# HEBREWS STUDY NOTES


Hebrews 1 ..... 2
Hebrews 2 ..... 17
Hebrews 3 ..... 41
Hebrews 4 ..... 72
Hebrews 5 ..... 88
Hebrews 6 ..... 101
Hebrews 7 ..... 124
Hebrews 8 ..... 148
Hebrews 9 ..... 164
Hebrews 10 ..... 190
Hebrews 11 ..... 229
Hebrews 12 ..... 267
Hebrews 13 ..... 304
Appendix 1 ..... 328
Appendix 2 ..... 331

# HEBREWS 1

**1:1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,**

Very early in the wake of the calamity of evil, God began to use prophets. These were individuals who would provide insight into God's heart and mind, to guide all who would listen. And so we find prophetic activity alluded to in men such as Enoch and Noah (Genesis 9:25). We find Abraham referred to as a prophet (Genesis 20:7). We find Melchizedek speaking prophetically to Abraham, the father of the faithful (Genesis 14:18-20). This prophetic ministry continued among the offspring of Abraham, as God sought to shape them into a functioning community of his people.

The early Hebrews designated such individuals by a term that was derived from the verb "to see" (Samuel 9:9). They were called seers, recognized as those who saw into the mind and will of God. This prophetic voice, intelligible speech about tangible ideas and behavior, was Yahweh's provision for their spiritual health and vibrancy.

As far as the written prophetic writings that we have, Moses was the first human author used by God to begin the process whereby a book of God's thought for man's blessing and benefit would be passed along. It was a book that was likely Moses' life work (Deuteronomy 31:24-26). We call it the Pentateuch, because it consists of five scrolls, the first five books of our Bible. It was the beginning of a larger book that would guide the lives of God's people to blessing (Joshua 1:8).

Where exactly Moses got all his information on events that had happened in the millenniums before he lived is unknown. He could have gotten it through written records available to him. He mentions in Zechariah book for example, another book called "The Book of the Wars of Yahweh" (Numbers 21:14). Written genealogies and histories existed that Yahweh could have guided Moses to and through. Perhaps even his formal education in Egypt contributed something to his access to ancient written records.

However it was done, Moses' work was the beginning of a process whereby God inspired through various human authors a book that would reveal his thought for humanity. Many prophets contributed to that which Moses began. Many wrote valuable thought that contributed in some way to the life of God's family, whose writings did not find their way into the book Yahweh was writing (Joshua 10:12-13). So there was a long tradition by which those who saw clearly Yahweh's heart were always present to be the eyes and ears of the people both to help them perceive and understand Yahweh rightly and to be the voice of Yahweh to them.

The first verse of this treatise we call Hebrews functions subordinately to the second verse. It provides the subject of the action that will be stated in the second verse. That

subject is God. Verse 1 is a statement about God, identifying him as Yahweh, the One who spoken to the Patriarchs.

The term "fathers" is used in different ways in the Scripture. Among Jews the term referred to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob primarily. In a looser way it referred to generations of Israelites that followed (Luke 1:55). Beginning with Christ, believing Jews began to understand these offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as a mixed bag. To these the prophets were sent, but by Christ's time Israelites had established a tradition of killing such envoys (Matthew 23:29-36).

The purpose of this verse is to solidly root the message that came in the person of Christ in Yahweh, the covenant God, and his plan revealed by the prophets. Verse 1 begins in the Greek text with two adverbial ideas—the idea of many parts and the idea of many forms. So as we look at the Old Testament, the Sacred Writings as they were called, or just "the writings," we see many different human authors each with a personal style, using various genre, all with the same intended result—to provide a written source of God's thought for humanity. All the prophets came to know in part what Yahweh was doing and contributed a part to our understanding. The result is a record of the "many-tinted" wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:19). It is Yahweh who was the source of all this truth that verse 2 will describe as having spoken once again through yet another form of revelation, its consummate piece.

The writer is linking to all this prophetic activity of the past, the message of the life of Jesus Christ. Throughout the book he references this lineage to show that Christ was not a new figure that was seeking to establish a new movement. He was the one spoken of from the beginning in word and figure that would restore the blessing lost through the transgression of Adam and Eve.

**1:2 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.**

Throughout his work the author weaves together events of a former age with practical exhortation/warning for the present, and with the presupposition of a future age clearly showing itself (2:5-8; 6:5; 12:14, 26-29). This verse is typical in that we see these three dimensions of time woven together in these statements about Christ.

From the first use of the term "last days" in Scripture (Deuteronomy 4:30), Yahweh has pointed to his salvation, his plan to restore blessing to his creation. He continues to move all things toward this great end of his. The writers of the New Testament saw themselves living in the end of the ages (1 Corinthians 10:11; Hebrews 9:26: 1 Peter 1:13; 4:7), that last age before the age of Christ's reign on earth. This is an age that began with a momentous event, the incarnation of God in human flesh in the person of Jesus, who was the Christ. So the term "last days" in the Old Testament was more nebulous. By its nature the term "last" meant there was an end, and "last days" referred to the

days that led up to that end. In the New Testament we see that these days were shaped by the presence of Christ on earth, his death, and his presence through his Church on this earth. They were more sharply defined as to their beginning and their end.

The great signal event of the start of this age is that God's revelation of himself reached its apex. Where there had been words—a written description—there came to be present the actual person those words were spoken by. God became a human, visible and living among humanity. The author's words here are definitive on this point. The previous message of God had come through prophets. His message to us now came "by Son." As such this "by-Son-revelation" was more precise and more detailed. It was not just spoken, it was demonstrated. It was more powerful in that it was confirmed and authenticated by action. It was more information by volume, so much so that the amount Yahweh said "by Son" was infinite (John 20:30-31). Here the writer implies this great superiority of revelation we enjoy in the present age. This idea of a better more complete state of things will be his recurring theme throughout his work.

The second phrase of this verse sets this tone of the superiority of Christ. He is the rightful heir of all things. That is a remarkable statement of power and rank. Paul had written definitively of this same idea that Christ was the One for whose purpose and benefit all things existed (Colossians 1:15-19). When such One speaks and acts, we have some very significant and important information. So Christ is designated here as the God-appointed heir. Many beings have sought to gain for themselves what belongs only to God. They will continue to do so until they meet their own God-appointed end. They will continue to fail because Jesus is the appointed heir according to the unthwartable plan of Yahweh.

In this whole matter of the ownership of all things we see the great mystery and harmony of the Son and Father at work, and in particular the perfect love that governs their being. We have verses like this that clearly point to the Son as the One who will receive the glory, honor, and power that comes with being over all things. Elsewhere we see that even in that moment when his right is realized and exercised, He will defer to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:20-28). There is perfect unity between them that cannot be broken because they are incapable of evil.

The third phrase of the verse further strengthens the authority and value of all information we have received through Jesus the Christ. It was through Jesus that God made what most English versions call "the worlds." The term used by the writer here is αιωνα. It does not speak so much of the planet itself as it does the ages or times associated with the earth as we know it. While it is true that Jesus made the earth (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16), this statement has more to do with the fact that Jesus is the one drawing the events of time along to their designed conclusion, so that all the events of earth's history serve Yahweh's purposes.

**1:3 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.**

God's revelation of himself "in Son" revealed a much deeper level of God's essence to us. It is not so much that the revelation of the Old Covenant was marginal. It is that the revelation of God through Jesus was so clear and precise. This verse continues the statement of that greatness.

Jesus was the radiance of Yahweh's glory. All that is weighty and profound about God was made continually visible in Jesus. While the glory of Yahweh was demonstrated in things like the cloud, the pillar of fire, and various theophanies, the great proposition of the New Testament writers is that in Jesus we have more than these provided. What had been demonstrated through physical phenomenon like light and fire, was now incarnated in a living being. It gained in this a greater exactness because it originated in a living being, God. Jesus was a clear demonstration of Yahweh's character, the very nature and character that makes him so trustworthy and worthy of our all. There was a loss in translating all that he is into mere phenomena. In Jesus it was present in a living way, continued and varied, yet persistent and enduring. Because Jesus was of God's essence, Jesus radiated God's glory, which can now be understood not as just in the earthquake, wind, and fire, but in the still small voice.

In Jesus we have the exact representation of God's nature or essence. The word rendered "exact representation" describes a figure that is stamped or engraved. It is the impress left by something, a character as in a written letter of the alphabet that represents a sound. In Jesus we have the nature of God joined to the nature of man, and so Jesus is the result of the Divine impress on the human. The word for character is υποστασεωσ. It refers to those things that undergird one's actions and make them who they are. That which explains who they are that leads to what they do.

Now, some have said that Jesus was not God in essence but was a caricature of him—one who behaved like God. The statement here is not suggesting this. Rather, we have in Jesus a very precise statement that considers the hypostatic union, the joining of the Divine nature with human nature. Any statement about the essence or nature of Jesus must take the reality of this union into account or it will not harmonize with other statements made about him in Scripture. We have in Jesus Christ undiminished deity and perfect humanity united forever in one person. It is in this sense that he is the exact representation of God's nature. He is fully God and fully man.

In his earthly experience Jesus laid aside his prerogatives as God. It is not that He laid aside his divine essence. It is that in taking on human nature and living as fallen humans must live, He did not exercise all the prerogatives his divine nature would have allowed. So he emptied himself by that which He took on, both in nature and in mission. He did not exercise his rights as God.

The remainder of this verse alludes to what we have termed his various "states." By that we mean his varied experience as God before He became a man, during his stay on earth, during his death, burial and resurrection and his current experience since his resurrection.

As to his current state, Jesus upholds all things by the word of his power. This is a statement of the idea that it is by his ongoing command that there is something rather than nothing. This idea forms a major tenant of a proper Christian worldview. This was the testimony of Jesus to his disciples after his resurrection (Matthew 28:18-19). It was the testimony of the Holy Spirit through Paul (Colossians 1:15-17). All things find their rationale for existence in the plan of the Father and the command of the Son.

The next phrase speaks to the major achievement of Jesus in his earthly existence. He made purification for sin. The word rendered "made" is one that often speaks to action taken that then reproduces itself in an ongoing congruous way. In this case Jesus made purification for sin, and the result is that millions have through faith been purified from their sin. He accomplished his will by the means that the Father's plan delineated. So redemption was provided for fallen creation. The Creator had served the great need of creation.

The last phrase of this verse marks the current state of Christ that all the New Testament affirms (Acts 2:33; 5:31; Romans 8:34; Revelation 5:1). "The right hand" is a term that describes authority and influence. It is meant to convey in terms understandable to us the utter supremacy of Jesus. It is what the title "Christ" conveys, the one anointed by God to carry out his will over all that has been, is, and will yet be. The right hand is also a position of relationship. It is based on trust and confidence of the sort that only exists within the Godhead. The Godhead is pictured as three co-equal persons, two of whom are subjected by their own will to God the Father, all of whom inherently trust each other knowing the truthful essence they all share.

**1:4 having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.**

Verse four completes the initial statement of verse three. It is an important statement to the initial readers and hearers, significant enough so that the next ten verses are offered in support of it. There is considerable evidence that among the first century Jews not living in Israel, there was the practice of angel worship. This was particularly true in Asia Minor. Paul mentions angel worship in his letter to Colossae (Colossians 2:18). It is quite possible that this motivated the author to make this series of statements that capture from the words of the Old Testament the supremacy of Christ with respect to angelic beings. These statements all will demonstrate the superiority of his "name"—the honor, rank, privilege, power, and authority He had. They flow out of this idea that He had been seated by God the Father at his own right hand.

**1:5 For to which of the angels did he ever say, 'Thou art my son, today I have begotten thee'? Or again, 'I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son'?**

This statement can be found in Psalm 2:7. There it occurs in the context of the earthly, godless rulers and would-be rulers seeking to cast off the rule of Yahweh. It is said that Yahweh laughs and scoffs at their feeble efforts to rule independent of him. Amid all their boasts and his dismissal of them, Yahweh makes this statement. It affirms that the right to rule belongs to his own Son. So this is an Old Testament poetic statement of Yahweh's determination to rule the earth's kingdoms through his own Son.

From statements like this the idea of a Messiah, an anointed one, a God-appointed ruler who would be born from the tribe of Judah, a direct descendant of David, came to be embraced by the Jews. The Greek term for one who was anointed was χριστος, from which our word Christ comes. Christ is a title, that which affirms the right to rule over all creation. The idea of Yahweh's order being re-established over fallen creation was the hope extended by God to humanity from the moment they chose evil (Genesis 3:15). The hope was that a son would appear from the seed of the woman that would crush the one who had been the source of evil and its painful consequences. It was a hope that was of God not an empty, contrived one. It was founded on clear, pointed statements and promises made by him.

Many of the songs written by David anticipated the eventual reality of the reign of this anointed Son of God. The songs were expressions of David's own emotions in his own reign as King of Israel. As such they have value to all who are a part of God's great kingdom. They express the hope of Yahweh's salvation always; their hope always grounded on his lovingkindness and truth. That salvation does not end in his saving us from the traumas of evil in this world, or even from the penalty of our own sin, though these are both eventually assured by it, in his time. It includes the demonstration of that salvation on this planet with respect to this fallen creation, through the Son's rule. And then it reaches its ultimate breadth when He rules over a new heaven and a new earth. David's songs spoke to events and truths that would repeat themselves as part of the experience of both the rulers and citizens of God's kingdom. The Son of God whose right it was to rule (Genesis 49:10), would preside over these cycles and bring them to their appointed conclusion. This rule, anointed and sworn to by Yahweh, the Eternal One, affirmed the Son as infinitely superior to the angels.

The second quote in this verse is composed of the words of God to David when God promised him that his family would rule over Israel forever (Samuel 7:12-17). They were given in response to David wishing to build a house for Yahweh. Yahweh's response is that David's son Solomon was the one He had appointed to build that house. These words had an initial fulfillment in Solomon but anticipated that the King promised before would come from David's line. Solomon would be disciplined by Yahweh as one would a son. But the descendant toward which God's whole promise to David pointed would be God's Son, who would be born on earth through the Davidic line.

The important point of the author of Hebrews at this point in his presentation is that Jesus is God's son. This makes Jesus superior to the angels. His eventual point will be that Christ's words and teachings are critical and our attention to them is a matter of great urgency.

**1:6 And when He again bring the first-born into the world, He says, 'And let all the Angels of God worship Him.'**

There is some degree of uncertainty about where the material in this verse is drawn from. Most English versions refer the reader to Deuteronomy 32:43 here. That chapter records the words of a song that Yahweh instructed Moses to teach the Israelites. It was a song that was to remain in their literature for a day when they would find themselves far from God and in need of repentance. It would be used to guide them back into relationship with him.

That song recites the rebellion of Israel and their punishment at the hands of foreign nations. In the end however, it recites the faithfulness of Yahweh to his covenant promises and his intervention in their behalf. From our knowledge of later revelation, we know that this will be carried out through the Messiah, God's anointed ruler. The author of Hebrews takes this knowledge and rightly applies the summons in the song of Deuteronomy 32 to Jesus. The Septuagint version of the Old Testament is the source of this quote and so the words read exactly as that version rendered Deuteronomy 32:43.

Some suggest that this is a free quotation from Psalm 97, where the last verse summons the angels to rejoice over the enthronement of the Christ. In that case the statement of the bringing of the firstborn into the world would be a reference to when Yahweh brings his firstborn into the world as King, at the second advent not the first.

Others suggest that this is not a quote from the Old Testament Scripture at all, but a reference to the events associated with the first advent of Christ, which were well-known in the early Church at the time of this writing. This of course, fits the statement well. But it is an awkward explanation in that it casts a nonscriptural piece of evidence amid evidence deliberately drawn from the Scripture.

The most favorable option of these three seems to be that it is a quote from the Septuagint version of Deuteronomy 32:43. It is applied to Christ based on information supplied by the writings of later prophets, in a way that aligns with the normal New Testament writer's use of the Old Testament.

**1:7 And of the angels He says, 'Who makes His angels winds, and His ministers a flame of fire.'**

This quote of the Old Testament comes from Psalm 104:4. Its significance in this dissertation in Hebrews is to show that angels are viewed by God as those dispatched by him to accomplish what is in accord with his will. These beings He commissions as ministering spirits who bring about events that He has choreographed. They are dispatched as one might a servant or an employee. And this can be seen in the Hebrew term rendered "angel." It is used of angelic beings and of human messengers as well (Genesis 32:1, 3,6; 2 Chronicles 6:16). It is also used of Joseph when he served Potiphar (Genesis 39:4), of Joshua when he served Moses (Exodus 24:13), and of Aaron and the priests (Exodus 28:43). So Angels are ministers. That is not to say there is indignity in the term itself. But it does reveal a different function than that of the Son. They are entrusted with the errands associated with the plan of Yahweh.

By comparison, the Son is entrusted with ruling the entire plan of God. The difference between the Angels and him is the same as between employees and an owner. There is great dignity in being a servant of Yahweh. Jesus' privilege and dignity is higher, which will be brought out in the next verse.

**1:8 But of the Son He says, 'Thy throne O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom.'**

Whereas the angels are ministers who attend to details in the business of God, Jesus is his anointed king. We get lost in the mystery of the persons of the Trinity in our attempt to understand this. This much is clear; the Son, known by the name Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, is the Christ. From our perspective on this earth, Jesus is the invisible, anointed King overall. He is to become visible on earth later. The writer of Hebrews is going to considerable length to demonstrate that this means that Jesus has superior rank and power over all the angels.

This quote is from Psalm 45:6-7. That song was written for the wedding of a King in the line of David. It pictures him ruling over Israel for God and describes his beauty and that of his bride. And so the throne of the king over God's covenant people is rightfully seen as God's throne, no matter who occupies it from a human point of view. It was established to this end, for the Messiah, God himself, to occupy.

Many of the psalms speak in glowing terms of the kings and kingdom of Israel. They are written with a view of a particular kingdom that Yahweh would raise up in Israel, ruled by one of David's descendants. So there was a view of any present king as occupying the throne of God, not yet occupied by its eventual heir and not yet realizing its eventual glory. They had a rightful expectation of a king of God's choosing that would be different from the rest. And so Israel was to increasingly look for the Christ, God's anointed ruler. Such a forward look is evident in these words. The writer to the Hebrews rightly reminds the hearers that the governing of God's creation was

the role that the Son of God would lead humanity in. The throne was his by Yahweh's will and plan and this could not be altered. By virtue of this, Jesus the Christ should be the focus of our attention and worship over that of any other being.

