification.” Of which sanctification does this speak? It refers to that sanctification that is necessary to see the Lord.

Pursue Peace	Pursue Sanctification
This peace is to be with all men	This sanctification results in our seeing the Lord
Directed toward men	Directed toward God

We live in a day that emphasizes the importance of peace. But some would emphasize peace at the expense of the truth of the gospel. They are not mutually exclusive. We are to pursue peace and sanctification.

ENDURANCE FOR THE JOURNEY

15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; 16 that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. 17 For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears. (Hebrews 12:15-17).

Commentaries have regularly come to this passage and have depicted it as though it refers to some sort of emotional bitterness which a Christian ought to avoid. I agree that emotional bitterness is a bad thing and something to be avoided, but that is not what this passage is describing.

The writer to the Hebrews has been speaking of the doctrinal poison of leaving Jesus to return to the Old Covenant way of life. The big idea throughout this book has been that Jesus is better. He is better than Moses and He provided a better sacrifice than the Old Testament sacrifices and He has instituted a new and a better covenant than was found in the old covenant of the law.

As he now warns against the danger of coming “short of the grace of God,” he is speaking of the same danger. It is the danger of coming short of the grace of God by abandoning Jesus in favor of the law; of abandoning the cross in favor of the Old Testament sacrifices. This is described in terms of a root of bitterness. It is a poisonous root that is in danger of sprouting up in the church.

The image of such a poisonous root is borrowed from the Old Testament. Moses used this image when he spoke to the Israelites of the danger of turning away from the Lord to serve the false idols of their neighbors.

17 Moreover, you have seen their abominations and their idols of wood, stone, silver, and gold, which they had with them); 18 lest there shall be among you a man or woman, or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of those nations; lest there shall be among you a root bearing poisonous fruit and

wormwood. (Deuteronomy 29:17-18).

Now the danger has come full circle. It is no longer the danger of worshiping idols of wood or stone or silver or gold. Now the danger is of making an idol of the law and turning away from the One to whom the law pointed. This is seen in the flow of thought as depicted in the following chart:

Pursue	peace with all men, and the sanctification, without which no one will see the Lord,
overseeing	lest anyone fall from the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness growing up cause trouble and through this many be defiled, lest any immoral or profane one as Esau who gave up his own firstborn rights for one meal.

We can see from this mechanical layout that the readers are called to “oversee” three areas. I believe these are merely parallels for the same thing; that is, they are three descriptions of the same action.

By leaving Jesus to return to the legal sacrifices of the Old Testament, the Hebrews to whom this epistle is directed were in danger of doing the same thing that Esau had once done. They are in danger of abandoning their birthright to gain a single meal. Their birthright is the Messiah. After all, Jesus was Jewish. He came to His own people, but those who were His own did not receive Him. They preferred the meal of their tradition and thus gave up the One who was their birthright.

JOURNEY’S BEGINNING: THE OLD MOUNTAIN

18 For you have not come to a mountain that may be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, 19 and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of

words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word should be spoken to them. 20 For they could not bear the command, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned." 21 And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I am full of fear and trembling." (Hebrews 12:18-21).

The writer to the Hebrews is going to set before us two mountains. They represent two approaches to God; two ways of viewing the universe. He seeks to move you from one mountain to the other. Each represents an institution. After all, a mountain is...

- ♦ Big
- ♦ Established
- ♦ Immovable

Each of these mountains represents a total way of life; a unified system by which people attempt to meet with God.

Mount Sinai	Mount Zion
Represents the approach of law	Represents the approach of grace
People are warned to stay off this mountain	The entire world is invited to come to this mountain
It is a literal mountain; it can be touched	It is a spiritual mountain; it cannot be touched
It inspires fear and terror	It inspires love and rest
This mountain makes one want to go and hide and cover his ears	This mountain makes one want to listen to the singing of angels
Condemnation of sinners who have disobeyed the law	Acceptance of righteous men made perfect
Moses: "I am full of fear and trembling"	Jesus: The Mediator of a new covenant

Do you have a “Sinai strategy” in dealing with your sin? I am not saying that

you are being tempted to abandon Christ and return to your sin, but are you nevertheless living at the foot of Mount Sinai? Are you living in the shadow of your sins? There are one of three approaches you can take:

- ♦ You can excuse your sin. You can say, “It really is not all that bad.” This is what Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden when they dreamed up operation fig leaf. They tried to cover up and, when that did not work, they tried to blame someone else.
- ♦ You can vow to do better. This is the road to self-improvement. It involves a self-centered striving. But it does not work and those who take this approach are doomed to frustration.