The words of Psalm 45:6 emphasize the eternal nature of Christ's kingdom. Its king will be unlike the many other kings God has allowed to reign for seasons of time. So permanence is the message of Scripture about the great kingdom that God will bring about on earth through his Son whose right it is to rule (Genesis 49:10; Daniel 2:44-45; 4:34-35; 7:13-14).

The song speaks of the character of Christ. That is what makes him unique among all the kings the earth has known. It does so in speaking of his scepter being righteous and of righteousness. The term scepter comes from a word that means a branch or a stick. From ancient times rulers carried a staff of some sort, some of which became quite ornate. It was a symbol of their authority. Moses and Aaron had their "rods" which symbolized their authority (Exodus 4:2-6, 20), and these became objects through which Yahweh's power flowed (Exodus 7:20). The use of the scepter took on various customs in ancient cultures (Esther 4:11; 5:2). In biblical usage it was a metaphor for authority to rule (Genesis 49:10). The claims of Christ were not lost on the Roman soldiers who mocked Christ by placing in his hands a reed for a scepter (Matthew 27:29). This was an act that will no doubt haunt unbelieving humanity on the day of judgment as Joseph's brothers were haunted by their mockery of him.

Christ's right to rule rests in who He is as God's Son and this identity is validated by his absolute righteousness. This perfect righteousness is what enables him to be the substitute sacrifice for the sins of all who compose his kingdom. He can then be joined to them and they to God. With this they can begin to experience righteousness in their own character. So righteousness is in him and will come to be the mark of all who believe, when the day comes for him to establish his rule on earth. Righteousness is Yahweh's plan for humanity. He wishes to restore it in us. Jesus Christ is the one through whom this will be brought about (Isaiah 1:3-4). Jesus is in every sense the source of righteousness for fallen humanity. It is not a token righteousness that his work will bring to an otherwise unchanged humanity. It is righteousness as it is in God, complete and flawless (Romans 1:16-17; Revelation 21:1-8, 22-27; 22:1-5). This righteousness that will save all who believe from the curse of evil will be found to have flowed to us from God through the Gospel. That Yahweh's righteousness comes to us is what makes the Gospel good news.

**1:9 'Thou has loved righteousness and hated lawlessness, therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with oil above thy companions.'**

The idea of the sinlessness of the Christ is present in the imagery of the Old Covenant, in things like the law's demand for an unblemished sacrifice. It lies just below the surface in many of the poetic passages that speak of Jesus Christ, like this one in

Psalm 45:7, and in prophetic passages that speak of Christ such as Isaiah 53. It is a point that was clear to the writers of the New Testament as they interpreted the Old under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and bore witness to the life of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19; 2:22; 2 Corinthians 5:20-21; 1 John 3:5). It is a point the author of Hebrews will return to (Hebrews 4:15). It can be said of many that they have spoken against lawlessness and championed righteousness. It is uniquely true of Christ who is the only one in the entire stream of humanity not to sin. The sinlessness of Christ is a truth critical to our redemption and our own spiritual progress.

In seeking to explain how the sinlessness of Christ came to be, we must avoid a surface level explanation of it. We must avoid quick explanations like, "He was God!" If we so easily dismiss it, we downgrade his humanity. The writer to the Hebrews will speak of him being made perfect through suffering (2:10), and of him learning obedience through suffering and the practice of normal spiritual disciplines (4:7-8). It seems apparent that his temptation was genuine and that his victory over it was gained as we must gain it, through faith. In the laying aside of his Divine prerogatives (Philippians 2:6-7), He did not become any less God. But He did choose to live as we must live, practicing life under the Spirit's control, in unbroken fellowship with the Father, to rise above sin. In this strength he loved righteousness and hated lawlessness as no other.

Though God had the right as God to save and redeem humanity in an infinite number of ways, He chose to do so in this way—by earning the right according to the demands of his own standard of justice. He brought our salvation about by conforming to his own rules and so preserving his righteousness and justice which are the great hope of the universe. It is this playing by his own rules that the psalmist is referring to in this passage. Christ clearly merited the exalted position He was given among heavenly beings. His humiliation and his obedience led to his exaltation. He is the only human to merit the full blessing of the Law by the Law's standard.

The term rendered companion by the NASB is important to understand in terms of interpreting the remainder of this author's treatise. The Greek term is μεταχουσ. It is formed from the preposition which means "with" in compound with the word "have." In this case it is itself the rendering of a Hebrew word that describes one who is joined to another. This is the word which describes classic close friendship (Ecclesiastes 4:10). It is used to describe the close friends one would have in their wedding party (Song 8:13). It is used of those who band together for a common purpose such as battling a common enemy (Judges 20:11). It is used in a bad sense of those whose hearts share an evil agenda (Proverbs 28:24). In the New Testament it is used six times, five of which occur in Hebrews. The only other occurrence is in Luke 5:7, where it is used of the relationship between Jesus' disciples. The author to the Hebrews is borrowing this entire phrase from Psalm 45:7 and uses it here of the angelic companions of Christ, those whom he is representing Jesus to be exalted above. So in the author's line of thinking, the companions here include the angels.

Therefore, we can observe that μεταχουσ is a term that describes those who share a common bond and friendship, like the author envisions between the angels and Christ. From our viewpoint, we would describe it as one of close, personal friendship of the sort that is entered into only on limited occasions. In the remainder of its uses in Hebrews it is used to describe the special relationship that exists between the readers and the heavenly calling (3:1). It is used to describe a relationship between themselves and Christ which they can enter (3:14). It is used of the relationship between a hypothetical group of believers and the Holy Spirit (6:4). It is used of the relationship of the sons of God and the discipline of God (12:8).

In each of the words uses in Hebrews after this verse it is rendered in the NASB by the word "partakers.' The idea of being an active participant with someone or something and of intimate knowledge of it is being conveyed. It is not a word that can be construed to speak of one who has passing knowledge of someone or something or mere knowledge of its existence. There is the idea of mingling together that is inherent in the word.

**1:10 And, 'Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thy hands;'**

Verses 10-12 are a free quotation from Psalm 102:25-27. The words themselves are addressed to "my God." Earlier in the song He is addressed by his covenant name, Yahweh (12). The author of Hebrews, following the Septuagint, captures that term with the Greek word rendered "Lord," an addition that is not in our Hebrew version of Psalm 102:25 nor in our English version of that verse. It is a legitimate addition to the text since the Psalmist is very clear that Yahweh is who he is speaking of. This then becomes a very clear statement of the author's belief in the divinity of Jesus.

Our doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture means that this is the teaching of God to us regarding the essence of Jesus the Christ. By saying that those words are spoke by God of the Son, the Spirit is revealing that in Jesus we have the Creator of heaven and earth in human form. This was the persistent testimony through the writers of the New Testament (John 1:1-4; Colossians 1:15-17), that in Jesus we see the Creator of the heavens and the earth. Things that are said of God are clarified after the incarnation to have been referring to God the Son, Jesus the Christ.

This revelation that came after Jesus died, that looked back and explained what it was that occurred in his life and death, elevated him to be the only reasonable focus of our worship. This is the purpose the Spirit, through the writer to the Hebrews, that He is pursuing through this series of statements. He is moving the reader toward the recognition that in the revelation embodied in Jesus, we have something far greater than visions from angels and the phenomena that might surround such things (2:1-4). It is for this reason that the movement came to be called Christianity. Its centerpiece is the Christ. He is its final voice, and there could be no higher authority.

**1:11 They will perish, but Thou remainest; and they will become old as a garment,**

Because Jesus was God in human form, all the things we believe about God are true of Jesus. This includes the fact that God is eternal. Though Jesus appeared in time and experienced it, He himself created it to serve him. He is above time, and it serves him. He appeared on Earth, but it too serves him. He is not a slave of time or creation as we have become through our fallenness. He will outlast them, and they will serve his purposes.

The teaching of Scripture is clearly that the present earth is not forever. It has a purpose, and God has an end in view for it. While stewarding our lives and our planet we must do so considering this reality, or we will not rightly manage either. All that is, exists to serve its Creator. Long after they are gone, He will remain, and so it is critical that we be found to have served him not them. The two phrases quoted here reflect that this creation will perish. The day will arrive in the plan of God when it will all be gone.

The imagery of the garment expresses the idea that the earth will become old from use. So not only is there a proclaimed end to the earth, but there is also the reality that it will deteriorate because of passing time and use. The teaching of Psalm 102 shows that stewardship should not take the pathway of extreme preservation. That is poor stewardship that seeks to oppose what God is doing. The constant we are to tie our hopes to is Jesus Christ.

The primary function of this quote from Psalm 102 is to reinforce the supremacy of Jesus. That is the entire purpose of the book of Hebrews. It is meant to steer a particular ethnic or religious group away from where they might naturally turn as humans—back to what was comfortable. It was a strong tradition and routine that had been in place for centuries (Hebrews 2:1-2). This is just what we do. We drift back to what we know and feel comfortable with. We try to preserve what is familiar. We like tradition, landmarks, and connection with what was. For the most part that is an empty pursuit as it is not what God is doing on planet Earth. It will perish. It will become old like a garment. No amount of emotion or work on our part will change that. We must embrace the Creator as the constant, not his creation and certainly not ours! And He is unchanging and enduring. He remains, when all else is taken away! And He has the power to create and re-create, bigger and better (Revelation 21:1-8).

**1:12 As a mantle Thou wilt role them up; as a garment they will also be changed. But Thou art the same, and Thy years will not come to an end.**

The free quote from the Septuagint version of Psalm 102 continues with this verse. It points out not just the eternality of the Son, but more importantly for the argument of Hebrews, the reality that the Son's will is imposed on creation. While remaining unchanged himself, the Son will both change and then eventually end the heavens and

the earth. In prophetic writings like those of Zechariah and Revelation we see the possibility that significant changes in the earth and heavens are likely in connection with the coming of Christ to rule the earth (Zechariah 14:4-11; Revelation 8:12-13). There is an end of the present earth and heavens that is spoken of in numerous paces (2 Peter 3:8-13; Isaiah 65:17; 66:22). In several places in Scripture we find the idea of the changes in the heavens captured in this same expression, "rolled up" (Isaiah 13:9-10; 34:4; Ezekiel 32:7-8; Joel 2:31; Revelation 6:14).

The idea that is paramount to the argument of the writer to the Hebrews is that the Son oversees the timetable the heavens and earth exist in. He uses them for his purposes, changes them as He needs to, and will bring them to an end. That is a role of sovereign ruler, superior to that of the angels. He himself is the constant.

**1:13 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'?**

This is a quote from Psalm 110:1. It was written by David. Jesus made it clear that David was speaking in it of One who was more than David's son. David and Jesus made it clear that it was a Psalm written of the One who was the Sovereign to whom David himself bowed. Jesus taught through this Psalm that the

Christ was the Son of God (Matthew 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42). This Psalm became key in the Apostles' teaching about the identity of Jesus (Acts 2:34), the proof text for the fact that He was more than the son of David. Christ's position is the highest one that could be held, a position within the Godhead itself, under only God the Father. In having this position Jesus was clearly superior to the angels.

This idea of Jesus' position being at the right hand of God was one that was highly offensive to unbelieving Jews (Acts 7:54-60). It equated him with God. For a perspective of the Old Testament Scriptures, it clearly marked him out as God's chosen ruler (Daniel 7:13-14). Angels were servants of Yahweh, dignified, powerful, highly esteemed, and to be revered (Judges 13:21-22, Samuel. 29:9; 1 Chronicles 21:18; 2 Kings 19:35). But Jesus, being at the right hand of God, clearly commanded the angels' worship and obedience. How much more ours!

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

In these words there is great definition regarding angels and their role in the program of God. Now, this statement is made almost in passing to increase the majesty of our view of Jesus, the Christ. We must be certain it does that! He is all in all, the One who is the source of the significance of all else.

But this statement about angels is an astounding idea and a life-altering one. There are these mighty spirit-beings, myriads of them, commissioned by God to minister for our

benefit in every imaginable need we might encounter. The are God's public servants. They render assistance and convey his favor into our experience of life on this fallen planet.

There is no telling how often humanity experiences angels, though we know little of them! We see them only through the eyes of faith except on rare occasions. And we do so only through believing statements like this in Scripture. Belief in their continuing presence in our behalf should give us great confidence and mitigate every fear!

We see first that angels are spirit beings. When people see angels, it is clear from this statement that such sightings are not the norm. At such times angels have made themselves visible for some reason that God himself has. But by actual essence angels are spiritual beings not physical ones.

We see second that they are "ministering" spirits. This is emphasized using two different expressions in the phrase. In this phrase "ministering spirits," the word rendered ministering, λειτουργικα, is one that speaks of those who render what is beneficial for others, particularly acts that benefit and nurture them as Yahweh's children learning to trust him. It is used of a wide range of Spirit orchestrated activities (Acts 13:12). It is the word used later in Hebrews to describe the performing of various routines by the priests of the Old Covenant (Hebrews 10:11). The English term "liturgy" is derived from this word. Inherent in it is the idea of that which helps and assists in nurturing the partnership envisioned by Yahweh with humanity, from the invigorating of the relationship to the accomplishment of a task or mission.

This idea of "ministering" is further enhanced by the expression "sent out to render service." The word chosen by the author here is διακονιαν, from which we get our term deacon or minister. Grammatically it is used in a clear expression of purpose and so defines angel's primary function in the plan of God as ministering for the benefit of his family. The idea of "sent out" is conveyed by the word from which we derive "apostle," and so conveys the idea of an official mission and one that is based on the authority of another. The role of angels as official emissaries of God, dispatched by him to render beneficial service according to his purposes for his family, is clearly stated.

We see as well that their service is for the benefit of those who are 'about to inherit salvation" (the force of the accusative with δια, δια τουσ μελλοντοσ κληρονομειν σωτηριαν is an accusative of relationship, expressing a relationship that functions for the advantage or disadvantage of another). What angels do is serve the needs of God in bringing his chosen family safely into his plan and destiny for them both in this life and in that to come. This short phrase casts angels in a role of serving the needs of humans within the good pleasure of God's plan and desire.

So we can see that angels are serving those made weak for a time by the fall, on a journey that will lead them to God's intended role for them of ruling the earth. This fledgling group, cared for and nurtured by angels, will eventually rule over the angels (1

Corinthians 6:3). It is possible that envy on the part of angels of this future role for humanity is what led to the rebellion of angelic beings led by Satan. They wanted another role, the "more" that we can often feel in our rush for position and influence. And so the evil angels have an intense bitterness toward humanity.

The contrast between angels and the Son is becoming very clear. Angels are invisible ministers who provide practical help for all people in the journey of belief as fallen people in a fallen world. In contrast to these wonderful allies of ours, Christ is the anointed King to whom angels answer and from whom their orders come. Angels are directed by Jesus for the benefit of those whose faith He is the "author" and "perfecter" of, who will eventually inherit Yahweh's salvation (2:10; 12:2). Angels serve and enable as needed this fledgling body of people as they journey towards their certain appointed end.

# HEBREWS 2

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

This verse marks the beginning of a preliminary conclusion the author makes. He is facing his readers for the first time with the theme that is shaping his writing. He will bring them back to it several other times. The first four verses of chapter two complete a cycle that began in 1:1. This cycle is repeated by the author throughout the book. The cycle consists of a series of instructions rooted in the Old Testament and supported by it, followed by a practical warning to the readers based on the truth just expounded. Having spoken of the superiority of the messenger who announced the New Covenant—Christ, he now deals with the implication of that regarding the message itself.

The exhortation he gives is very simple. It is necessary to give much greater attention to the message of Christ. He uses a word that means "to hold to" something, the idea being to give attention to it and to keep ahold on it and to apply it with diligence. He casts this word alongside an adverb which means "much more," and so strengthens the idea of "holding to" further. The author is calling the readers to the greatest degree of diligence possible. This is an expression designed and used to assign the highest possible urgency to giving attention to the message of Christ that they had heard. Diligence in the faith is a most serious matter.

What does it mean to give attention to that message? That will become increasingly clear as the letter moves along. It certainly consists of understanding the message itself, and of growing in one's understanding and practice of its implications. It is also a call to a lifestyle shaped by the truth articulated through the words and actions of the Son of God, Jesus, the Christ. It is implementing the truth in life's details. It is engaging the same work as Christ engaged of incarnating truth.

There is real and specific danger to believers if they do not apply such diligence in implementing the truth. This danger is captured in this verse by one word. The meaning of that word, a verb in the subjunctive mood, is "we might drift along." The idea is perhaps that of drifting in the currant of a river past an intended destination. The NASB renders this word "drift away from it." The words "from it" are added and implied in the overall language of the text.

This drifting from the prescribed course is a constant concern of the writers of the New Testament. As opposed to drifting, they summon us to stability through several different word pictures. There is the idea of being rooted (Ephesians 3:17; Colossians 2:7), of rising above drifting with the wind (Ephesians 4:14; Jude 12), of being like a building with a firm foundation (Matthew 7:25; 1 Timothy 6:19; 2 Timothy 2:19). The

concern over stability appears as a call to strength (Romans 1:11; Ephesians 6:10; 1 John 2:14).

The summons to the maturity of an adult as opposed to being a child is a picture of this (1 Corinthians 14:20; Ephesians 4:13-14). We are called to firmness (1 Corinthians 16:13; 1 Peter 5:10). It is not an exaggeration to say that the concern over our tendency to "drift" is what motivates every writer in

Scripture. It is the prime challenge of God's people to overcome this weakness through his Spirit. It is the subject of concern in this letter as well and the author will say much about what is to be lost by us unless we remain diligent in spiritual matters.

**2:2 For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense,**

Under the Sinai covenant, this was the rule, that every failure to perform has its just punishment. The book of Deuteronomy has this theme running in the background constantly—obey and you will possess the land and live long in it. Disobey and the land will spit you out (Deuteronomy 27-29). There was a blessing that could be gained through obedience, and a curse that would be inherited through disobedience. This word of blessing or curse through obedience or disobedience was unalterable.

Now by Yahweh's grace, the Israelites did not get the full measure of what their unbelief and neglect deserved. God's mercy carried the day for centuries. But they received enough of God's justice that by the time the author of Hebrews made this statement to them it was irrefutable. God had brought down on Israel all that He had promised in terms of consequences, yet with deep and abiding mercy. The word "if" here essentially means "since" in the minds of both the speaker and the listeners.