We are not called to live on Mount Sinai. We are called, instead, to come to Mount Calvary. We can come there with all our sins, all our broken vows, all our worthless excuses and leave them before the cross. Come with your broken heart and meet the One who will heal your soul.

JOURNEY’S END: THE NEW MOUNTAIN

22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. (Hebrews 12:22-24).

Now we come to the new mountain. This is the better mountain. That has been the message of the entire epistle. It is that Jesus is better. He is better than the angels. He is better than Moses. He is a better high priest and a better tabernacle and a better sacrifice. Now we see that His is a better mountain.

1. He has a Better Jerusalem: *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22).*

We who have come to Jesus have found ourselves citizens of a better

city. It is alternatively called “Mount Zion”, “the city of the living God”, and “the heavenly Jerusalem.” We are no longer speaking of a city that was located in the mountains of Palestine. That city is only a shadow of the better city. Our citizenship points to a heavenly Jerusalem. This is the same city pictured in the book of Revelation, the city coming down from heaven as a bride being presented to her bridegroom.

2. He has a Better Assembly: *To the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven (12:23).*

The phrase “general assembly” is translated from a hapax legomenon, a word that is only used this one time in the New Testament. The word is the dative feminine of *πανηγυρις* (*paneguris*). It is a compound word made up of the joining of two Greek words.

- ♦ Παν (*pan*) is the Greek word for “all.”
- ♦ Αγορα (*agora*) refers to the marketplace.

Richard Trench tells us that the compound was used in Greek to describe *a solemn assembly for the purposes of festal rejoicing* (1980:6). Thus the festal gatherings and the assembly to which this speaks conjures up images, not so much of the New Testament church, but of a grand, heavenly celebration.

The writer has deliberately used terms that normally call to mind the nation of Israel as it celebrates the various feast days and he has applied them to the greater Israel and to the heavenly Jerusalem. It serves as a reminder that the kingdom of God is a party to which we have all been invited and of which the past festal celebrations were only a shadow.

3. He has a Better People: *To the spirits of righteous men made perfect (12:23).*

When we come to Jesus, we find that we have come to the One who is able to perfect and complete us, not in a mere physical sense, but with respect to our spirits. The writer has already made reference to this “perfecting” work when he described how God has provided something better for us, so that apart from us the Old Testament saints would not be made perfect (Hebrews 11:40). We are in process

and the One whom we are called to follow is working out that process in us.

4. He is a Better Mediator: *And to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant (12:24).*

We have already seen Jesus as the mediator of the new covenant in Hebrews 8:6 and 9:15. He is the one who stood in the gap between God and men and who represented God to man and who represented man to God. He did the former by demonstrating to us the love of God and He did the latter by taking upon Himself the punishment for our sins.

5. He has Better Blood: *And to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel (12:24).*

The sprinkling of blood is seen throughout the Old Testament. It regularly represented the application of a sacrifice. But the author directs our attention, not to the sprinkled blood of a sacrifice, but to the blood of Abel. What is so significant about the blood of Abel? The blood of Abel was shed by Cain in the first murder of history. You remember the story. Cain got jealous and murdered his brother. The Lord questioned Cain about the death of his brother and then said, “The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground” (Genesis 4:10).

The blood of Abel serves as the prototype for a sacrifice. Abel was innocent. He died, not because of his own sins, but because of the actions of his sinful brother. We are meant to look at Abel and see a reflection of Jesus.

Abel	Jesus
His blood cries up from the ground	His blood speaks to us in the Lord's Supper
His blood condemns	His blood brings life
As a result of his blood, Cain was worried about vengeance	As a result of his blood, we are given mercy and forgiveness

The blood of Abel gave testimony. What did it cry? It cried for justice. While the blood of Abel called for justice, the blood of Jesus calls for mercy.

FINAL WARNINGS

See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven. 26 And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven." 27 This expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; 29 for our God is a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:25-29).

The epistle to the Hebrews has been full of warnings of the most serious kind. We are brought in this section to one final warning. It is a warning that *you do not refuse Him who is speaking*. It is a warning that you do not ignore the message of this epistle.

1. The Example of the Past: *For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven (12:25).*

This example is given for a reason. It is given as a warning from the lesser to the greater. The writer has used this sort of rational earlier in his epistle. If the lesser is true (that Old Testament people did not escape when they ignored the warnings of God), then how much greater danger do we face if we ignore the warnings of God?

Old Testament People	New Testament People
They received earthly warnings	We receive heavenly warnings

They did not escape when they ignored those warnings	We have even less chances of escaping when we ignore God's warnings
------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------

People often comment on how much judgment is to be found in the Old Testament. There is quite a bit of judgment found there. But that does not mean we can ignore the idea of judgment merely because we have the New Testament. To the contrary, our own liability in ignoring the warnings of God are even greater than were those who lived in the days of the Old Testament.

2. The Promise of a Second Revelation: *And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven."* (12:26).

There were some amazing things that took place in the days of the Old Testament. There was lightning and thunder and a shaking of the earth. We are reminded of an Old Testament promise that says it is going to happen again. The promise is given in Haggai 2:6. It is a promise that God will act and, when He does, there will be a great shaking. It is a promise that, just as God shook the earth at the giving of the Law, so the earth and the heaven would shake again.

It did. When Jesus went to the cross, the sun became black and darkness covered the whole land. When He died, there was an earthquake; a great shaking of the earth. As if to announce a corresponding shaking of the heavens, the veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom.

3. The Contrast between that which can be Shaken and that which is Unshakable: *This expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain* (12:27).

There are some things that can be shaken and other that are unshakable. Haggai described that which would be shaken. Those are the things that are of this creation. But there are also things that cannot be shaken.

Things which can be shaken	Things which cannot be shaken
The Old Covenant	The New Covenant
Things of this creation	Things of the new creation

The contrast is the same contrast we have seen all throughout the epistle to the Hebrews. It is between that which is of the old covenant versus that which is of the new covenant. It is between the Old Testament shadows versus the New Testament substance. Jesus came to establish that which cannot be shaken and, in doing so, He shook the old covenant to its very core.

4. The Gratitude of Grace: *Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe (12:28).*

We are now brought to a conclusion. This is the result of the establishment of the new covenant and the new kingdom. Because we have a new and unshakable kingdom, we are to respond with gratitude. It is not that we do this service in order to enter into that kingdom. Grace means that the kingdom is freely given. But because we have received such a kingdom, the obvious response is one of gratitude. This gratitude is to be manifested outwardly in an “acceptable service” and inwardly through an attitude of reverence and awe.

A SERVICE OF GRATITUDE

Hebrews 13:1-9

The last chapter closed with a call to respond in gratitude to the gift of grace that we have received. Because we have received a kingdom which cannot be shaken, we are to show gratitude by offering to the Lord our service to Him. In this chapter, we are given the specifics of what that service involves.

12:27	12:28-29	13:1
We have received a kingdom that cannot be shaken	Because we have received an unshakable kingdom, let us respond in gratitude with service	That service involves... <ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ Hospitality♦ Our marriage♦ Being content♦ Holding to the truth

This chapter is radically different from the first twelve chapters of Hebrews. It is epistle-like. It contains a personal appeal to those for whom it is written. The theological presentation is over. This is the practical side of the epistle to the Hebrews. It is the call to move from theory to practice. It is the mandate to put our faith into action.

A CALL TO HOSPITALITY

Let love of the brethren continue. 2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. 3 Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body. (Hebrews 13:1-3).