The word of God was proven unalterable through the history of Israel. That story has not ended. He will, through his dealings with them, continue to prove his word unalterable. As He promised to punish their disobedience and rebellion (Deuteronomy 27-29), So He promised to bring them to repentance and fulfill the good He has planned for them (Deuteronomy 30:1-10). They quickly broke the Sinai covenant (Exodus 32:7-8), so that their hope really rested in a New Covenant that Yahweh would bring about (Deuteronomy 5:18; 29:4; 30:6), established with them based on the work done in their behalf by a promised One, a Savior. The word of Yahweh regarding their judgment and discipline, proved unalterable. In the end his gracious choice of them will also prove unalterable (Romans 11:25-32). The message to the Hebrews, living at "halftime" as this story was unfolding, is that their history has proven that spiritual laxness produces awful consequences.

Now how do we rectify the fact that Yahweh's word of justice is unalterable, yet we see many generations of Israelites and others for that matter, that did not receive what they justly deserved? We have alluded to how this apparent contradiction can be

resolved. First, God's justice is not compromised by his mercy. He provides for the demands of his justice out of his own reservoir of goodness. So Jesus Christ became the means of bearing the curse for Israel, and for all who would believe in him. Second, due to his omnipotence and absolute sovereignty, his kind intention can be brought about despite and even by means of the evil of other parties. Again, this is perfectly demonstrated in Christ. So Yahweh's word can include promises of uncompromised justice and ever-present mercy, and both can be justly and perfectly fulfilled by him.

2:3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard.

The question that begins this verse is a rhetorical one. The intent of the author is to have the reader understand that they will not escape if they neglect so great a salvation. Now what exactly is the author communicating here? What is it we wish to escape? What does neglect consist of? What is meant by neglect of salvation?

The term "salvation" is the key one in this phrase and understanding how it was used by the authors of Scripture is the key to understanding not only this verse but the whole book of Hebrews. When we use this term today as Christians it is the term for God's act of saving us from the penalty of Sin so that we will go to heaven instead of hell once we die. In its usage in the Old and New Testaments, the term rarely has this meaning. The verb "to save" occurs first in the Bible in Exodus 2:17. There it describes Moses' act of help in watering the sheep belonging to Jethro, tended by his daughters. This usage is typical of the way it is used in the Old Testament. It describes acts that rescue another from danger or defeat (Deuteronomy 22:27; Joshua 10:6; Judges 12:2).

The noun form occurs first in Genesis 49:18, where the salvation of Yahweh is spoken of. This idea of Yahweh's saving acts becomes a frequent theme of Old Testament writers. These saving acts are related to rescue from oppression, from enemies in war, from disease, from bondage of various forms. It is used very rarely in the way we use it in the Church today. Yahweh's salvation was seen very broadly, as his entire activity that grew out of a relational bond He formed, which then related to all aspects of our lives in an evil world. It referred to being rescued daily from myriads of emotional, spiritual and physical dangers. This rescue was and is available all the time to all his children. Rescue is to be our norm. and it is a great challenge we must rise to in interpreting the New Testament to force ourselves to read the word "salvation" in this way.

This is the salvation God has always offered. It is certainly about rescue from hell. It is equally about rescue from sinful habits, and perils of every other sort. Yahweh's salvation simply flows out of who He is and so encompasses virtually every area of the human experience. It begins for us in a series of decisions made by God before the creation of the World (Ephesians 1:3-4; 1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8; 17:8). Yahweh's salvation will culminate in his new creation, when we live with him on the new earth

(Revelation 21:1-8). So it is proper to speak of ourselves as having been saved, of being saved, and of one day getting saved.

Christ is the key figure in Yahweh's salvation plan. He is the one chosen to rule over creation and the one chosen to offer himself to save it. The writer to the Hebrews will refer to Christ as the "author" of our salvation (2:10). So he did more than the angels did under the Old Covenant. They announced God's plan of redemption. Jesus Christ continued that but more importantly He was our salvation. In earthly language, meant to convey his central role, He is said to have purchased us with his own blood (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 1:19; Revelation 1:5; 5:9). He became like us, that we might become like him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

So ours is a great salvation in the sense of its source—God. It is great in terms of its scope—relating to every area of our life and being. It is great in terms of its worth—the lifeblood of God incarnates One. It is great in terms of its impact—transforming our entire view of life and death and so transforming us. It is great in terms of its purpose in the plan of God—a key exhibit of his glory.

It is possible for us his chosen ones, those who have believed in Jesus Christ, to neglect this salvation. The word rendered "neglect" is formed from the Greek word μελω, which means to be of interest and concern, with the "a" privative prefixed to it, which has the effect of reversing its meaning. So it conveys a lack of interest and concern.

This word appears only three other times in the New Testament (Matthew 22:5; 1 Timothy 4:14; Hebrews 8:9). It is used by Jesus in Matthew to describe in a parable the collective rejection of Yahweh's rule by Israel, for which they would subsequently be collectively judged. It is important that individual salvation had not denied them. Their collective role as the primary instrument of God's dealing in the world was temporarily lost. They were neglected in this sense by God, an idea affirmed by the writer to Hebrews using this same word (Hebrews 8:9). So we have the idea of neglect in the sense of not giving the expected, normal care to something, of perhaps exposing it to destructive elements. This is the sense in which Paul exhorts Timothy not to "neglect" his spiritual gift (1 Timothy 4:14). There the word speaks of not stewarding it to realize its full impact and potential.

So the term, when used of salvation could encompass a rejection of the gospel, resulting in a person never entering the sphere of Yahweh's care. But that is unlikely here. The concern expressed so far is of "drift." It is believers who, like Timothy, faced the potential of losing interest and not stewarding their opportunity well. So the writer is continuing to express his concern that Hebrew Christians do not lapse into a lukewarm type of spiritual experience and so steward poorly all that could be theirs through Yahweh's saving power. They had potential to overcome enslaving habits, to achieve important spiritual objectives through the Holy Spirit. They also had potential

to simply drift and so be encumbered by all the sins that normally infect humanity rather than being rescued from them. In an age where God's power was flowing even more freely, they could become as disobedient as their ancestors. All such mediocrity required was neglect on their part.

The writer then makes a series of statements designed to shake the readers from any spiritual slumber. It is as if they were settling into a kind of "road hypnosis," mechanically traveling along, slowly becoming disengaged and numb to conditions around them. They author wishes to restore their alertness.

The truth the readers had embraced and the way they were traveling had been announced by none other than the Lord. He is more than a prophet, more than an angel. The language used here in connection with expressing origin is not common. The writer says literally "having received beginning to be spoken." This wording may have been chosen to reflect the fact that the message did not really begin in the man Jesus. He spoke as He received it from the Father (John 5:19-47). So it was a message sourced in the Godhead, of which the son is part. It had a beginning in terms of its present fullness and its existence in the time or space dimension of earth. It is certain that it was predicted, projected and for-shadowed in the Old Covenant. But its clarity and fullness began through Christ, as this text says.

The apostles certainly saw continuity with the Old Covenant. They sought to establish in the minds of hearers the solid linkage between the Scriptures of the Old Covenant and the teaching of Christ. Jesus spoke definitively of this linkage in claiming that the Scriptures spoke of him (John 5:39-41; Luke 24:25-27, 44-45). It was an outstanding feature of his message. It also is clear that the apostles viewed themselves as pioneering a new beginning with the people of God (Acts 11:15).

Here the author represents himself as a second-generation Christian. He and the readers received what they believed through eyewitnesses. This generation of teachers viewed the faith as essentially received through the teaching of Christ that came to them through the Apostles (Jude 3). This author speaks of these eyewitnesses as having "established" the message of Christ. They disseminated it, clarified it, gave clear boundaries, and practically applied it in matters ranging from Church polity to marriage and the home. They presented it as complete. It did not need to be added to. There would be no sequels or subsequent new revelation. The task of Church leaders was to go back to what had been declared and delivered to them by Christ and his apostles. They did not need to seek new teaching. This is the clear message of this writer to his readers.

As an aside, this posture and this representation of himself likely eliminates us considering Paul as the author of this epistle. Paul represents himself as one who had received his message from the Lord himself, one who had seen Christ (1 Corinthians 9:1;

11:23; 2 Corinthians 12:1-4). This has led many to believe that whoever wrote the book, it was not Paul.

There remains a final important question about this verse. The clear message of it is that believers can neglect their faith. It is also clear through the rhetorical question at the beginning of the verse, that if we do so we will not escape. What is it that we will or will not escape?

The previous verse supplies the answer to this question. It speaks of "just recompense." The idea that people of Christ can put themselves in spiritual danger will be clear throughout this letter. What exactly are such Christians in danger of that is called just recompense here? It is what the wilderness generation experienced. Their collective experience, viewed as one, is presented by this author as an illustration of our individual experience. The consequence for the generation of people who were saved from slavery was that they did not enter the promised land. They wandered in the wilderness. To use the terms of this context, when they allowed themselves to drift, they became drifters. They did not enter the full experience of what God had for them. They died short of it.

Now, they had many good experiences with the Lord. They experience his loving care in providing manna and protection. They even won some battles. But they fell short of experiencing the full blessing of the promised land. They experienced freedom from slavery, no small blessing! Their existence in the wilderness was far better than being slave labor! But it could have been so much more had they not drifted repeatedly and received "just recompense."

This is a clear and present danger to all who are part of the family of God. That is the message of Hebrews. "Just recompense" covers the gamut of various consequences of sin. Eternal damnation is one consequence humans receive. But the term includes the discipline of God brought to bear by him on his children, like that of any loving Father (Hebrews 12:9). We will not escape the consequences of our failure to trust in God's goodness.

**2:4 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.**

An important feature of Jesus' ministry was the miraculous signs that He did to show that He was not merely a man. These were ordained by God to enable the rational processes of humanity and so foster faith in Christ (John 20:30-31). It was understood by the apostles that they too would be instruments of God's power and do diverse miraculous things that would confirm the truth of the message they spoke

(Matthew 10:7-8; Luke 10:9, 17-20). They understood the declaration of the truth as a partnership with God in which He enabled them in two ways. First, He enabled them to speak boldly. Second, He confirmed their word to hearers through signs and wonders

(Acts 4:29-30). The roots of this methodology and the expectation of it can be found in God's dealings with Moses (Exodus 4:1-9), and his dealings through Moses and Aaron with Israel (Exodus 4:27-31), and of course with Pharaoh.

It is noteworthy however, that the primary factor in belief is not reckoned by Scripture to be the rational processes of man. Though God enables these, it is his work within the heart that produces the tipping point and enables faith (John 6:44; Romans 9:14-18; Ephesians 2:8-10). So we must conclude that the offering of signs and wonders is what God does because He is, in the long term, seeking to demonstrate the essential nature of his mercy and grace in the salvation of me. The rational processes in humanity would not themselves enable faith and trust in God. The human mind seems driven to believe what it wants to believe regardless of the presence of the miraculous. In observing humanity pragmatically this seems to be a huge piece of our fallenness, a loss of capacity to separate what is true from what we want to be true. We are driven along by more than rational processes.

The confirmation of God regarding the Gospel message had one look in the lives of the early messengers, specifically what we could call the apostolic company. But God provided for an ongoing confirmation of the Gospel through his church. His witness of the truth of the message is heard through what is called here "gifts of the Spirit" This is the rendering by the NASB of the phrase μερισμοισ of the Holy Spirit, "portions of the Holy Spirit. This refers to the fact that the Holy Spirit began and has continued to join himself to every person who believed in Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit himself was and is the great gift of God that He promised from early on, knowing that it was the only means by which humanity could walk in the blessedness of his ways (Deuteronomy 5:29; 29:4-6; 30:6; Jeremiah 32:39). This gift (singular, Acts 2:38) is this divine person. It is the Holy Spirit joined to each believer. He has been energizing believers in every generation since Christ to serve and powerfully contribute to each other's faith exactly what the moment called for. So each person in Christ through the Holy Spirit, came to be gifted and energized to serve other believers. The Holy Spirit then was the great gift, of God and is continually referred to in this way in the book of Acts (2:38; 8:20; 10:45; 11:17).

Again, the word rendered here and in most English versions with the plural "gifts" is not the term we usually use for what we call "spiritual gifts." Instead it is the word μερισμοισ, which has to do with "portions" or apportioned pieces." It probably should be understood not as spiritual gifts themselves, but as referring to the sphere of impact and areas of impact that God's plan includes for each of his children. It likely captures the entire package that three words in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 refer to—gifts, ministries, energizing or workings. It summarizes the divine role that accords with God's blueprint for his Church that is assigned to each of his family members. These are pieces that collectively reveal a picture of God to the world through God's family and confirm the message they are declaring.

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

With these words the author begins a series of statements speaking to things like the present and future state of Christ, angels, and all who have believed in Jesus. He contrasts first the destinies of the angels and humanity—particularly the strain of humanity headed by Jesus Christ. These will rule the world that is to come.

In God's design and plan angels are destined for the privilege that is lower than humanity. Humanity was made to rule over creation. Angels were made to serve in lesser ways. When humanity fell their ability to rule was lost. The Son of God who had created them become one of them to redeem them from their slavery to evil and restore them to their intended role. He is Christ, God's anointed ruler over Creation. All who are redeemed through him will rule with him over the world that is to come. The world to come has been subjected to Christ and his family. It has not been subjected to angels. That has been God's design from the beginning. In the plan of God we see both Jesus Christ, and his new creation of redeemed humans exalted above angels.

Curiously, God chose to bring this all about over long periods of time during which angels appear to us to be far superior to humanity and even at times to Christ. The verses that follow speak to the present state of things in the workings of God, what we are seeing in terms of angels, humanity, and Christ.

**2:6 But one has testified somewhere, saying, 'What is man, that Thou rememberest Him? Or the Son of man, that Thou art concerned about Him?'**

This is a free quote from Psalm 8:4-6, the Septuagint version. It will stretch over the next two verses. That it is prefaced with the words "...one has testified somewhere" might initially lead us to believe that the author is working from his own memory under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who himself felt more detail was not important to the message being communicated. But this was an accepted way of quoting others in that day as is evidenced in secular writings of the times.

Psalm 8 is attributed to David. The particular words quoted here express David's thought as he is pondering the heavens—the moon and the stars. The vastness of these and their order cause him to be amazed at the significance assigned to humanity. He speaks to this significance of both humanity and their offspring, the son of man. God seems to have inspired the use of this term "son of man" of a particular strain of the human stream that He viewed as of his own heart. He himself would become a man and be the head of this spiritual offspring, the Son of Man. Jesus would adopt this term as a designation of himself. How much David and early writers of Scripture understood this term may be open to question. There is considerable evidence that the term was slowly gaining definition (Daniel 7:13-14), as referring to humanity, but ultimately to one particular member of humanity promised in Genesis 3:15. The author of Hebrews, speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, shows

that scriptures like Psalm 8 have application to sons of men due to the identity and the work of one particular Son of Man who was their Creator, Head, and Savior.

The author of Hebrews points in using this scripture is to further establish the superiority of Christ as One of greater authority than angels. His teaching and message were to have priority. The quote from Psalm 8 is a perfect one in that it captures the significance of humanity in the mind of God that motivates him to be their Savior and to seek them out. The term rendered by the English word "concerned" is one that speaks of God's special intervention to bring about judgment or blessing (Genesis 21:1; Exodus 3:1617; 32:34). It is the term Joseph uses when he prophesies regarding the future "visit" of Yahweh to Israel that would result in their redemption and their exodus from Egypt (Genesis 50:24-25). Man is such to God that He does not simply let them go. They are objects of his special care, and He intends to restore to them their original role. He is working a plan in their behalf.

**2:7 Thou has made Him for a little while lower than the Angels; Thou hast crowned Him with glory and honor and hast appointed him over the works of thy hands."**

The Septuagint version softens the language of the Hebrew version considerably in Psalm 8:5. The Hebrew version describes man as being made a little lower than God. This is the exact impression one gets from Genesis 1; man being made in God's image to rule, doing God's work in the earth. This language of Psalm 8 describes God's intention for humanity that He has decreed to bring about through the God-man Jesus, the Christ. It states the truth about who Jesus is and who those who believe in him will become.

As for the wording of the Septuagint, we can only suppose that those who translated it were driven by a concern not to exalt man. They were also not working from the vantage point of a full understanding of which Scriptures spoke with Christ in view and the spiritual world to come that He would bring about. And finally in the Jewish mind, when someone saw an angel, they spoke of seeing God (Genesis 32:30; Judges 13:22). We can only speculate that these factors were all at work in the minds of the translators that led them to substitute the word "angels" for God. In their own way they were seeking to be precise. Their error serves the writer of Hebrews very well, which is an important idea.

The author's point in this text is that Jesus, by taking on the likeness of sinful flesh and serving God's purpose by dying at the hands of evil men, was by all appearances made lower for a season than the angels. Philippians 2:5-11 provides the perfect backdrop for a proper understanding of this text. In the wake of his work on the cross, Jesus has been given a position higher than any other.

The position of Jesus in Yahweh's plan is reflected in the title "Christ," meaning "the anointed one. Jesus is the one anointed and ordained by God to bring humanity to

their destiny of ruling over all things, angels included. The teaching about Jesus and the teaching of him as this Christ, remain our great hope and sole authority.

2:8 'Thou has put all things in subjection under his feet.' For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now, we do not yet see all things subjected to him.

The NASB rendering has sought to convey very precisely the author's intended meaning in this verse and so preserve the meaning of Psalm 8. This translation does that through the capitalization of certain pronouns in the author's commentary in the second part of this verse. We will follow the logic of the author's perspective from the point of view of the NASB.

In keeping with the clear statement of the Hebrew text of Psalm 8, all things have been subjected to man in the plan of God. He, that is God, making no exceptions, subjected it all to him, man. This interpretation reflects the decree of God at creation (Genesis 1:26). But presently, we do not see all things subject to him, that is, to man. With that idea the writer of Hebrews addresses earthly realities that came about through the fall. The image of God is marred in man, and the result is that humanity's rule over creation is both incomplete and distorted. In some ways humanity has ruled over the earth. In other ways the earth has ruled humanity. It is a great understatement to say that all things are not presently subjected to man! It is the reality of even redeemed man in his present state. The next verse will address the present reality of the man, the one who is our hope to bring us to what God intends for us to be, Jesus the Christ.

**2:9 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.**

Presently we do not see all things subjected to humanity, as is God's master design toward which his plan is working. We do see Jesus, the Godman, exalted as Christ by God. There has been this important movement in time that has brought about a certain state of things in our relationship with our Creator. Though it is not the end toward which the plan is moving, it is a great situation, and it assures us that the end of the plan will come about.