The call for hospitality begins with a call for the love of the brethren. This is brotherly love. It is family love. We are to love all men, but we are to especially love our Christian brothers. We are a part of a spiritual family. We have family commitments. This speaks of Christian fellowship. But our obligation only begins there. It moves from our obligation regarding other Christians to our obligation for all mankind and even for strangers.

Hebrews 13:1	Hebrews 13:2	Hebrews 13:3
Love of the brethren	Hospitality to strangers	Care for prisoners

Verse one is the call to love the brethren. This is rendered by the single Greek word *φιλαδέλφια* (*philadelphia*), the same word which gives the city in Pennsylvania its name. We call it the “city of brotherly love” because its name literally means “brotherly love.” What is interesting is that verse two has a word with the same Greek root. It is the word translated “hospitality.” It is translated from the Greek word *φιλοξενίας* (*philoxenias*) and literally means “love of strangers.”

Hebrews 13:1	Hebrews 13:2
<i>Φιλαδέλφια:</i> Love of brothers	<i>Φιλοξενία:</i> Love of strangers
A call to show love to insiders	A call to show love to outsiders

We are to show love to strangers because there was a time when we were all strangers. Hebrews 11:23 reminds us that even the Old Testament saints were *strangers and exiles on the earth*.

The epistle to the Hebrews began by talking about angels. Now we are told that, by showing hospitality to strangers, *some have entertained angels without knowing it*. One such example of this is Abraham. The story is told in Genesis 18. Abraham looked up one day to see several visitors approaching. There was nothing about their appearance that was necessarily striking, but he nevertheless showed them the hospitality of a gracious host. As a result, he soon learned that his visitors were not ordinary men. They were angels and they played a role in saving the extended family of Abraham.

The point is that, when you show hospitality to strangers, the results may turn out to be far greater than you ever dreamed. Hospitality has a way of

magnifying itself and its result are often far beyond that which was originally intended.

Another outworking of this principle of hospitality is seen in the visitation of prisoners. I have had opportunity to visit people in prison, but if we pause to remember the historical context in which this injunction was first given, we shall see that it extends far beyond that of most of today's prison ministries. I am not disparaging prison ministries. Far to the contrary, I think they are a wonderful outreach. What I must point out, however, is that prison ministry in the ancient world would have involved a great deal more than it does today. Prisoners in the ancient world were not necessarily provided with the essential physical nutrients. One could easily starve in prison unless there were friends or family to bring food.

The point is that our love for both the brethren and for strangers is to have a practical application. We do not merely sit back and have nice feelings for others. That love is to be put into action by serving others. We are called to love as Christ loved. He is the standard of our love. His love was such that it caused Him to leave the comfort of heaven to take on flesh and to come as a servant.

A CALL TO PURITY IN MARRIAGE

Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge. (Hebrews 13:4).

There is no verb in the Greek text; it is supplied here by the translators and rendered into the imperative. By contrast, the KJV translators rendered this as an indicative.

NAS	Marriage is <i>to be held</i> in honor among all, and the marriage bed is <i>to be</i> undefiled
KJV	Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled

While both translations are grammatically correct, it is likely that we are to understand this as a command, given the context. There are a whole series of commands given throughout these verses and the idea of a command is

borrowed by the context.

With these two commands, the author calls us to sexual purity, whether we are single or married. Marriage is to be held in honor. That means we are to reserve for marriage those relationships that are appropriate for marriage. This is an injunction against fornication, the engaging of sexual relations outside of the bonds of marriage. Likewise, the marriage bed is to be undefiled. This is a prohibition of adultery, the act of breaking the marital vows by sexual infidelity.

A Command to Single People	A Command to Married People
<i>Marriage is to be held in honor among all...</i>	<i>...and the marriage bed is to be undefiled</i>
Sexual relations are to be reserved for marriage	Sexual relations are to remain within marriage

It has become popular in recent years for single people to delay marriage. There is nothing wrong with such a delay as long as it is accompanied by sexual purity. But to engage outside of marriage in that which is to be reserved for marriage constitutes a dishonor of marriage and brings with it the judgment of God.