Jesus was made for a little while lower than the angels. This is true in several respects. He took on the form of sinful man—meaning He lived in the kind of body we must live in. All the physical weakness that came to humanity because of the fall He lived with, because of the nature of the body He took on. He did so without sin. But He experienced our weakness. He was lower than the angels as well in the act of bearing our sin on the cross. The angels serve our needs as ministering spirits (1:14), but none have been assigned so menial a task. He was made lower than the angels in that He bore the insults of humanity, including that of unbelief and its derision.

Scripture presents Jesus as being exalted "because of" his suffering and death in several different portions (Isaiah 53:10-12; Acts 2:22-36). The author of Hebrews does not present Christ as a moral robot who was unable to sin. He is presented as one who was able not to sin and so lived without sin. Because He was obedient to his assigned lot, he entered his full inheritance. In his earthly experience Christ learned and embodied obedience (2:10-18). He serves as a model of the writer's theme, and so as a model for us who must obey if we are to enter in to all that God has for us in salvation.

The great news of the time is that the death of Jesus was substitutionary! This cannot be made clearer than the statement made in this verse. He tasted death for everyone. All the imagery of the Old Covenant prepared and revealed that it was possible for a just penalty to be paid apart from the death of the guilty party. It all pointed to Jesus as the lamb of God (John 1:29), who as a sinless man would bear the punishment due us (Isaiah 53:5-6; 1 Peter 1:18-19). Jesus' death, burial and resurrection were and is the grace of God in full bloom, the good news, the gospel.

Aside from his essential identity as God, Jesus' function as our Savior and Sovereign should lead us to set aside all other spiritual fascinations (such as angelic beings) and seek out all that has been spoken and embodied in Jesus Christ. We have the privilege of knowing, understanding, and relating with him. We have the privilege of receiving in him all that God's grace has made available, which is all that God has. We have the hope that this is a meager beginning, relative to the end which God has for us of sharing in Jesus' glory.

**2:10 For it is fitting for Him, for who are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.**

Anytime the Scripture speaks of things that have been done within the being of the triune God, it is difficult to get our minds around it. And so as we contemplate that which pleased the Father in relationship to the Son, we come hard up against two very difficult things for us to grasp, the trinity and the hypostatic union. This verse is an example of that challenge.

This verse is speaking about how God planned to bring the incarnate Son to the point of maturity and completeness. How would this Godman grow up spiritually, while living in a fallen world with a fallen body, as humanity must live—by faith?

The verse describes what was "fitting" for such a one. That is the NASB rendering of a word that means "to tower up." It was used to describe what was prominent. In this case it describes what was prominent about God in the actions and lifestyle of the Christ. In describing this we might use the colloquial expression, "It was classic God," or "vintage God." So the writer is speaking of the path to maturity that Jesus would be directed on that was well known and common in terms of the dealings of God with

humanity. It was as we might expect, knowing what we know of God. Jesus was led and strengthened in the same path that God leads all his children in, a method that is prominent in his dealings with us. It was a path of deep emotion, passion and pain. By this journey He would be equipped as the chief leader, the one from whom direction and wisdom would come for the good of many.

This Godman would be the first in a long line of sons—offspring. These would be those acted on by God to follow this God/man and so be led to glory. Glory describes all that resides in God that humanity had and then forfeited in the fall. It describes the image of God that was lost in all humanity when Adam and Eve chose evil. From a subjective and pragmatic point of view, glory is that which our inner being longs for that we seek in vain to provide through experiences relationships, and things in this world. God is leading many to this lost glory.

Jesus, the Christ, the Godman, is the one who points out the way and leads us in it. The way involves pain because that is the inescapable nature of life in fallen bodies, among fallen beings, in a fallen world.

The NASB describes him as the "author" of our salvation. Other English versions have chosen the word "captain." On two other occasions in the New Testament this Greek word is rendered "Prince" when speaking of Christ (Acts 3:15; 5:31). Later in Hebrews the writer will use this word to describe Christ's role in our salvation (Hebrews 12:2). His testimony in using this word is that Christ is the ruling chief and central figure in the salvation process that God is working in humanity. He has experienced the process. He is intimately acquainted with the path. Jesus is the designated source of all that is necessary to make the journey. The theme that will be developed in the coming verses is the commonality of humanity with Christ and the commonality of Christ with God.

**2:11 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,**

Here the commonality of redeemed humanity with Christ and God is stated. We are one with Christ. He calls us brothers without shame. That is remarkable! Now, we are his by his doing not by our own. We are united to him and are of him, though we are distinctly fallen humans. We are deeply blessed to be so called. Christ is the One who makes us holy, and being declared holy is the essence of the concept of sanctification. The fact is that He has designated us in our present life for his special use.

But due to our union with Christ, greater things lie in store for us. Our salvation is coming about in this life and is aiming toward our specific role and usefulness to God in ages to come (Ephesians 1:3-12). What we see in the present world through the lens of Scripture is the rescue of certain people, their being pulled out and set aside, adopted as members of God the Father's family, through whom He will rule his new creation. Jesus is the one through whom this great reclamation project is being done.

This whole work is intensely personal, as only God is capable of. Its loving and relational nature was demonstrated frequently by Christ as He affectionately embraced his followers (John 11:33-36; John 13:15; Luke 22:14-16). He did so in the end in his death on their behalf (John 15:12-17). It is certain that He viewed them in as friends and peers, hence the term "brothers" is used by him of us (Matthew 25:40; 28:10; Mark 3:32-34; John 20:17). He embraced his own, despite their patent short comings. He did so shamelessly and continues to do so (John 6:37; Luke 15:7). The writer of Hebrews will now offer evidence from the Old Testament writings that demonstrate this affectionate joining of God to his earthly family.

**2:12 Saying, 'I will proclaim Thy name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will sing my praise.'**

This is a quote from Psalm 22:22. That Psalm is attributed to David. It is a Psalm that likely grew out of his sufferings which he seemed to understand as typical of all who were called by God. Such sufferings were typical of the journey of righteous Israel. This would be embodied in the Messiah, who would bear the suffering of the nation (Isaiah 53).

The description in this Psalm, written a millennium before Christ, we find precisely fulfilled in the events of the crucifixion of Jesus. Its first 21 verses depict the suffering he endured when, delivered by his own people, He suffered at the hands of the Romans. Beginning in the words quoted here from verse 22 we see the testimony of Christ to the fledgling Church after the resurrection, and then their worship of Yahweh in the ages to follow. We see the revival of Israel, the return of Christ to rule the nations all provided for in the words of this song that would be imbedded in the liturgy of the worship of Israel.

The author of Hebrews directs the readers primarily to one word in the Psalm. It is the word "brethren." It is a relational word that describes how God views those He has drawn to himself. They are not merely a labor force. They are not just beings with whom He shares common ground. They are family. They are people toward whom He has affection and obligation as well as commonality. In focusing on this word the author is emphasizing the bond that Yahweh envisioned and established between himself and humanity. Ultimately his purpose is to direct our affection and our power of intellect to Jesus as opposed to any other spiritual being or movement, for the shaping of our lives (Hebrews 12:1-2). The author continues with another citing of a text in the Old Testament Scripture that reinforces persistence in this single-minded focus of faith.

**2:13 And again, 'I will put my trust in Him.' And again, 'Behold I and the children whom God has given me.'**

These words are most likely an abbreviated free quote from the Septuagint version of Isaiah 8:17-18). In that passage Isaiah speaks of the fact that he and his children are signs to Israel. Yahweh said a great deal through Isaiah's family to Israel. But the outstanding feature was that they were bound together by an unwavering commitment to trust Yahweh. In this action Isaiah illustrated the unwavering trust of Jesus as He against all human reason, entrusted himself to the Father in his earthly life. Isaiah's family illustrated all who follow in the footsteps of Jesus and mimic his simple trust.

The purpose of this quote here is that it identifies faith/trust and standing firm in it as the catalyst that creates the emotional and affectionate bond that exists between the Father, the Son, and all the adopted children who are indwelt by the Spirit. The simple words of Isaiah, "I will but my trust in Him!" are themselves passionate. They reflect an arrival of both an emotional and intellectual point of no return. They represent a surrender of one's being at the deepest level to the inner drawing of God's Spirit to the truth of his existence, his authority, and his love. They are the words of one who is fully vested, who is burning bridges to the more instinctive way of living.

This is the bond that exists within the family Yahweh is building. We are on a journey together with Christ that He has taken and now leads us in. The angels of God minister to us along the way. But their desire and aim are that our focus be on Christ, and our path be directed by him. He became human like us to provide for that journey.

**2:14 Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil;**

A previous verse has stated that the maturing of the man Jesus through suffering was a classic, fitting and appropriate choice of God (10). Jesus' suffering was a story that had God's fingerprints all over it. The thoughts that will be expressed by the author in the remainder of this chapter will take us deeper into the classic work of God in the incarnation of himself for humanity, as one of them, suffering all that they suffer and more. God's vision and work deals with things deep in the spiritual world and deep in the spirits of the world, including the spirit of man.

The first statement of this verse is that the children share in flesh and blood. From God's point of view the essence of a person is not their body, but their spirit. Nevertheless, their material bodies are of him. He is speaking through the human author of these words from that perspective. The beings that He has created are spiritual beings, chosen and dearly loved, who share in the experience of existing in a body of flesh and blood. As they were created by him, they continue to come into existence clothed with material, visible bodies. The word for "share" comes from the

same root as the word we render “fellowship.” It is a perfect tense verb, indicating an ongoing result of a past action. So the idea is that this is God’s ordained plan for humans that now stands. They become flesh and blood beings as a part of their coming into existence and their entire experience together is not just spiritual, but also physical.

This means that an important factor in their existence is their bodies. Their spirits are joined to a physical material body that impacts the expression of their spirits. There is a mingling together of our spirits and our bodies in this existence. We are not neatly compartmentalized beings with clear identifiable boundaries between body and spirit. There is a mingling of the two elements so that our spirits impact our bodies, and our bodies impact our spirits. We must emphasize that we are speaking here of the human spirit, not God’s Spirit.

Our present existence is complicated further by the fact that we inherit, the moment we are created, the results of Adam’s sin. There are consequences of his sin in our flesh and blood, in the world we come into, and in our thought processes. There is bodily weakness and even defectiveness, and there is likewise moral weakness. We call this “spiritual death.” Though we are alive physically our experience is that of spiritual death. That is our world that we are mingled into and share in together by conception and birth. To exist is to share in a certain physical, emotion, and moral experience common among all of humanity.

The author says that because this was our experience, God himself similarly shared in it. The statement is precise and important. It is emphatic in its affirmation that it was God himself who shared in it. The adverbial term rendered “likewise” that describes how God shared in the human experience could be understood as “like a neighbor alongside.” It allows for a similar experience, without one that is precisely the same. The word rendered “partook” is derived from the word “to hold,” joined with the preposition meaning “amid.” It is used of those who eat or drink in common (1 Corinthians 10:17,21), and who share a common emotional experience (1 Corinthians 9:10).

These words and phrases describe God living out a human existence sufficiently like ours to be a legitimate experience of common ground without it being precisely the same in each detail. We know that the distinction the wording allows for is that Christ lived as a human, without sinning. He was like us, but distinct from us in this way. He lived in a body impacted by Adam’s sin. He experienced normal bodily weakness— fatigue, sickness, aging. He never experienced spiritual death. He never sinned. All of this was with a specific objective in view, a purpose that He could achieve for the benefit of humanity. That objective was and is our salvation. It is to rescue humanity from spiritual death and its consequence— physical death. This purpose or desired result is clearly marked out by the grammar of the text.

The method and means by which God brings rescue and soundness to humanity is ironic. It was through his own physical death that he rescued us from spiritual death, resurrects us from physical death, and will shield us from what he calls the “second death” (Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8). his death became the means of life for us.

Jesus experienced death for our benefit. But he also experienced death for the disadvantage and detriment of another person. The second half of this verse speaks to this fact that his death had a specific result in mind with respect to a particular person. This person is the devil. This name, used throughout the

New Testament of the rebel angel who is the source of evil in God’s creation, is taken from the word meaning to slander (1 Timothy 3:11; 2 Timothy 3:3; Titus 2:3). Satan is called this because he slanders the reputation of all to gain advantage and leverage for himself. And so he slanders God and God’s people. This is his method of drawing people into his control. He draws them into ideas about God and truth that are slanderous. His thinking makes good out to be evil, and evil to be good. God then becomes evil and the devil himself a savior and friend.

Through slander Satan brought spiritual death to humanity. He has since sought to confirm each individual human in that state. He does so because he knows God has conferred the right to rule creation on humanity. Satan desires that role for himself. So his motive is self-serving. His desire is to rule over creation. It is a futile one that God’s plan has undone and will continue to undo.

The irony is that God undid Satan’s plan through Satan’s great weapon—death. This great irony is brought out in this verse by the author of Hebrews. In Christ God engaged the cleverness of the evil one and “outclevered” him (1 Corinthians 1:19). God himself appeared in a normal, sin-scared body, though without sin himself. So there came to be in the human stream a perfect man. Just as Adam’s sin infected humankind, this man’s righteousness had the ability to redeem all of humanity who would come to believe in him. One man caused our downfall by choosing spiritual death (Romans 5:12-21). One man brings about our salvation by choosing physical death in our behalf (John 10:11-18). His death was substitutionary. In dying on the cross He paid the penalty for the sins of humanity. God, because of Jesus’ death, pardoned the sin of every person who believes in Jesus. In these who believe, Satan’s schemes will finally be made powerless.

Now, what does this mean that he has rendered Satan powerless? It is a contradiction to embrace the idea that Satan can bring no harm to believers. It goes against the clear teaching of the Scripture (Ephesians 6:10-20; 1 Peter 5:8). We are warned to be on guard against his schemes (2 Corinthians 2:1011). So he can inflict harm on believers. This idea of a powerless evil one can be addressed more fully by the thought of the verse that follows. However, for now it can be said that Satan introduced sin to humanity and brought about spiritual death in them.

Were it not for God's plan of salvation, humanity would be forever separated from God, victims of Satan's evil power. God's justice would not allow God to simply overlook our offenses. Spiritual death would be our permanent state, and humanity likely would have self-destructed had he done so. The death of Jesus in our behalf met the demands of God's justice, in the case of all who believe. Satan, the slanderer, can bring no legitimate charge against any who have believed. His accusations are empty and meaningless. So when the text say Satan is rendered powerless, it is talking about his very essence and nature as a slanderer who brings accusations against humanity. The great irony is that the death of Christ, brought about by evil and intended for evil, has become how spiritual death and the very perpetrator of evil is overcome.

**2:15 and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.**

God's objective in his plan of salvation is the deliverance of humanity. His plan restores them to their dignified position of his special creation who rule over his creation in his behalf. That is its end. This plan will be realized by all who turn to him and by faith embrace him.

In the ancient world death was a much more common experience than today. It was a much more common experience to lose a child. Sickness was much more likely to end in death. All manner of superstition and errant religion took root just due to people's desire to remain alive and keep loved ones alive. Such thought inevitably enslaves one to the devil. Where there comes to be a belief in evil spirits, gods of life and death, witches, medicine men and the like, people are enslaved to lies and half-truths, the primary tools of Satan.

In modern culture such spiritual slavery happens a little differently, but the result is the same. Among us we develop a fear of death because of our love for this present world—its experiences, its things, its relationships. We worship life itself and believe the worst thing that can happen to anyone is death. It is our greatest fear to die young, and it is our greatest dream and hope to extend our lives and fill them with experiences of this life. So we become no less enslaved to the evil one than were the ancients. Though our fears might be more rational they are no less intense, and they are no less of an influence on how our thoughts and actions are shaped. The fear of dying has been one of the most influential forces shaping human behavior in any era.

The author of Hebrews speaks here in this context of Satan having the power of death. That is true only in the sense that God has allowed him such power and influence for a period. Any power that exists anywhere is derived from God and exists only because it has his permission (John 19:11; Romans 8:38-39; Romans 13:1). This includes the power of the devil.

When we speak of the devil having the power of death, we must be careful not to ascribe him either too much power or too little. We know that through temptation and deceit he brought about spiritual death in Adam and Eve. The result was the spiritual death of all their offspring. Spiritual death became the defining part of the human experience and with its physical death. Spiritual death Satan brought about by lies and deceit, because he knew the spiritual laws that governed God's kingdom and creation. Physical death more likely should be understood as coming because of God's judgment and mercy toward man's sin so that man could not live forever in a fallen state (Genesis 3:22-24).

All of this is complex, trying to comprehend dividing lines in the spiritual realm between actions of God, man, and Satan. But it appears that when the Devil is said to have the power of death, the Scripture is describing his ability through deceit, superstition, and false information to bring about the spiritual death of humanity, their separation and alienation from God. Physical death is the consequence and certain sins Satan inspires can speed that. He has humanity at a distinct disadvantage and so has power over them.

It is for this reason that God's salvation is so urgent and union with his Spirit (new birth), so critical. We must be saved from this fear of death that so infects our thought patterns and leads us into increasing degrees of self-obsession, further from God. Christ's death provides for our being re-united with our Creator. Our faith and trust make us part of his family. As our faith and trust in God increases, our decisions lead us away from many of the symptoms of spiritual death. This happens even though we must live in fallen bodies in a fallen world. It is the work of his Spirit who is now joined to ours. WE are rescued and released from so many destructive patterns. And though our bodies weaken, our inner being is being renewed each day (1 Corinthians 4:18-5:10). We die physically, but we will be raised in imperishable, immortal bodies to the existence that God has decreed for fallen but redeemed humanity.

**2:16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham.**

After speaking of God's incarnation of himself in human form, and of his dramatic intervention in a lost and rebellious world to serve the needs of lost humanity, the author relates all of this to his opening argument. That argument is that relationship with and understanding of Christ should be sought out and pursued much more so than special experiences involving angels.

We do not know why this was such a critical subject to the original recipients of this writing we call Hebrews. We suspect that then, even a s now, people were vulnerable to the sensual attraction of supposed "new revelations." These could be easily counterfeited by the devil and his fallen angels. But the author's argument does not mention that. Instead it affirms Christ's superior position over the angels. It has even

inferred that redeemed humanity occupies a position superior to the angels. All of this is reaffirmed in this statement about the community of faith.

By stating that God does not give help to angels, the author is speaking to the fact that there is no plan of God to rescue fallen angels—Satan and demons. Their eternal destiny away from God's presence is set. God has no plan to become one of them, to die for them, to join his Spirit to them, or to in any way alter the destiny they have chosen. They will eternally demonstrate what would have happened to humanity were it not for God's goodness and love, his mercy and his grace. He gives no help to these, and we have no idea why. We know it is not because he is not good. We also know that this is just and right since He has demonstrated that this is his nature. We know that helping such beings is within his power since he has helped humanity without compromising his justice. But the fact is stated plainly here, he does not render such help to angels as he has to man.