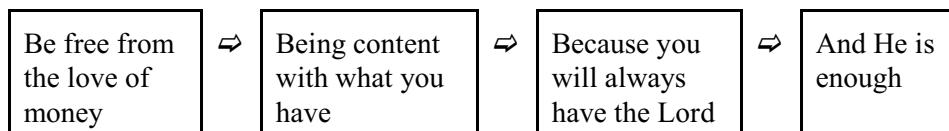
Another aspect of holding marriage in honor is to understand that it is a good thing to be married. The church in the 2nd and 3rd centuries adopted the view, based largely on a misunderstanding of Paul's teachings in 1 Corinthians 7, that it is not so spiritual to get married. It is true that the Lord has called some to a life of singleness. Singleness is good. But marriage is also good. The Lord established marriage and blessed it. We are to hold marriage in honor. Marriage is to be honored. It is to be honored because it was ordained by God. It is to be undefiled. Fornication and adultery are a defilement of marriage. Marriage was designed to be between one man and one woman and it was designed to join a couple as long as they live.

It is not your love that sustains your marriage. It is your marriage that sustains your love. If you are committed to the God-ordained sanctity of marriage, that commitment will see you over the times when you find it difficult to love.

A CALL TO CONTENTMENT

Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you," 6 so that we confidently say, "the Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5-6).

This call to contentment begins with a warning that you are to have a character that is free from the love of money. This is not an end in itself. It is not merely a call to love poverty. Rather, it is a call to love the Lord and to be satisfied in Him and in what He has given. We can trace the flow of thought in this chart:



God has a promise for His people. It is a promise of His presence. He promises that He will always be with us. If God is with you, then all other concerns are of no consequence. After all, how much would you worry about money if you were the guest of a multi-billionaire, especially if he was promising to take care of all your needs?

You are to be free from the love of money. It is not that money is bad. Money has a tendency to show where your heart lies. Show me your bankbook and I will see what it is you love. Though there are obvious exceptions to the rule, you will generally spend your money on that which you love. There has been quite a lot in this chapter regarding that which you love.

Hebrews 13:1	Hebrews 13:2	Hebrews 13:4	Hebrews 13:5
You are to love one another	You are to be a lover of strangers	You are to love your spouse	You are not to be a lover of money

We are called to love one another. We are called to love strangers. We are called to love husbands and wives. We are to love because we have been loved.

A CALL TO FOLLOW

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Hebrews 13:7-8).

Jesus called His disciples to follow Him. That is well and good, but Jesus is not here today. It is hard to follow someone whom you cannot see. It is for this reason the writer to the Hebrews tells his readers they are to remember and to imitate those who led them in the past. We are called to be imitators. We are to imitate Christ. If you cannot see Christ, then imitate someone who is imitating Christ.

At the same time, we are reminded that Jesus has not changed. He is *the same yesterday and today and forever*. Why is this statement included? It is because the standard to which we are called to follow is an unchangeable standard. This is significant because there are some who claim to follow Christ whose teachings are subject to the latest fad. Whenever a certain teaching becomes unpopular, they have a “new revelation” to update their teaching. Jesus does not change in such a manner. He is consistent and we are called to be consistent, too.

A CALL TO DOCTRINAL STEADFASTNESS

Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited. (Hebrews 13:9).

The Greek construction of this command is a present active imperative. When a negative command is given in the present tense, it can carry one of two possible ideas:

- ♦ A command against a continuing or habitual action: “*Don’t be continually carried away...*”
- ♦ A command to stop doing an action already underway: “*Stop being carried away...*”

Given what has already been said to the recipients of this letter, we can

assume it is the latter use that is utilized here. Because Jesus is *the same yesterday and today and forever*, we are to stop being carried away by teachings that are not the same yesterday and today and forever. We are to beware of varied and strange teachings. To what teachings does this refer? The teachings that were problematic in that day involved an occupation with foods. These were the kosher laws of the Old Testament. An occupation with Old Testament kosher laws is not of spiritual benefit. Such an occupation does not strengthen the heart. What strengthens the heart is the grace of God.