There is a second plainly stated, important truth in this verse. It is that God's help is extended to "the descendant of Abraham." The superiority of Christ is the first important theme of Hebrews. The overwhelming significance of faith is another great theme of this book. Its presentation will reach a climax in the well-known material of chapter 11. Here faith is alluded to through this phrase "the descendant of Abraham." It is certain that this phrase recalls God's choice to reveal and execute his plan of redemption through Abraham and his descendants known to us as Israel. He entered covenant relationship with these, promising to bless all nations through them. So the way to possible recovery of God's special blessing on humanity forfeited by Adam and lost through our collective spiritual death in Eden, is alluded to from the beginning of that relationship.

One of the most dramatic moments in that relationship is recorded in Exodus 2:23-3:12. There Yahweh says that he has determined to intervene on earth on their behalf and for their benefit. As the relationship unfolds over the centuries between Yahweh and Israel, it becomes clear that those who inherit this promise are those who mimic the faith of Abraham both among his physical descendants and those who by faith relate themselves to Yahweh the God of Israel.

The help of God was initiated in this family. But if flows across ethnic and cultural lines, to what we refer to as Abraham's spiritual descendants. It is not that the natural, ethnic descendants of Abraham are irrelevant, as God's past and future demonstrate. It is that his intention was "all nations" from the beginning (Genesis 12:1-3). God would cause his blessing to flow through these to all people. This is most dramatically seen in the fact that Jesus was an Israelite and blesses and is a blessing to all people. There will be successive chapters in this blessing story, sequels in which the families of the earth will be blessed through the help first extended to the physical descendants of Abraham. They remain forever the locus of God's deposit of the knowledge of him. They remain

forever the family that produced the redeemer. They simply are the channel of blessing to humanity that God chose to bring redemption through.

The reason for this choice of Israel escapes us. Abraham's faith of which it is said that God "reckoned it to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6), is significant. But God initiated that relationship and its maturation. But there is no doubt this faith of Abraham is noted by the author of the Pentateuch in a way that it stands out as a signal event (Genesis 15:6). Its significance is noted throughout the New Testament in verses like this one in Hebrews (John 8:39-41; Romans 4:1-12; Galatians 3:6-9). So in pondering the choices of God we are perplexed. But if we are concerned for our own eternal security the certainty is clearly not in discovering the reason for the choices made by God. We need only exercise and nurture our trust in him and our welfare is guaranteed.

Faith in humanity is the great work that Yahweh has been accomplishing which will be fully acknowledged in chapter 11. There this author presents it as the consummate achievement of man that leads to other great achievements (Hebrews 11:32-38). It is the great objective to which the readers are to rise (Hebrews 10:35-39; 12:1-2). This is consistent with Scripture's varying presentation of faith as both a work of God and a work of man.

The story of what God has done for humanity in and through the family of Israel has caused many among all people groups to align themselves with Yahweh and so receive his great help. Such a rescue has never been carried out by him among angels. The implication is clear. Our passionate search should focus on Jesus the Christ.

**2:17 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.**

This verse emphasizes the humanity of Christ. This is a very important doctrine and was the area in which the first major heresy took root in the Christian Church. The author affirms Christ's humanity and speaks to why his humanity was essential in the mind of God.

The thought expressed here is tied to that of the previous verse, God's desire to rescue and take to himself for good and blessing the seed of Abraham. Because of this desire and plan, the author says God assumed a certain obligation, a debt. This is seen in the words "He had to be made like his brethren in all things…" This is a reference to the demands of God's own standard of justice. By that standard humanity had to be condemned and banished forever from God's presence. Because God is just, and because he desires all of creation to reflect who he is, there cannot be forever the inconsistency of unpunished evil. So if humanity was to be saved it was not a matter of simply overlooking and ignoring sin. Salvation had to be brought about in a way that

met the standard of justice that is inherent in God. This would make it sure and permanent.

So, since God wished to take humanity to himself for the purpose of blessing them, he had a moral obligation to his own character that he had to assume. The language the author chooses here captures that idea. Jesus, to save humanity, had to be made like his brethren in all things. He owed this to himself. But that was only the first step. By becoming a man, Jesus did not bring salvation to humanity. It was an essential first step, however.

The text states that he was made like his brethren. The term is ομοιωθημαι from the family of words used to express likeness. The phrase "in all things" is added to show that he was fully human. His humanity was not just a disguise or an illusion as some would wrongly teach. He was fully human and because he was to be a substitute for humanity in judgment, he had to become truly human. The statements of the remainder of the verse allow that this did not mean he was a fallen man who sinned as his brothers did. Sin and sinfulness are not an essential element of human nature as the original creation clearly demonstrated. So Jesus was created with the body of fallen humanity, subject to weakness and death. Other Scriptures affirm this, that he came to us in the likeness of sinful flesh (Romans 8:3), yet without sinning himself (Hebrews 4:15). his achievement in this was greater than Adam's could have been. Christ lived in a fallen body, without sinning. Adam could not resist sin though in a body not yet marred by evil.

The verse states the purpose of the Son's incarnation. It was what he had to do to provide for humanity a "merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God." Another way of understanding the grammar of the phrase is that Jesus was a "faithful in things to God" high priest. The High Priest in Jewish worship was the one who entered the most holy place once per year to make atonement for the entire worship system of Israel. The nation depended on him and his intercession on their behalf. The author here introduces an idea that will be very important in his letter. The office of High Priest occupied by men was only symbolic of this true high priest God would provide. This High Priest, Jesus, would be "faithful in all things pertaining to God." Of no other human being could this be said in the absolute sense in which it was said of Christ. The faithfulness of other men fell short, as demonstrated by Moses faithfulness. Jesus fulfilled completely the things which the symbols of the Old Covenant merely foreshadowed. He was the true High Priest who had audience with God on behalf of the people, and he was the sacrifice, the lamb without defect that was offered on behalf of their sin. The phrase "faithful in things pertaining to God" captures his perfection and sufficiency. There was nothing more God needed in humanity's behalf than what Jesus provided for us.

Jesus was also a merciful high priest. This idea would have been astounding to the Jews at the time of the writing of this letter. The high priestly office had become a

political position occupied by ambitious men serving for their own advantage (John 11:47-53). God has always led his people as a caring shepherd, and as a loving Father. People who are leading by his Spirit always appeal for mercy on behalf of those they lead (Exodus 32:9-14, 30-35; 2 Samuel 24:17). Jesus did not just rescue humanity. He did so out of pure, genuine love. A leader is not Christ-like if he or she begins to get arrogant toward those they lead. They must accept a measure of weakness in their followers, plead for God's mercy on their behalf, and be instruments of it.

The verse ends with a clear expression of the ultimate result of the incarnation. Ultimately the son took on human form to "make propitiation for the sins of the people." The word used here for "make propitiation" is a verb that occurs only one other place in the New Testament, in Luke 18:13. There it is the cry of the tax gatherer, humbly and contritely begging God for mercy. The noun form of the word occurs in 1 John 2:2, where Christ is said to be the propitiation for sin. The term is likely the Greek rendering of a certain Hebrew expression, a cry to God for merciful deliverance. There appears to be linguistic linkage between the root of this word and the Hebrew word cried out when in deep need for deliverance. That Hebrew word occurs in Psalm 4:6, the plea of David that the Lord "lift up the light of his countenance" on Israel. In writing to a Hebrew audience it is likely that the author would use an idiom familiar to them as the cry for God's merciful intervention and provision with reference to their sin.

There are three main ideas that Yahweh seems to deliberately associate with this merciful provision of his for our sin. The first is that of a covering—not to conceal sin but as just payment for it. Blood was the frequent thing sprinkled on people and objects. It foreshadowed that which would ultimately cover (atone for—κιππυρ), our sin—the blood of Christ.

The second idea associated with Yahweh's merciful provision for sin was that of reconciliation—the restoration of a broken relationship. Where there had been alienation and hostility, God's mercy brought peace.

The third idea associated with God's merciful provision for sin was substitution—the death of One God allowed to serve as a substitute for the actual guilty party. There were many symbolic deaths of animals prescribed by the Law, all of which pointed to the Lamb of God, Jesus.

All these ideas and more, Yahweh had plainly expressed for centuries through the symbolism of the worship system of the Old Covenant. They all were meant to condition the Israelites and the world for Jesus Christ. He made merciful provision for all who would believe. All those symbols, all the blood of the animal sacrifices had no value in themselves, apart from Jesus' blood being shed.

"The people," a reference here to the family of the faith of Israel, needed Christ's atoning blood, and this is a truth many ethnic Israelites would stumble over. They, like all people, needed to receive the mercy of Yahweh to have any hope in judgment.

Ultimately Christ had to live and had to die. This was the purpose of the incarnation, to finalize the salvation of all who embraced the faith of Abraham.

**2:18 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.**

This verse begins with a short prepositional phrase in the Greek text that means "in which." It is likely referring to the work of Christ in his incarnation that has been the subject of the previous four verses. It has just been stated in this previous verse that the purpose of the incarnation was that Jesus might become a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God. The result of that mission was that he made propitiation for the sins of the people. This verse begins by referencing these great facts and points out that in doing and achieving these things he suffered. The conjunction "for" identifies this as additional explanatory thought. It will show how he is merciful and faithful in his suffering.

When we speak of Christ suffering, we generally think of the events surrounding his death. But we must remember that the entire incarnation involved a laying aside of a certain existence (Philippians 2:5-11). It involved moving into a state of suffering in which he had not existed. The entire change in state was a sacrifice which continues eternally. Appropriately here in this text, the word suffered is a perfect tense. As such it describes past action that results in a condition or state that continues. While Christ's suffering in making propitiation for our sin is paramount in Scripture, that suffering could easily be understood as including more than just the events of the trial and torture. His entire state of being, becoming a man and remaining forever one of us, was an enormous step down for him. There is no indication from Scripture that he will ever change back from being the Godman, though in a glorified state, to that existence he had before.

It is a profound truth that in the incarnation we have God, who knows the detail of the goodness he has decreed for humanity to inherit, willing himself to live embrace forever that existence. So it is trust, modeled by the trustor, for the trustees, so that they might feel safe in trusting him! He has gone first to show us the way is safe.

Christ's temporary experience in a fallen body, "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3), was particularly a step down to suffering. This is hard for us to comprehend because we have known nothing else but the existence we have. The author's point here is that to bring about the will of God, which was to be a propitiation for the sins of the people, Christ has suffered and will forever live sacrificially. That suffering is accomplished and has resulted in an entirely different situation between God and humanity that is ongoing.

In this great suffering Christ was tempted. The word means "to test," and it can refer to either trials meant to strengthen faith or trials concocted by the evil one that

encourage a lapse in faith. It is not necessary to distinguish which precisely may be in mind here. We know that Christ experienced both. The point here is that his experience in these makes him sympathetic toward our tests. He is motivated by actual common experience to come to our aid in our times of testing.

The English phrase “to come to the aid of” is the rendering of one Greek word. It is a compound word formed from the word for a cry and a word meaning “to run.” So the idea inherent in the term is to run to a cry. It is a particularly graphic way of picturing the empathy of this great High Priest of ours, what he feels and how he responds to our trials and sufferings. He knows the trial of the human experience. He knows and understands it better than us because he has that which he can compare it to.

The author will return to this idea of a sympathetic merciful High Priest who is able, willing, and anxious to help us, and who has been tempted, later in his treatise (4:14-16). For now, he chooses to move on to show that Christ is greater than one of the great religious leaders of all time, Moses.

# HEBREWS 3

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

The central idea of this verse is the command to "consider Jesus." That command is a charge to engage the mind in such a way to properly perceive him. The concern of the author for his reader's spiritual stability and maturity has already been expressed. Speaking as their peer he has said, "we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it" (2:1). That concern will be brought out in this portion of his message as well, beginning with this command. To perceive Jesus' person, his life and his death properly, to look at life though that lens, equips us for spiritual stability and perpetual growth.

The way he addresses the readers or hearers here enables us to add more to our understanding of who they are. What we know so far is that they are viewed as those who had embraced the truth of Jesus. They are not unbelievers. They had heard, arrived at the right place with respect to Christ. We know this because they are seen by the author as peers, who like himself, could drift with respect to the truth and neglect their salvation (2:1-4).

Now at this point he addresses them as "holy brethren." The term brother or brethren was already in use by Jews of each other. It was not a technical term for a believer. In the New Testament we see Jewish believers addressing unbelieving Jews as 'brothers" (Acts 7:2; 13:26; 22:1; 23:1,5,6; Romans 9:3). The term "holy brethren" would seem more definitive to us. But again we see that Yahweh regarded Israel as a people as holy (Leviticus 20:26). Paul seemed to regard them in much the same way (Romans 11:16). The term "holy brethren" does not necessarily demand by rules of the usage of the separate words that we regard it as a term exclusively used of a believer in Jesus Christ. However, the term occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. There is a uniqueness to the strength of combining the terms. Both the preceding statements of chapter two and the terms that follow in this verse indicate that the author is approaching his audience as believers in Jesus Christ.

The author describes his readers next as "partakers of a heavenly calling." This is the second use of this word rendered "partakers" in this book. The first use was in 1:9, a quote from the Septuagint of Psalm 54:6-7. There it describes the "companions" of Christ, who likely include angels. The term is used a total of five times in the book of Hebrews. Its only other use in the New Testament is in Luke 5:7, where it is used of the business relationship between Simon and the sons of Zebedee as fishermen. So the word is used where a relationship does exist, one of shared interest and concern.

In the usage here the partners shared interest and concern is named. Theirs is said to be a "heavenly calling." In usage in the New Testament a calling was an actual state of

existence such as marriage or singleness (1 Corinthians 7:20). All but one of its uses are of the state of having believed in the good news of the gospel. "Calling" is not used of those who might have heard the good news but not believed. It is used of those who have believed it and now are summoned to live out the implications of it. This calling is a heavenly calling, one sourced in heaven and having as its objective things related to heaven.

"Heavenly calling" seems to foreshadow the detailed description the author will give later when he illustrates faith living with concrete examples from the great people of faith in God's family (Hebrews 11:13-16). The readers by these terms are represented as people who had started down the road on the same journey as the heroes of the faith. They will be urged to exercise diligence and follow-through to arrive where these heroes arrived rather than remaining in what the author will describe as spiritual infancy (5:11-14).

Understanding the readers in this way will have enormous implications with respect to how later statements by the author should be understood. It has equally important implications with respect to how we are to understand the Christian life and our own growth in it.

As stated earlier, the command to consider Jesus is the central thought of this verse. It is the word κατανοησατε. It is a compound word composed of the word for the exercise of the mind and a preposition that intensifies it. When this word is used elsewhere it means to observe to comprehend fully and completely the nature of something and its implication (Luke 6:41; 12:24,27; 20:23; Acts 11:6). The readers had believed in Jesus, now their task was to understand more fully his nature, his stature as a human and his work and then, to adapt to the implications.

Such "considering," is an essential element of the kind of thinking that leads to stability and maturity in one's practice of the faith. It is intellectual, but it always takes aim at the practical details of life. Right behavior of Christians toward each other for example, grows out of a proper comprehension of the attitude of Christ in his condescension (Philippians 2:1-11). So this command to "consider Jesus," aimed at producing what the Old Testament called meditation. Our meditation is to center on Christ. Out of it right thinking on a host of different subjects will grow.

Christ is said to be "the Apostle and High Priest of our confession." The author captures the preeminence of Christ by assigning the supreme title of spiritual authority from the Old Covenant era to him. He adds alongside the title of High Priest the supreme title of spiritual authority under the New Covenant—Apostle. This shows his own proper perception of Jesus Christ. The rest of his thinking centers on these ideas and their implications.

Christianity is called here a confession. That is the way God views it. The word is a compound formed by joining the word for "sameness" and the word for a message or

speech. It describes agreement on a message. In this case it describes our agreement with God's testimony about the identity of Jesus, and with Jesus' testimony about God, himself, the world, and us.

This agreement among parties forms a community composed of people and God, a living organism called the Church. It is through this Church that God makes himself visible to all beings. The confession or agreement on the part of any individual that Jesus is Yahweh in human form, and that he died a substitutionary death for humanity's sins, and that his resurrection is proof of this, places one in this covenant community. From this entry point the understanding of this confession greatly expands so that growth in maturity and stability occurs. This collective pondering and growth are what the readers are being urged to engage themselves in more fully. That is the persistent message of the New Testament writings.

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

To Jewish people Moses was regarded as one who was without peer in the realm of spiritual leaders. And there is good reason for that assessment given the testimony of God about him on two separate occasions. One was when Miriam and Aaron opposed him and suggested that God was wanting to speak through others besides Moses. God clearly showed on that occasion that Moses was unique among spiritual leaders (Numbers 12:1-15). It was on that occasion that God testified that Moses was faithful in all his house (Numbers 12:7). The implication is that God found Moses to be uniquely faithful. That testimony of God on that occasion is what the author of Hebrews has in mind here. Another occasion where God affirmed Moses' unique spiritual authority was in the rebellion of Korah and the Levites (Numbers 16). There we see dramatic response by Yahweh and a willingness to destroy the entire congregation. Moses' intercession for them is presented as the reason why they were not consumed. This was an astounding affirmation of Moses' faithfulness to his charge as the leader of Yahweh's people.

In this initial thought Jesus is presented as a leader in the vein and tradition of Moses. This will not be the conclusion. The author will move very quickly in the next verse to the absolute superiority of Jesus. But this comparison with Moses followed the thought expressed by Yahweh through Moses in the Torah that Yahweh would raise up from Israel prophets in the tradition of Moses who would speak His truth to the nation. Yahweh's words on that occasion were that he would raise up a particular prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15-19). More than a reference to the office of prophet and the prophetic ministry that God enabled all along the line, this was a reference to the Christ, Yahweh incarnate, who to a much greater degree than Moses knew God face to face. So the Messiah was the provision of spiritual leadership that Moses was just a foreshadow of. In fact, Moses himself in the Torah is presented as a man whose

faithfulness fell short in the end and who was kept from the promised land (Deuteronomy 32:48-52).

As an aside, this verse is a prime example of the absolute and relative language of Scripture in its testimony about righteousness in humanity. There are those who God proclaims faithful by some gracious standard. But by the absolute standard of his justice their faithfulness falls short.

The comparison of Moses and Christ begins with this comparison from a human standpoint. The author now moves quickly to a Divine perspective.