A CLOSING CALL

Hebrews 13:10-25

In these closing verses, we come to the end of one of the longer epistles of the New Testament. This section contains both a summary of what has been previously stated as well as some new instructions that are given on the basis of that summary.

A CALL THAT TAKES US OUTSIDE THE CAMP

We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. 11 For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp. 12 Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. 13 So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. 14 For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come. (Hebrews 13:10-14).

The community of Israel was “in the camp.” This was the place of fellowship. It was the place of belonging. It was the place of safety and of comfort. It was also the place of holiness. The presence of God was in the camp. That all changed when Jesus came. He was rejected by the leaders of the nation. He was rejected by those who were “in the camp” and He was taken and crucified outside the gate, outside the camp.

The writer to the Hebrews is addressing those who have been in the camp but who have now come to faith in Christ. They now have a decision. Will they

continue to follow Jesus, or will they return to the camp of those who have rejected Him? This is a call to go to Jesus outside the camp. It is a call to be reproached by those who have reproached Him.

This same call can also be applied to those of us who are not Jewish by birth and who have never been a part of the Israelite camp. It can be applied in that we are also called to “go outside the camp” of our own unbelief and to join ourselves to Christ and to identify ourselves with Him. When we identify ourselves with Him, we find that we have been given three things:

1. We have an Altar: *We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat (13:10).*

The priests within the temple were permitted to eat portions of the sacrifices that were offered upon the altar of the temple. But we have a different sort of altar. It is an altar from which the Levitical priesthood is not permitted to eat. To what altar does this refer? It speaks of the cross upon which our sacrifice was made. The cross did for us what the Old Testament altar could only provide as a foreshadowing. Jesus has provided a better altar and it is from His altar the we are able to find nourishment for our souls.

That nourishment is pictured when we come to the Lord’s table. We come and partake of that which represents the body and blood of Christ. It is not that the bread or the wine have been magically changed. They are symbols. They direct our attention to Christ. We come and, through faith, we partake of Him. We are able to do so because He has given of Himself.

2. We have a High Priest who Suffered: *Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate (13:12).*

Jesus is our high priest. The main duty of the high priest was to offer a sacrifice for the nation on the Day of Atonement. Jesus offered a sacrifice, not only for the nation, but for the entire world. The sacrifice He offered was Himself. That means He suffered.

He not only suffered; He also suffered outside the gate. This speaks of His rejection at the hands of the Jews. They treated Him as an outcast. They did to Him what they did on the Day of Atonement to

the scapegoat. The scapegoat was taken out of the city and put to death, bearing the sins of the people. Jesus was taken out of the city of Jerusalem and put to death. Dying outside of the city was a sign of His rejection by the city.

It is for this reason we are called to *go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach*. Because He was rejected, those who follow Him will also be rejected. Because men hated Him, they will also hate those who follow Him. This call is for a resolve to bear the persecution that is aimed at Jesus.

3. We have a Lasting City: *For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come (13:14).*

It must be remembered that this is being written to Hebrew believers. It is being written to those who have looked to the city of Jerusalem as their city. But the city of Jerusalem has rejected Christ. It was the city of Jerusalem that put Him to death outside the city. That means believers in Jesus will also be rejected by the earthly city of Jerusalem.

The Earthly Jerusalem	The Heavenly Jerusalem
The present city	The city which is to come
A temporary city	A lasting city

A CALL TO WORSHIP

Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. 16 And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. (Hebrews 13:15-16).

The call that takes us outside the camp is a call to worship. Worship in the Old Testament always involved a sacrifice. An animal had to die. Worship under the New Covenant looks to the sacrifice of Christ. He is the One who died on our behalf and that means we give a continual sacrifice of praise. This sacrifice of praise is described, not as a work, but as fruit. It is the *fruit*

of lips that give thanks to His name. We give thanks because He has accomplished the ultimate sacrifice on our behalf.

Our sacrifice of praise has a corresponding manifestation of works in our lives. It is not that we are saved by such works, but they are the natural outflow of praise. These works are described here as *doing good and sharing*. They are directed toward others. Our praise relationship with God overflows into how we treat others.