**3:3 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.**

We know that Moses and Elijah had met with Christ on the mount of transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36). They spoke with Jesus of that which he was about to accomplish, mainly his death (Luke 9:31). This is not the type of occurrence that seems to be the norm in the testimony of Scripture. There is much about this entire incident that is mystifying to us. What we do know about it is that Moses was a part of it. It was certainly a glory moment for him, to add to many others. There is no doubt that Moses was and is highly regarded in both earthly realms and heavenly ones.

We also know that Christ's glory is greater. It is greater in the sense that it is from eternity past (John 17:5). It is greater because it involves a scope of authority that extends over all that is (Matthew 28:18). It is greater because Jesus is the Creator of all things including Moses (Colossians 1:16). But the contrast in glory the author to the Hebrews is speaking specifically to relates to "the house." This is a reference to the community of Yahweh, all who have ever been of faith, in every era of earth's history. Moses is a key figure in that family. Christ is the creator of that family and the head over it (Colossians 1:18). So the comparison is that Moses is part of the thing which Christ himself built.

The word used for "builder" here is significant to the meaning of this entire passage. The word normally used for one who leads a household is the word οικοδομεω. That word is also used by Paul in a figurative way to describe actions that "builds up" the faith of another. This is not the word this author chooses to use here.

The word used here is κατασκευαζω. There is some overlap in meaning between the two words. But this word generally refers to the total work of preparing a house to be lived in. It is used literally of preparing the ark, which means not just construction, but the stowing of all the provisions necessary to make it livable. It is used figuratively of John the Baptist ministry (Mark 1:2-3 other times), as that of preparing the way for Christ. Most of its uses are in Hebrews (six of eleven uses). Three of these are here in chapter 3, two are in chapter 9 of the preparation of the things in the tabernacle, one is in chapter 11, where Noah is said to have prepared the ark. So here this term

describes the forming of the family of God, and then the work of making it fit for its function in the plan of God. It pictures Christ as the one justifying his people and sanctifying them.

The comparison made here between Moses and Christ is this; Moses is a part of the living organism that Christ himself formed, and Moses functioned as he did because Christ so developed and equipped him. Christ's is the cause of Moses" life work and therefore has the greater glory.

There can be a great beauty to a house that is even awe-inspiring. But if there comes to be such beauty, it is because it resides first in the builder of the house. The greatness of any child of God is attributable to Jesus Christ. That is the uniqueness and glory of him.

**3:4 For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.**

The previous verse has identified Jesus Christ as the builder of the household of faith. He is the source and first because of it as an entity. It used a term of him that indicates that he not only draws into membership those of his choosing, but he is the one who equips all in it, including Moses, for the roles they fill in the plan and program of God. In the imagery of that verse we have pictured a family, one member of the family, and the one who is responsible for the creation, growth and development of that family, Jesus Christ. That imagery pictures the weightiness of Christ compared to Moses.

This verse continues with the imagery of houses and builders. Its purpose is to add further explanation and detail to the idea that Jesus must command our attention rather than Moses. The first idea presented is that every house has a builder. This seems obvious enough. But the author perhaps wants to cement in the mind of the reader through this phrase the inherent superiority of Christ over Moses. So this phrase reminds the reader that what exists has a source behind it. When we look at Moses and all that he presided over we are looking at greatness. But because everything has its source and first cause, we must look beyond him to the One who brought Moses and the household of faith about, Jesus Christ.

The second part of the verse takes us even deeper to the ultimate source of all that has ever come to exist. In the final analysis we come to the One who makes ideas and thoughts possible and who has a master plan which all things fit into. We come ultimately to the Triune God who is the first cause of all that has ever come to be. Perhaps by bringing the reader to this thought the author is further seeking to raise the Jewish readers up from their Moses focus. Moses was great because Yahweh addressed him face to face. The ultimate question then is through whom is Yahweh the Creator God speaking and building now? The author has already given the answer. Yahweh has spoken "in Son" (1:2). The Son has eclipsed Moses as the source of God's thought for us.

Throughout Scripture we have thought that is implicit about the nature of God. By implicit we mean that it is inferred or assumed to be true, lying below the surface of the statements of the words themselves as part of their foundation. As we reflect on the words, they lead us into certain speculation and logical conclusions. Taken together as a whole, the verses of Scripture have led the Christian community to speculate and conclude that Yahweh is a Triune being—a single being composed of three persons. This concept is complexed, we embrace it because it is the only way we can justify all the statements made by Yahweh in his written revelation about what the Father has done, what the Son has done, and what the Spirit has done. In this verse for example, we have stated that God is the builder of all things. Yet we have it clearly stated in the previous verse that Jesus built the household of faith. Elsewhere in Scripture, we have it stated that Jesus created all things (Colossians 1:16, John 1:1-4). These seemingly contradictory ideas occur in several areas such as who forgives sin and who judges sin. They are resolved as we understand God as a Triune being and that this is implicit in all the behaviors he ascribes to himself. The builder of all things is God, yet Jesus has created all things. Both things are true, because Jesus shares the Divine essence, what he does can truthfully be attributed to himself, to the Father (John 5:19), and to the entire Godhead—Yahweh.

**3:5 Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later.**

This is an important statement by the author about Moses that will serve as a basis of comparison for a statement about Christ in the next verse. A key idea in this verse is expressed by the English preposition “in.” There will be a contrast made between Moses’ role with respect to the house and the role of Jesus. Moses here is said to be “in” the house. We could understand the author as expressing the idea that Moses was someone placed in the house as a part of its preparation for its function and usefulness.

It is said of Moses that he was faithful. This is the witness of Yahweh himself recorded in Numbers 12:7. It is no small compliment to be declared faithful by Yahweh. It is the ultimate test of all of us (1 Corinthians 4:1-5). This was and is Moses’ great glory—that he was faithful.

It is also said of Moses that he was faithful in “all” his house. This is no doubt a statement that is meant to convey the completeness and exceptional, exemplary service that Moses rendered. He was one who distinguished himself by his faithfulness. There is good reason to regard him highly and for him to be honored. The purpose of the author is not to depreciate Moses. It is to truthfully compare him to a greater One, Christ. In all the matters God entrusted to Moses, he distinguished himself by his faithfulness.

The “house” here certainly refers to the “household,” what we would call the community of God, or the family of God. Moses was faithful with respect to the people, putting their needs and welfare above his own. This means the people of his own generation and those of future generations. The past, the present and the future generations of the family of God were always on his heart and mind. Moses was in this sense “faithful among all” those of this great household of God.

The “house” in view here was also the tabernacle. It was the first building God designated as the one in which he would meet his people and be present with them. Everything about it spoke of him and revealed things about his relationship to his community of people, his household. It was a historic building designed by him meticulously and build with precise attention to the details as he had envisioned and designed them. Because the details revealed truth about him and us, it was important that Moses pay attention to them and make sure that the thing built be exactly as God ordered it. In this sense Moses was “faithful in all” the details of his house—its construction and its day-to-day use.

The author describes Moses as a servant. He uses a word for servant that is a rare one by the time of his writing. It appears rarely in the New Testament (Luke 9:11; 12:42). It is the word used in the Septuagint in Numbers 12:7, the record of God’s declaration of Moses faithfulness as a servant. It is the word used when Yahweh speaks of Israel being his servant (Isaiah 45:5), and the term he uses of the Messiah or Christ (Isaiah 53:11). One is in good company to be such a servant of Yahweh.

Moses charge as a servant was to be a testimony to specific things that would be “spoken later.” There are scores of things that Moses gave faithful testimony to that would be made plainer by future revelation. His faithfulness can be summarized by three areas of responsibility related to his position that he occupied in God’s kingdom. Each area provides an infinity of instances in which Moses’ faithfulness was demonstrated.

First was the responsibility he had of establishing the worship system of the Sinai covenant. He was faithful in this This included the design and construction of the tabernacle, the fabrication of its many furnishings and utensils, the instructions to the priests and their ordination, and the instruction of the people in its ceremony and celebration. Moses was faithful in bringing it all into reality according to the pattern God revealed to him (Exodus 25:9,40; Numbers 8:4; Acts 7:44). This was no small feat. The entire system was full of objects and rituals that spoke of realities that would be made plain and obvious later. Moses was faithful in the finest of the fine details of this entire system.

Second, Moses was faithful to submit to the Old Covenant and to lead the people in it, though God had revealed that the covenant itself was destined to fail (Deuteronomy 4:25-31; 5:28-29; 29:3-4; 30:6; 31:1429). It would be revealed later that this was God’s

purpose in the Sinai covenant to demonstrate man's inability to secure God's blessing by his own works. So in a sense, Moses was given a futile mission! The real way to God's blessing would be the work done by Christ, a fact that would be spoken of clearly later. Moses was faithful to live under the Old Covenant, even when the result was his own banishment from the promised land. He was faithful to write a book that recorded not only Israel's inability due to unbelief, but his own unbelief (Deuteronomy 32:51). He was faithful to submit to the justice of God's consequences (Deuteronomy 3:26-27). Thus, future generations up to the present are provided with a consistent testimony of the inadequacy of the best of people to rise from their fallen condition to merit any of what God desires to give. This is an outstanding example of faithful service!

Third, Moses was faithful in his personal saving faith. He believed and entrusted his personal salvation to Yahweh. It is hard to know the extent of Moses knowledge of Jesus the Christ. But Jesus spoke of Moses writing about him (Luke 24:27,44). Others of Jesus' day spoke of Moses writing about the Christ (John 1:45; Acts 26:22). So though he lived under the Old Covenant historically, his personal faith rested in the Messiah Priest King who would one day bring salvation to Yahweh's people. The deeds of Moses testified to this coming One, the offspring of Abraham who would bless all people (John 3:14-21).

It can be shown then that Moses was faithful in a myriad of details that pointed to the message of the gospel in its fullness that would be proclaimed to the world through those like the author of Hebrews. Of the people that have been members of God's household of faith it would be difficult to find one more faithful than Moses. He was faithful in God's house, serving in the affairs related to his specific role in God's family.

**3:6 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.**

This is a statement about Christ that, when compared to the previous verse, clearly shows his superiority over Moses. The key to this statement is the preposition that describes Christ being over God's house. Moses was described as a faithful servant IN God's house. Christ is described as faithful as a Son over God's house. The difference is clearly one of scope of authority, as well as relationship to God. Moses was given authority and exercised it during an era of history, over a segment of God's community of believers. Christ has been given all authority over all that is God's, which means all things (Matthew 28:18; Colossians 1:15-18). This means that Moses is under the authority of Christ. Moses understood the superiority of this coming One (Deuteronomy 18:15-19).

The second half of this verse is a little more complex to interpret. It is important because it is a statement about who is part of the house Jesus is over. It could easily be construed to mean that the readers were not for sure a part of the house of God,

and that they could become such if they held fast to two things. First, their confidence or boldness, and second their hope. This reading of the text would say that not only was it possible for them not to make progress in their salvation, but they could also lose it entirely and not be in the household of God at the end.

Another reading of the text would say that whether they are in the household of God will be made evident by whether they endure in their hope and confidence to the end. They do not even know for sure presently, but who they are will be made evident in their works of endurance.

Because of statements like this one in Scripture, many establish a linkage between works and salvation. In their argument they chose one of two lines of thinking. One line of thinking is that our justification is not final until it is joined by a pattern of sanctification that is maintained until the end of one's life. The other line of thinking says that the sincerity of belief is proved by works and so if one is truly justified, then there will be displayed a pattern of progress in sanctification throughout their life. In both lines of thinking the intensity of the required sanctification varies. Some would say it involves simply persevering in belief with no denial of Christ. Others would say it involves a pattern of moral choices and conformity in matters of character. The one front-loads justification, saying it occurs only in the wake of what is believed and what is trusted in and the resultant works. The other backloads justification, saying that its authenticity can be discerned by certain observable patterns of behavior. Variations of these two lines of thought can be seen in most of the interpretations of this verse.

It would seem legitimate to approach this verse with the idea that the discussion it is a part of is not about justification, but about sanctification, progressing in one's salvation to be a useful instrument of God in his house. Faithfulness and usefulness are being urged. The hearers are presumed justified. They have been addressed as having made a confession, and as partakers of a heavenly calling (3:1). While all would admit that the Christian community has its "Judases," is the author addressing that issue here? Or is he addressing a much more common phenomenon in Christianity, a lethargic faith. Have his words to this point in his letter not stated that it is possible for us (including himself), to drift (2:1)? The language and terms employed thus far in the letter are a first line of evidence that the author was addressing the issue of believers becoming stagnant in their faith and not making progress in their salvation.

A second line of evidence of this comes from the terms and imagery of the immediate context. As mentioned earlier, the term used of Christ when he is described as builder of the house (3:3), is not one that projects him only as the assembler of the bricks and sticks. It is a term that includes preparing the house for functionality and habitation, down to its furnishings and supplies. Christ's work in his people is paralleled to Moses' work in "preparing" the tabernacle. That preparation involved the building itself, all its utensils and instruments utilized in its function in worship and its symbolic function. It involved everything from the ark of the covenant to the shovels, to candlesticks, to the

ordination and training of the priests. Christ's house is prepared by him in the same way. The vessels and instruments in it, in this case its people, are selected and formed for a purpose and are a part of its life and usefulness only if they are so formed and maintained. When we read this verse, we should likely understand being part of his house as referring to being part of that which the bricks and sticks represented, the spiritual activity and process that occur as God is joined to people. Jesus is preparing us continually for that spiritual work that he wishes to carry out through us. We are a part of it as we endure in our faith and trust him enough to shape us as he wishes.

The final line of evidence for viewing this statement as one about our usefulness and productivity is that Christ is presented by the author as "Son over his house." That choice of words is drawn from the custom of a son, traditionally the first born, being designated by the father to oversee the affairs of the family in the father's absence. So that role that Jesus is cast in here had to do with managing the affairs and particularly the business of the household, that which it was engaged in for livelihood. It involved overseeing the roles being carried out by each person and the needs incurred by them in that process. It had to do with the life of the family and its functional health.

We can rightfully then conclude that this verse contributes to an emerging message of the author of this work. He is addressing a group of people who are growing lethargic in their faith. This will become increasingly clear in later statements (5:11-14; 10:32-39). The danger they faced was that of becoming useless for the high purposes of God for them. They could slip into a state of mere existence in their faith. When that happens to any believer, they are vulnerable to the same destructive power of sin that is experienced by the spiritually dead. The story of the prodigal son deals with what happens when one does not endure in their faith. The entire message of this book is to inspire a group of believers to re-engage with all that Jesus wishes to bring about in the life of his children. "Keep re-engaging with the process!" is God's word through Hebrews.

**3:7 Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, 'Today if you hear His voice,'**

This verse begins a lengthy quote from Psalm 95. It offers scriptural support for the concern of the author about the lethargic faith of the readers. This concern is emerging as the key theme of this treatise. The scriptural support he is garnering is not from isolated verses. It is itself the theme of many of the writings of the Old Covenant, succinctly stated in verses throughout the Old Testament. One of those statements is Psalm 95:7-11.

Psalm 95 is part of a group of songs (95-100) that came to be sung at public gatherings by Israel. It is a song that begins with a summons to worship Yahweh. In the middle of the song is the statement, "For He is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand." So there is recognition of the loving care of Yahweh and the privileged position and spiritual position of Israel as the posit of

Yahweh's revelation of himself. It is after this statement that the song takes a rather abrupt turn. The next line in the Hebrew Scripture is, "Today, if you would hear his voice." This is the line that begins the quotation in Hebrews. The song moves from an invitation to worship to a warning not to be hardened toward Yahweh and so turn away from trusting him. So a song that began as a call to worship on an inspirational note becomes a warning against unbelief and its accompanying spiritual lethargy. It makes some astounding statements about the climate that can develop between Yahweh and his people when individuals allow a lack of trust in his goodness and care to settle in. The song may have inspired the pattern followed by the writer of Hebrews, who clearly alternates between inspirational reminders of the greatness of the truth about Jesus and warnings about the dangers of drifting away to a trust in merely human ideas.

There is a strong conditional tone in our English versions of this Psalm. It is captured by the word "if," and the word "would." The English version of the quote in Hebrews leaves out the word "would," but the conditional sense is present in the Greek grammar. The writer accurately quotes the Greek of the Septuagint, which passes along the conditional nature of the statement through the subjunctive mood of the main verb. So the idea of the statement is that if God's people wish to remain in a place where they are fellowshipping with him and hearing his voice there is a condition to meet. That condition will be named by the Psalmist. But the critical point is that we have personal responsibility in spiritual vibrancy.

The author affirms that the Psalm is not merely human literature. It is the voice of the Holy Spirit. This is not his main point, but it is a very noticeable feature with its own implication regarding Spiritual health. There must be an honoring of the voice of the Holy Spirit in our approach to the Scripture if we are to be moved at all by our interaction with it.

The word "today" is also an important feature in this song. In the following lines it will cite history. But the history of God's people, even the lapses into sinfulness, has application for the hour we are in. The word "today" imparts urgency to the action. We should never procrastinate in these matters. To do so is to begin to drift from where we have been. What we do in the very moment in front of us is a critical matter in our spiritual health.

Finally, the word "therefore" that begins the verse should be noted for what its Isaiah It is relating what has just been stated to what follows. So it alerts the reader that they are about to be provided with something that is a logical implication of what has been stated. The message that this simple connecting word alerts us to is this: Jesus has far more to impart to us than Moses. So, we must not make the same mistake Moses' followers made in not listening to him.

**3:8 'Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness,'**

It is a great privilege to have our Creator speak to us and address us in a personal way from a heart of concern. When he does so it happens in a way we can easily pass over it. There are times when he speaks to us in mass through very normal channels such as through Christian leaders in Church meetings. There are other times when he speaks to us individually through a person that he places in our life at a time of his choosing. There are times when he sends us a message through circumstances. Sometimes he speaks to us very privately, through our own mental processes as we pray or ponder some issue in our lives. Always when he does so there is the witness within us of our own conscience that "this is the way, walk in it" (Isaiah 30:21). It is dealing with this inner voice that becomes critical in the salvation process. We must become people who listen to the Spirit-directed voice of conscience.

There is no doubt our conscience can be weak and defiled. It can be weak due to a lack of the presence of the Holy Spirit. This is the case in the non-believer. In such a person however, the conscience is still used by God however weak and defiled it is to guide them to belief. The conscience can be weak through atrophy. That is a common condition we bring on ourselves by ignoring it, so that its voice we do not even hear. This is a common condition even in Christians. It can be defiled through information that is inaccurate. Exercising it according to the truth supplied by revelation corrects our conscience. God's design is that through the presence of the Holy Spirit our conscience becomes a means of hearing and following his voice to us.

What is the conscience? From a biblical viewpoint in the 21st century how are we to understand this inner voice that is present in every person? It is best to see it as an activity of the human spirit, that part of our being that makes us living beings that is from God (Genesis 2:7). One of the functions of this portion of our being is to work in conjunction with our mind as a witness to what is true and right. Our conscience is God's gift to us. That we have it is one of the things that distinguishes us from animals. They can be taught through negative and positive consequences to behave in a right or wrong manner, but they have no inner understanding of moral matters apart from our instruction and training. We have that inner moral compass that is part of God's image in us. It can be developed through the Holy Spirit's presence, through use, and through our understanding of truth into a precise and valuable asset.

Hardening of the heart refers to a liability that resides in every person. We can make a choice to steel ourselves against the witness of our own conscience. The ability to over-rule our conscience is critical in a fallen world. There are a few errant ideas and superstitions that would otherwise lead us in a terrible moral direction. Sin damages and scars us so that it becomes possible for us to commit atrocities in the name of conscience. So it is critical that we be able to over-rule our conscience. Yet if we do so at the wrong times, we inflict great damage on ourselves. This is why God's provision

of a written record of his will for us is so critical. Armed with knowledge of truth from this written record, our rational processes can be used by the Holy Spirit to rule our conscience, strengthen it and conform its voice to the standards of God.

But this ability to rule our conscience with our rational mind can become the means of silencing our conscience. Self-serving thoughts and courses of action can carry the day. We can mute the voice of conscience entirely. In the imagery of Scripture this is pictured as developing calluses or scar tissue on it so that it is insensitive. At this point we lose a large part of our innate potential to know, understand, and relate to our Creator.

To summarize, hardening of the heart is deliberately turning away from conclusions that our conscience is seeking to lead us to. It is resisting the influence of conscience and suppressing the truth.

This Scripture from Psalm 95 is referring to a series of incidences in which the Israelites squelched the clear witness of their conscience and their concrete experience that God was good (fifteen are reported; Exodus 14:10-15; 15:22-26; 16:1-12; 16:17-28; 17:2; 32:1-6; Numbers 11:1-3; 11:4-12; 12:1-15; 14:112; 16:1-11; 16:41; 20:2; 21:4; 25:1). These incidences began just hours after they had been released from bondage in Egypt because of Yahweh's judgment of the Egyptians through the plagues (Exodus 14:1012). It continued just three days after they had walked through the parted Red Sea and seen the entire army of Pharoah destroyed by the hand of God (Exodus 15:22-26). A total of five are recorded before the incident when they see the fire and smoke on the mountain and are afraid to meet Yahweh. Five more are recorded from the giving of the 10 Commandments until God bans that generation from entering the promised land due to their unbelief. After they are so banned, five more are recorded as if to confirm the judgment of God. So in their minds Israel suppressed what they had concretely experienced of God's goodness, in favor of a course of thinking that somehow gratified their own desires. This pattern of thought they continually allowed themselves to revert to despite the continued patience of God and proof of his goodness.

In the account of Moses then, a great and important irony is presented on this subject. Pharaoh hardens his heart against the clear voice of Yahweh and seeks to prevent, then overturn the Exodus. Against this backdrop, God's covenant people harden their hearts and so miss out on experiencing the promised land. Together they demonstrate that this is the great human problem and dilemma. It demonstrates to us an important idea. It is that hardening the heart can happen to the Christian as easily as the non-Christian. This is exactly the point the author to the Hebrews is bringing out through Psalm 95.

The author refers to the events in the wilderness as a season of time in which Israel "provoked" Yahweh. The text in the original language is stronger here and in verse 15,

where the entire string of incidences is referred to as “the provocation.” From the point of view of the author, whose choice of words is being orchestrated by the Holy Spirit, the period we refer to as “the Exodus,” God refers to as “the provocation.” The idea of the word rendered provocation is to be in the company and so repeatedly experience that which prods and irritates. So the whole experience of the Exodus for Yahweh is described in interesting emotional terms. It is important that we understand and guard against being as the Israelites were if we wish to have a full experience of Yahweh goodness. Who wants to be part of what provokes him?

The Exodus is also referred to here as “the day of testing.” The testimony of Moses regarding the entire period spent in the wilderness is that it involved a series of tests from Yahweh. At times he revealed the terror of his presence so that Israel would develop reverence for him and keep from sin (Exodus 20:18-20). At other times he tested them to reveal to them what was in their hearts (Exodus 16:4; Deuteronomy 8:2). His tests were meant as a means of humbling them and helping them grow in character and so inherit blessing (Deuteronomy 8:16; 13:3).

Hardness of heart, the inner choice to resist truth because it speaks against a preferred course of action, is different from what could be called legitimate unbelief. Legitimate unbelief occurs where there is no knowledge of the truth, a genuine lack of information. This situation is not as common as might be thought, but it does exist. Hardness of heart occurs when the information is available, absorbed and understood and a deliberate choice is made to reject it. That choice is usually due to its implications, not its actual content. This is the great evil present in all of us that we must resist through the Holy Spirit. It is the force that all the information in revelation and all the activity of the Spirit and the Angels is equipping us to overcome. The author’s appeal here is fully supported by all the effort expended by heaven since the fall.

**3:9 Where your fathers tried me by testing me, and saw my works for forty years.**

This is a powerful and profound observation made by God and placed in writing for our examination and benefit. Yahweh has revealed through Psalm 95 that the years of the Exodus were in his mind “the provocation.” He is referring to the fact that his own covenant people refused to believe what he continually made blatantly obvious, namely his goodness, his mercy, and his desire and capacity to bless them. He has also referred to this period as the “day of testing.” Moses account of the events, as cited earlier, speaks of how Yahweh tested Israel. He placed before them obstacles and challenges to reveal what was in their hearts.

However, Psalm 95 has something different in mind in calling it “the day of testing.” The Lord’s meaning is clarified in its two crisp phrases. They recall Yahweh’s statements that Israel, by their unbelief, reversed the roles and tested him (Exodus 17:7; Numbers 14:22; Deuteronomy 33:8). Rather than proving their character to God

through belief, they made God prove and re-prove his nature and character to them. Rather than trust in his goodness, they looked for him to continually re-establish it for them. The writer of Hebrews said they tested God by δοκιμασια, the very thing God is seeking to lead us to do regarding the faith. It is a reversal of roles that Israel attempted to foist on God.

The biblical commentary on this period supports that this is indeed what they attempted. It indicates that Israel's unbelief was often purposeful. They complained and whined to get something that would satisfy some craving or appetite of their flesh (Numbers 11:4; Deuteronomy 12:20; Psalm 106:14). They demonstrated that they were not so much interested in being related to Yahweh, but in indulging in those things that could come as benefits of his power. Their interest was not in ridding themselves of earthly cravings, but in indulging them. So their unbelief was intentional a means of gaining that which would gratify their cravings. As we read this record its intent is to see this in ourselves and repent of it continually so as not to fall into their tragic error and lose out on God's greatest blessing.

God's people can accept a very peripheral experience of him. We can occupy a spot out on the fringe and receive short-term blessing that is beneficial in the earthly sense. For the Israelites in the wilderness it involved food every day that came freely, it involved clothing that did not wear out (Deuteronomy 8:3-4). There is security in such a life and there are even enjoyment and a certain ease. It is in the end however, the crumbs from the table. It is not entering into the full exchange with the God of the universe who wishes to take our fleshly cravings and short-term appetites and replace them with an understanding of and pursuit of true food and true wealth that endures to eternal life. To settle for a kind of elevated experience of normal pursuits is to forfeit the experience of freedom and salvation that Yahweh wishes to lead us into. In the imagery of the Old Covenant this fringe life is dying on the desert and never seeing the promised land.

**3:10 Therefore I was angry with this generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; and they did not know my ways';**

The impure hearts of the Israelites who left Egypt violated and offended repeatedly the justice of God. They had seen enough of his goodness to trust him. But there were those things from their past they reverted to, emotional crutches that they allowed to take the place of trust in Yahweh. The record of those years is such that we catch glimpses of these lapses in trust and the accompanying reversion in their behavior. We see in the record that strange human behavior of subjected, abused people in which they emotionally retreat to the "security" of what they know. In the case of the Israelites, they tried to revert to the abuse of being slaves (Exodus 16:2; 17:3). We see in them legitimate scars, but the refusal to entrust fears to Yahweh so as to rise above old cycles.

Then there were their superstitions and false beliefs that they stubbornly clung to. These are barely spoken of by Moses, but we see them mentioned later in the prophets. They were certainly enabled to leave them behind, but they did not. So we find that they brought along and worshiped the gods of Egypt and continued willingly to be enslaved by those superstitions during the provocation (Amos 5:25-26; Acts 7:42-43).

It is instructive that the abuse of their years of servitude Yahweh appears to have understood and dealt with patiently and empathetically. And so they immediately witnessed great acts of salvation and even believed them (Exodus 14:29-31). But they did not progress in the implications of those experiences and grow in faith. They were held accountable to progress beyond old fears, to be enlightened by what their eyes saw of the goodness of Yahweh. It is important for us to understand the anger of Yahweh as being a result of reasonable and just expectations being violated. It was not a loss of temper, or the kind of irritability and frustration we might experience.

The writer of Hebrews reports two pronouncements made by Yahweh against the exodus generation. First, that they always went astray in their heart. Their eyes saw, their ears heard, their hands touched, and their mouths tasted the fruits of Yahweh's blessing and goodness. Their experience of slavery gave way to a very tangible and dramatic experience of God's power and goodness. So their outer beings experienced the evidence of the truth that they were now uniquely positioned with God and had no cause for anything but celebration. But they allowed their inner beings to roam unchecked, and old emotions, beliefs, notions, and fears to over-rule the testimony of all that was rationally shown to be true. They chose what was natural, customary and easy over what was revealed as true. In this they modeled to perfection the depth of the human problem.

Second, they did not know Yahweh's ways. God was not saying that they lacked information. The record is clear that God gave them repeated witness of his intentions, his ability, and his motives in their behalf that could be examined and experienced by the five human senses. The data and information abounded. But they resisted entering the more intimate relationship with Yahweh that this was meant to produce. As near as we can reconstruct, they enjoyed and craved the phenomena, but were reluctant to give up those fleshly, self-preservation agendas that occupied their inner beings (Psalm 106:13-15).

The knowledge spoken of here is that intimate abandonment of trust that makes one vulnerable to another. Yahweh was absolutely and utterly safe, but they refused to enter such relationship with him. The loss was theirs in that there was so much more about him they never came to experience. This has always been the case among God's covenant community. There are varied experiences of him among individuals and there are many who never come to know intimately his heart.

This verse then, marks a great tragedy that occurred in an entire generation of people who led each other into a very mediocre experience of Yahweh. It is instructive to us in three areas. First, that such spiritual drifting is typical of humanity, and so can happen to any of us. Our great challenge is to trust. Second, redemption assumes scars and a spiritual handicap. But redemption is also an expectation of a new era. It enables for a rising above the old through faith and trust in Yahweh. Three, there is a just, fair, and reasonable expectation that we rise to faith. God understands the damage of evil. But he gives freely his grace to lift us above all of it. The wilderness story clearly demonstrates both his grace and his just expectation of his family. Clearly and thankfully, Yahweh does not hold over our heads in this our membership in his family. But there come points at which our failure to trust his goodness will affect our personal experience of him. The very next statement will express how.

**3:11 As I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'**

This statement comes from the last verse in Psalm 95. That song ends quite differently than it began. It began with an invitation to celebrate Yahweh. "O come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; Let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation." The transition to the rather ominous sound of the ending comes as the song recites the hardness of heart that dramatically changed the fortunes of an entire generation. They walked through the Red Sea out of slavery. They walked under the cloud of Yahweh's protection, power, and provision, with the high hope of the promised land. They died on the desert one by one, never laying hold of that for which they were laid hold. The message of the Psalm is clear Let us kneel before Yahweh our maker, for he is our God! (verse 6-7). There is an urgency to our calling, something very real to be gained or lost.

The pronouncement of Yahweh against the wilderness generation is stated by him to have occurred in his anger. This does not mean it was motivated by anger, as if he lost control, over-reacted, and then was stuck managing the aftermath. We must remember that he knew of their failure before he chose them, which was in eternity past. The statement means only that anger was a primary emotion that he felt and demonstrated as he viewed their distrust of him. his anger grew out of an injustice that was being committed. They were craving evil things (Psalm 106:14), and out of these motives refusing to trust him. The entire picture painted by revelation shows that they wouldn't believe because they did not want to believe. It is this stubborn refusal to bow the knee to truth and to the leading of his Spirit that led to God's angry tone in the pronouncement. He was angry but did not sin. In fact, the injustice and the evil of it all demanded such a posture from him if he is indeed just and righteous.

What exactly is the pronouncement of Yahweh? It is that the generation who were refusing to trust him would not enter "rest." This pronouncement occurred in the aftermath of the report of the spies. The entire incident is given two chapters by Moses in his book of the Law (Numbers 13-14). The actual pronouncement is recorded in

Numbers 14: 22-23. The sentence encompasses all who are over twenty years of age (29), and that Caleb and Joshua are excluded from it. There is every evidence that those who were so sentenced continued to be cared for by Yahweh. They continued to eat Manna and to be watched over for good by him. So they experienced his mercies and special care even in this time of discipline, which blessing Moses recites and recaps to their offspring 40 years later (Deuteronomy 8:1-10). So the pronouncement is not that the covenant was over and the deal off. It was that they had squandered the opportunity to experience its fullness. There is every evidence that they continued to have experience with Yahweh as part of his covenant community.

So, those lacking faith were denied what Yahweh calls in Psalm 95 "rest." The Psalmist reached back to the Genesis account to borrow the term "rest." The account of the creation is meticulously presented as occurring over the span of six days. The seventh day it is reported, God rested. In three short verses it is stated that God did not work on the seventh day. There was something God saw as holy and significant about that rest. It led him to bless the seventh day and "sanctify" it (Genesis 2:3). None of the other days, with all the important and significant creative works that occurred on them, were memorialized in this way. So we see from the beginning "rest" held out to us by the Creator as particularly significant and holy, and to be remembered. It is likely that this act, before evil corrupted creation, was a provision for that future era. The idea that "rest" was so sacred to the Creator, would be present in the calendar and would rekindle hope that the turmoil and unrest brought by evil would not be forever. The later provision of Sabbaths would be a kind of proclamation that "rest" is a product of the salvation provided by Yahweh.

In the Numbers account this "rest" was a blessing that would be conveyed in the promised land. Israel was sentenced to wander on the journey, rather than arriving in that land. It should be carefully noted that the experience forfeited by Israel was not just real estate, though it was that. "Rest" meant safe arrival in the land, conquering it and then rest from attacks from their enemies, i.e., national peace. It also involved rest from want and lack, that through Yahweh's blessing the land would produce abundant livelihood for them. It meant rest from all manner of personal trauma, from disease to infertility. And so early on while they were still in Egypt, the land was described as a land of milk and honey (Exodus 3:8), blessed by Yahweh so that through it they would enter "rest."

The original pronouncement of Yahweh was that they would not "see" the land (Numbers 14:23). Since the land was the place where they would find "rest", Yahweh's pronouncement meant that they would not enter all that he wished to provide for them. Their loss was huge. Psalm 95 focuses on this loss of rest rather than on loss of the land, and this serves perfectly the purposes of the writer of Hebrews. The distinction between the land and the state of rest in the land is an important one that the author of Hebrews will speak to later. Indeed, Israel would eventually experience the land. The state of rest proved considerably more elusive.

The larger question that this raise is this; what is the application and lesson of this experience of Israel with respect to us? There has been a tendency to approach the individuals within that disobedient generation as a mixed bag, typical of individuals in the Christian era. And so there has arisen a doctrine of "professors and possessors". That teaching is that there is a large group within the covenant community that have many of the appearances that go with being a part of that community of God. They profess to be members in it. There are only a few, typified by Caleb and Joshua, who are God's children. The term "elect" has come to be used of these "possessors." The idea is that many gather at the thought of some experience with God. But he chooses only a few and gives them faith and they will enter the promised land and rest, both of which are seen in this line of thinking as typical of actual new birth and heaven. So by this interpretation the entire wilderness generation were "unregenerate" and so did not enter rest and will not be in heaven.

The clue that this may be a wrong interpretation of Moses' record of the events lies in the way in which Moses is presented in his own narrative. He too is excluded from entering rest because of "breaking faith" with Yahweh (Deuteronomy 32:51). If the sentence by Yahweh that denied entrance into the promised land equates to being denied entrance into heaven, then Moses must be excluded from heaven, an idea that is ludicrous from a Scriptural point of view.

If we look at how the matter is presented in Scripture, we find that entry into heaven has forever been governed by faith with respect to Yahweh's provision for sin. The entire Old Covenant was an agreement by which a people could experience Yahweh's company and blessing. The clear parallel between the experience of the wilderness generation and us is that the full experience of Yahweh's blessing comes about through growing faith and trust in him. Moses and an entire generation missed out on the full portion of God's blessing.

By this interpretation, faith is the currency of both entry into relationship with Yahweh and the progressive journey he has for his children. The entry demands that we trust his provision with respect to our sin. Blessing in the journey demands that we trust in his way of living life and so be weaned from our own instinctive ways. This is exactly how the writer to the Hebrews is beginning to use the example of the wilderness generation. He is consistent with Paul in his application of their lessons (1 Corinthians 10:1-13). The example of this wilderness generation is used to call believers up to a more mature trust in the truth.

At stake is the matter of entering into the full experience of sanctification, the immediate aim of salvation. It is the blessing that God wants us to partake of in this present life in an evil world. He longs to share it with us.

There is of course, a grander reality that we must bring to bear on our understanding of the Old Covenant. It was our "schoolmaster" to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:23-

24). The grander purpose all of this was serving was to instruct humanity on humanity. Through the story of Israel, including Moses and the wilderness generation, we can come to an understanding of our inability to earn God's blessing through obedience. From that perspective it was essential that the wilderness generation demonstrate through failure their inability. It was necessary that even their leader, Moses who was "faithful in all his house" demonstrate ultimately his own inability. It was necessary that the future generations of Israel fall short. And so we see a stark record of an unyielding fact in the record of Scripture. The fact is that "rest" cannot be entered into through our own merits. It is a gift mercifully given by God in response to continuing faith and trust in him. The writers of the New Testament are unanimous in reminding their readers to apply trust in Yahweh to real life matters and so enter the full experience of Yahweh's salvation. Our inability requires that there be a New Covenant if we are to behave as children of God (Deuteronomy 5:29; 29:4; 30:1-10).