Jesus said that, at the last judgment, there will be those to whom He says, “I was hungry and you did not feed Me; naked and you did not clothe Me; sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.” They will ask, “Lord, when did any of this take place? If we had seen you, we would have baked you cookies.” His reply will be, “When you do it to My people, it is just as though you have done it to Me.” How do you treat others? You are called to treat them as you would treat Jesus.

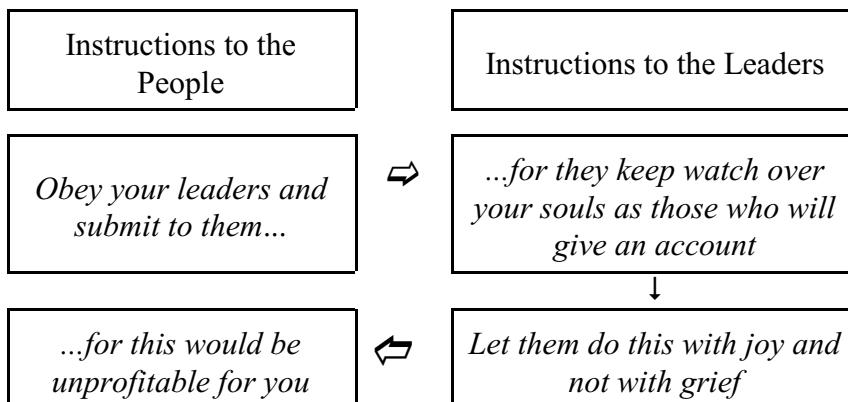
A CALL OF SUBMISSION

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. (Hebrews 13:17).

There has not been much about leadership in this epistle. The primary issue has not been about leadership in the church, but rather holding onto Christ and to the new covenant. Evidently it was not primarily the leadership of the church that was pulling people in the direction of rejecting Christ in favor of a return to the law.

Though the instructions are given to the people to obey their leaders, there is a corresponding charge that is implied to the leaders. They are to be “soul-watchers.” Leadership in the church consists primarily of guarding the souls of the congregation. This is accomplished both by healthy teaching and it is also accomplished by getting rid of “spiritual junk food.” We know about junk food. It might taste good, but it has an absence of nutrition. In the same way, there are things that seem, on the surface, to be spiritually gratifying, but that are without any spiritual value.

What starts out as an exhortation to obey leaders quickly moves into an implied exhortation for leaders to lead in a right way. The exhortation is for both the leaders and the laity, for both the leaders and those who are to be led by the leaders. The exhortation goes from one to the other as seen in the following chart:



It is a serious thing to be a leader. Leaders are liable. They are responsible for that over which they have been given leadership. Spiritual leaders have been entrusted with souls. That is a great treasure and they should take such responsibility with all sobriety, for they will have to give an accounting of their stewardship.

The recipients of this epistle are called upon to act in such a way that their leaders will lead with joy and not with grief. Given the context of this epistle, that means they are to believe the gospel and hold to Jesus and not turn aside or try to return to their old life under Judaism.

A CALL TO PRAYER

Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things. 19 And I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you the sooner. (Hebrews 13:18-19).

It is only here and in the closing verses of this epistle that we have the sort of personal notes that let us know the original readers of the epistle knew the author. He has not mentioned himself by name, but it is not that he is unknown. We can only surmise there must have been some other reason he

does not make more personal references.

This is a call for prayer. More specifically, it is a request for personal prayer. But it is not a prayer for safety or security or comfort. It is a prayer for a good conscience and a correspondingly good conduct. I believe this is a prayer that we can pray, both for ourselves as well as for our leaders.

A CLOSING BENEDICTION

Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, 21 equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21).

This is both a doxology and a benediction. As a doxology, it is a statement of faith and of worship. It directs our attention to God and to His work on our behalf. He is the God of peace and His work of raising Christ from the dead has brought peace to men who believe.

This is also a benediction. A benediction is a short, closing prayer. It is not a prayer for self-gratification. It is a prayer that the Lord might equip you to do His will. It is a prayer that draws us to glorify Christ and it closes on precisely that note.

1. The Source of Grace: *The God of peace (13:20).*

This prayerful benediction is directed to the God of peace. Remember that peace was very significant to the Jewish readers of this epistle. Even today, if you go to Israel, you will hear the regular greeting, “Shalom.” It means “peace,” but it means more than merely the cessation of hostility. The peace of the Bible reflects a well-being.

God is the God of peace. He sent His Son to bring peace to men, not merely the cessation of hostility between God and man as well as between man and man, but also to bring an eternal well-being.

2. The Means of Grace: *Who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord (13:20).*

Grace comes through the One who shed His own blood to bring about the eternal covenant. Why is it called the “eternal covenant?” It is because the New Covenant is a lasting covenant that comes to supersede the old covenant.

The old covenant was temporary. The very fact that it promised the coming of a new covenant was proof that it was meant to be temporary. It looked forward to the coming of the One who would bring better blood and a better sacrifice at the hands of a better priest in a better tabernacle.

Notice how Jesus is described as the “great Shepherd of the sheep.” Throughout the Old Testament, it is the Lord who is described as the shepherd of Israel. You will remember the 23rd Psalm that begins, “The Lord is my shepherd.”

3. The Result of Grace: *Now the God of peace... equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ (13:20-21).*

The result of God’s gracious sacrifice is that we are to bring forth good works. It is not that we are saved by those works, but that His work within us brings forth those works. The theological term for that work within us is “sanctification.” It is a work of God’s grace, even as our justification and our redemption are works of God’s grace. They are not earned. They are not deserved. This process of sanctification both equips us and also works within us the very thing that is in accordance with God’s purpose for us.

4. The Glory of Grace: *Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever (13:21).*

The result of God’s sanctifying work within the life of the believer is that Jesus is given glory. That would not be the case if I were accomplishing my own sanctification through my own efforts. Christ receives the glory because my sanctification is a sign of His work within me.

A CALL TO BEAR THE WORD

But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. (Hebrews 13:22).

There have been a number of exhortations and a number of warnings throughout this epistle. Much more could have been said; the author indicates this when he says that he has written briefly. Thus he makes one last plea that those who hear this word of exhortation might take it to heart.

What do you do when you are reproved or corrected? If you are like most people, your natural tendency is to deny the reproof. After all, if a reproof is accepted, then you are shown to be in the wrong and no one likes to admit they are in the wrong. But it is only by such admission that we can come to the gospel. Believing the gospel involves an admission that we have been very, very wrong. It is an admission that we are so wrong that the Holy Son of God had to come and to die in our place.

LAST GOODBYES

Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you. ²⁴ Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. ²⁵ Grace be with you all. (Hebrews 13:23-25).

In these closing verses, we have several more indications that the author was known to his readers. While not being definitive, these personal notes give us several clues to who that author might be.

- He sends greetings from those in Italy. This would imply that he is in Italy himself as he writes these words. The church in Italy had been the recipient of Paul's epistle to the Romans and had eventually hosted Paul himself when he came to Rome.
- He speaks of Timothy's release and anticipated coming. We know nothing in the New Testament of the imprisonment of Timothy. Paul's second epistle to Timothy directs him to come to Rome in light

of the apostle's coming death (2 Timothy 4:21).

We have already noted that the one person who was with Paul at the end of his imprisonment in Rome was Luke. It is therefore entirely possible that Luke was the author of this epistle. The obvious objection arises that Luke was not Jewish. This is true, but he spent a great deal of time with the Apostle Paul who was Jewish and who had the sort of intricate knowledge of Jewish customs and of the law that are demonstrated within this epistle.

At the same time, the author, though known personally to those to whom he is writing, has not mentioned himself by name. In this, his writing is similar to the writing of the Gospel of Luke and Acts, neither of which mention Luke by name, but both of which have an obvious knowledge both of Jewish customs as well as of the original recipient of the written work.

Whether one accepts Luke as the author of this epistle is of no great consequence. He has not mentioned himself by name and thus does not draw any great importance to himself. He calls us instead to focus our attention upon Jesus, the source of our grace, for He is better.

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