There is no doubt that in the Scripture we see varying degrees in the individual experience of Yahweh's salvation among his people. We see babes, and we see the mature (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). We see people like those addressed in Hebrews who seem to get stuck in their journey (Hebrews 5:12-13). We see people who have not died to self. This all is rooted in distrust of Yahweh's goodness and power to sovereignly insure our welfare. It becomes a hindrance to our own spiritual progress and that of others (3 John 9).

The entire story of the wilderness generation should be seen as a lesson on this, the issue of the spiritual progress of God's people, what we term sanctification. This is not to say that all who were Israelites were justified. That is a matter of individual faith in Yahweh to forgive sin through a substitutional sacrifice. The entire record of the Exodus generation says very little about where individuals stood on this matter.

We simply do not know who and how many of the million-plus involved went to heaven or hell. What we know is that while in Egypt they were to sprinkle blood on their doorpost to avoid the judgment of the angel of Yahweh. This act of faith certainly prefigured belief in Christ. The text represents the entire congregation as having done this. We also know that as a congregation it is said that they came to believe in Yahweh and in his leadership of them through Moses (Exodus 14:30-31). We do not know if every single individual did these things and did them with the right motives. But the story treats them as a community of children of God who did these and who subsequently, days later, did not trust either in Yahweh's goodness or in Moses leadership. That is the story that God is seeking to tell. It provides the exact lesson the New Testament authors draw from it. That lesson is that a failure to persist in faith causes us to lose out on the fullness of the salvation experience. The lesson is about laying hold of the promises of Yahweh.

There are two observations that we can make regarding the Law and the wilderness generation, two of the key elements of the Old Testament story. These are

observations made by the New Testament writers based on the instruction they received from Christ. First, the Law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:23-24). Second, the wilderness generation is our example to keep us from fleshly Christianity (1 Corinthians 10:1-13).

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

This verse begins with a single word command that could be rendered as the NASB has rendered it, or by the words "Take care," or "See to it," or even "Watch out!" It suggests a real and present danger. It suggests that there is an enemy that could subtly and unnoticeably do its dangerous work unless we are alert.

This command is immediately followed by the word "brethren." That is likely because we usually view the danger it is about to warn against as not present in and among people of God. Our mentality can be expressed in this way: How could unbelief come to be present among people who believe in one God, Yahweh, the Creator of all things? How could it be present in me, of all people? The addition of this term is a way for the author to convey, "Yes, I'm talking about you, people who have believed!" One has only to look at the position many Christian expositors have taken on the interpretation of Hebrews to find that we just don't think that what happened to the wilderness generation could ever happen to genuine Christians. The remainder of the verse reinforces the idea that unbelief and evil can be present in any of our hearts.

Amid this pessimism however, we must note that since the command to watch out for unbelief in ourselves is proof that it can be present, the command is also proof that we can combat it. If we are told to do something, then we can be certain that grace is given to us for obedience. Unbelief can come to be present in us, but it need not persist.

The phrase that defines the danger that can occur within our hearts is fairly specific. It should be understood something like this "an evil heart, the sort produced by unbelief, caused by turning away from the living God." There are two impressions left by the entire statement. First, an evil heart comes about because of a turning away in distrust from something formerly embraced about Yahweh and his truth. Second, the terms that accompany this warning, "lest" and "should be" and "anyone" are strung together in a way that indicates that this condition can arise in any of the readers at any future time.

The anecdote for such a condition is in these very words that describe the danger. It is to keep our relationship to God vibrant and healthy. There are turns that we take that take us from the place of listening to our Lord. They can happen in an instant of anger, covetousness, greed, or lust. They can happen gradually, when something good becomes idolatry and we can't pinpoint the precise instant it did so. They can happen

if we allow bitterness to take root. The fact is that we must be alert always for drift in ourselves, because we can travel surprisingly far very quickly. There should be multiple moments each day when we simply ask ourselves if we are in touch with our Maker, Savior, and Friend. Spirituality and obedience grow out of this relationship with him. When the relationship falters, unbelief finds room to settle in and that turns our inner beings to evil things. We become outwardly who we have allowed ourselves to be inwardly, and so an evil heart characterized by unbelief will soon be made manifest through deeds. That is how the tragedy of the wilderness generation came to be.

But there is something else that God has provided that the wilderness generation did not have. It is a primary resource for us in keeping our relationship with the Lord healthy. The next verse will speak to this remedy.

**3:13 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.**

Jumping ahead to what the author will eventually explain, since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ a new covenant has been instituted between ourselves and God. By the former covenant between God and his people we received blessing from God through obedience and conformity to the Law. That made a full experience of God's blessing essentially impossible. No person could hope to experience the ongoing company of his Spirit with them. Their hearts simply took them in the wrong direction too often. God projected this situation and the inadequacy of his people and promised that one day he would change the Covenant and their hearts (Deuteronomy 30:6, Jeremiah 31:31-34).

The new covenant was possible because Christ died for our sin. It put believers right with God with no outstanding debt for sin. God's Spirit could join himself to them because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for them and convey every spiritual blessing to them. And so he did (Ephesians 1:3-14).

This created enormous potential for relationship. First, each person's relationship with God could move to a whole new depth. God was joined to their inner being accessing their deepest thoughts. The resource that was formerly outside them was now in them. Second, their relationships to each other now had new potential. If one person still became blind to unbelief, another who was seeing the matter clearly could see that and sound the alarm. God's Spirit is now constantly orchestrating activity among his people, all of it meant to encourage and build up their faith.

It is this that the author is referring too here when he gives the command to encourage one another. We are to follow leadings the Holy Spirit will give us with respect to building up the faith of others. He will persistently call us to help each other against what the author calls the hardening that can happen through the deceitfulness of sin. The Spirit's presence in us does not necessarily make sin itself less deceptive. We can

still be taken in by it. The Spirit's presence does not inoculate us against hardness of heart. We can still quench the Spirit, desensitizing ourselves because we simply want to do what he is telling us not to do.

The writer says that this can happen to any one of us. It begins with deception. He does not say if it is real or willful. In the end it is both. We want something so badly we can erect a whole theology whereby it becomes in our mind God's will for us. But our justification of ourselves is all a fantasy. That is just the nature of sin, and it is not so much the nature of the sin outside us that brings this about. It is the sin in us and what we allow it to do to our thought processes. It plants seeds of doubt in God's goodness. We begin thinking that what is good for us can be found apart from what he has clearly said, and apart from what our conscience is dictating. It is this deception within us that starts us down the diversionary path that we are to guard against in each other. As we go down it against the voice of our own conscience, our conscience becomes calloused to our sin, and it no longer bothers us. We must spot it in ourselves this developing hardness, and we must spot it and warn against it in others. This is how the body of Christ is to work. We are to serve one another specifically in this matter "day after day."

There is the thought expressed here that this is a never-ending need in us. Encouragement must happen "day after day." There is also the thought of being faithful in encouragement as a routine. The Holy Spirit orchestrates such a routine through the Church. There are certain public things that happen on schedule day after day. This has been true in the Christian community for centuries. There are also the day-to-day relationships involving prayer and Spirit led conversation that happen more spontaneously in the life of the Church. All of this is critical in terms of us avoiding the deception of sin within us.

In the phrase "while it is still called today" there is a rather ominous and peculiar expression of time. This is an expression of the present time, in view of a belief in the appointed Day of the Lord (Isaiah 2:12-22). The Bible projects that the present age will end. Its seemingly perpetual, and rather benign rhythms where things, regimes, and people come and go, is not perpetual. It certainly is not benign. Just as it had a beginning, it has an end (2 Peter 3:1-13). Just as there is a season in which evil appears to be unpunished and unrestrained, so there is a time it will be judged and eliminated. That coming era when good will be rewarded and evil punished is what we are to use the present to prepare for. Once the present is gone, there will be no further preparation. We will have that which our faith or deeds deserve. It will be unalterable.

The Bible's teaching is that this is why our present attention to our faith is so critical. There is no other time allotted for it. It is because of the certainty of a coming age that matters entrusted to us by God are of the greatest urgency.

**3:14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end;**

For the second time in Hebrews we come to a conditional statement made by the author that involves continuing in something "firm until the end." The first statement said that we become Christ's house if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end (3:6). That is not a reference to membership in his family. It is a statement about a becoming a functioning person in his family, a part of that which facilitates all that his household is accomplishing. So it is not a statement about going to heaven versus going to hell. It is a statement about being present in the life and activity of a family rather than being an absentee member of it.

This second statement speaks to becoming a "partaker of Christ." This is the third time this word partaker has been used. To us the word evokes the image of eating. And so our mind tends to go to truth such as that expressed by Jesus where he illustrates belief in him with a figure of speech, describing it as eating "the flesh of the Son of Man" (John 6:53). So when we arrive at the term "partaker of Christ" we tend to read "believer in Christ." We see this verse then as a teaching about who is truly a believer, and the natural deduction is that our belief is genuine if it endures.

Before assuming that meaning we must remind ourselves of how this author uses the term "partaker." We addressed this the first time the word occurred in 1:9, where most English versions render it with a word like companion or partner. The Greek term is μεταχουσ. It is formed from the preposition which means "with" in compound with the word "have." In this case it is itself the rendering of a Hebrew word that describes one who is joined to another. This is the word which describes classic close friendship (Ecclesiastes. 4:10). It is used to describe the close friends one would have in their wedding party (Song

8:13). It is used of those who band together for a common purpose such as battling a common enemy (Judges 20:11). It is used in a bad sense of those whose hearts share an evil agenda (Proverbs 28:24). In the New Testament it is used six times, five of which occur in Hebrews. The only other occurrence is in Luke 5:7, where it is used of the relationship between Jesus' disciples.

Therefore we can observe that μεταχουσ, "partakers," is a term that describes those who share a common bond and friendship, like the author envisions between the angels and Christ. From our viewpoint, we would describe it as one of close, personal friendship of the sort that is entered into only on limited occasions. In the remainder of its uses in Hebrews it is used to describe the special relationship that exists between the readers and the heavenly calling (3:1). It is used to describe a relationship between themselves and Christ which they can enter (3:14). It is used of the relationship between a hypothetical group of believers and the Holy Spirit (6:4). It is used of the relationship of the sons of God and the discipline of God (12:8).

In each of the word's uses in Hebrews after this verse, it is rendered in the NASB by the word "partakers.' The idea of being an active participant with someone or something and of intimate knowledge of it is being conveyed. It is a companionship in cause and purpose

To speak negatively, this is not a word that can be construed to speak of one who has passing knowledge of someone or something or mere knowledge of its existence. There is the idea of mingling together that is inherent in the word.

We conclude that as in previous and subsequent uses this word is employed by the author to urge stability in the faith. He is describing entry into partnership with Christ in kingdom business, a sharing in the agenda that is his heart, and an eventual sharing in the return that goes with that investment. To share in the partnership, we cannot abandon its interests. To the degree that we stop investing, our role begins changing. When we cease growing in Christ, we become part of those the Church must rescue. We are no longer part of the rescue team. We are in a sense the Church's customer rather than a partner in its service. We are consumers rather than contributors. This is the entire issue that is occupying the mind of the author of Hebrews and motivating his message.

The nation of Israel provided a great illustration of this weakness that lies in humanity. They passed through the parted sea together and watched together as the dreaded army of Pharaoh was miraculously destroyed before their eyes by Yahweh. It had to be quite a moment to stand and watch as the most powerful army of the world simply was brushed aside and reduced to nothing. It provided a dramatic moment for the nation that is recorded in Exodus 14:31. "And when Israel saw the great power which the LORD had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses." It was awe-inspiring! Moses wrote a song! They sang it together commemorating the event! But the euphoria and trust in Yahweh and Moses didn't last. Just days later they were grumbling! (Exodus 15:24). The grumbling became common so that God disciplined them, and they lost the opportunity to experience the fullness of the blessing he intended for them. That this is in the mind of the author is proved by the fact that the verses that follow will take us back to their experience.

So the author's statement here has to do with stirring the readers from the dangerous state of a lethargic faith. His passion is for us to become partners with Christ. We can become great assets to Kingdom business. The author and the Holy Spirit do not want us to slip back so that we become those in need of rescue. The condition we must rise to he describes as "holding fast the beginning of our assurance firm to the end." In the imagery of the Exodus, he is calling on us never to lay aside the lessons like those who passed through the Red Sea did. Hang on to that memory, the trust that you felt there, nurture it and develop it. Seek it, so that it gets even stronger, and you become

through this faith an even more productive instrument in the hand of God, a partner with Christ in the great work of Yahweh.

**3:15 while it is said, 'Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked me.'**

An expression of time begins this verse. It gives a time frame during which the action of the previous verse is occurring. The author's intent is to show that we can become partakers of Christ through holding firm, even while the words of Psalm 95:7 stand and are being spoken to us. While this warning command is for God's people in every era and is being sounded to us, we can obey it and rise above the danger it is warning us about. This is an important point.

The warning of Psalm 95:7, which is really the warning of the spiritual catastrophe experienced by the wilderness generation, is not a prediction of our spiritual trajectory. Even in the aftermath of the colossal failure of the Old Covenant, we can experience the antithesis, the promised land of spiritual blessing. We do so by enduring in our trust of Yahweh. This is possible because of the new covenant with its forgiveness of our sin and our resultant union with the Holy Spirit.

It is important to view Israel's failure in the right way. What is true about it is that they demonstrate the problem of our fallen state. They demonstrate perfectly why we cannot earn back the blessing that was lost when Adam fell into sin. They demonstrate that our fallen state means we have become evil rather than just that we have done evil. They demonstrate that our hearts take us in an evil direction even when a good path is clearly laid out before us. They demonstrate that even if God becomes our friend, pardoning our sin, enduring our fallenness, and giving us powerful experiences with him, we will persist in evil. This is true and it was predictable in Israel's case. It continues to be true of all people, until God miraculously changes our makeup at the core of our being through joining his Spirit to our spirits. By the New Covenant standards, Israelites were people of God, forgiven and adopted by him, yet essentially unchanged inside. These Old Covenant people of Yahweh had intimate experiences with him, but not the experience of being joined to his Spirit.

It is not true that Israel failed because they weren't really "saved," or "elect." They failed because the evil within them was not addressed as it is in us through the New Covenant. It is not true that their failure means we too will fail, though it is certain we can. Again, that is the point of the author to Hebrews in this verse and in his entire treatise. The new covenant makes us essentially different. We can endure in faith where they failed, due to the grace of God which has placed his righteousness within us (Romans 1:1617). While the warning of their lives was being sounded to them (Numbers 14:11), they persistently failed.

While their recorded history warned their offspring of their failure, the offspring failed (2 Kings 17:7-23; 2 Chronicles 36:15-21). Finally, while the writings of the prophets warned the later offspring in the wake of God's discipline of them through exile and captivity, they too failed and rejected their Messiah (Matthew 23:37-39; Acts 2:22-23).

While this ominous history of spiritual catastrophe hung over the early Christians, they faced a new prospect. It is certain that they too could fail, but they need not. Because of the new covenant and the new heart Yahweh had given them, they could become partners of him in the details of their lives to be a part of his great earthly enterprise. This could happen on the same planet, with the same spiritual challenges, in the same mortal bodies that had added up to so much spiritual failure. The New Covenant equips us to live the blessing rather than the curse. Through the work and power of the Holy Spirit, we must endure. We can be a different story even while the old story continues to sound its warning. The danger of that warning is very real for us. But it is also true that we can endure in our faith.

**3:16 For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses?**

The writer's point in this verse seems to be to point out the failure of the entire generation. We know that

Caleb and Joshua were exceptions and God allowed them to live in the promised land. But the writer of Hebrews wishes to focus on the universal nature of the failure of an entire generation. This seems to be the focus of the Pentateuch as well. In fact Moses presents himself as having fallen short of God's desire for him and unable to enter the land. This author does not go into Moses' failure but instead states the failure of all those he led.

This is a remarkable thing to ponder, that among so many the number who rose to faith is not worth mentioning. This is especially significant when we realize that God has a remnant mentality. The smallness of a movement seems not to bother him (2 Kings 19:18; Romans 11:1-5). There was not such a remnant among the wilderness generation, and this is likely the point the author of Hebrews chooses to demonstrate here. The entire story certainly captures the degree of difficulty involved in fallen humanity rising to trust Yahweh.

Again we see the idea of provocation here, that which continually and repeatedly reopens and irritates wounds. From God's point of view, the Exodus does not to evoke a pleasant memory. It was a time during which he was continually goaded by his own people. There was so much the Exodus could have been.

**3:17 And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?**

The story of the forty years of wandering presents Yahweh in a very interesting light. There is no doubt they were cared for by him in very special ways during that period (Deuteronomy 1:31-32; 2:7).

Their needs for food and clothing were miraculously met (Deuteronomy 8:1-5). The imagery used in Scripture of Yahweh's posture toward them during this time is that of a father caring for a son (Deuteronomy 1:31; 8:5). Yet it is certainly true that he was angry with them and that they paid the price for their willfulness.

In sentencing them to forty years of wandering, Yahweh told the Israelites that they would bear their guilt for one year for each day they spied out the land. They spied out the land for forty days, so they would wander for 40 years. During this time, he said, they would know his "opposition" (Numbers 14:34). So during those forty years they saw his incredible care for them, yet they felt his opposition as well. The point of the writer to the Hebrews is that it is possible for God's people to live out their years in a spiritual wilderness. We find ourselves there because of disobedience, specifically, a persistent failure to trust God's goodness enough to do as he has directed.

The language of the writer of Hebrews is succinct here. Their bodies, or corpses "fell in the wilderness." That description is blunt and terse. The forty-year period was a time of death in Israel. We are told that not one of those over twenty years of age who left Egypt, except Caleb and Joshua, survived the forty years (Numbers 14:28-30). That meant that they buried somewhere around a million of their own, 2,000 per month or close to 60 people per day! So though they experienced the care of Yahweh each day, there was this steady stream of death that reminded them of their unbelief. It really was and is an awful state to be in. The writer of Hebrews will describe it further in his writing in hopes that he can lead all the readers to loath the thought of spiritual lethargy.

**3:18 And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient?**

This verse makes three observations about the text of Psalm 95 that we must have in our thinking as we ponder our own spirituality. First, Yahweh swore that these people would not enter his rest. In other words, we find that people to whom Yahweh had attached himself and made certain promises, he made an oath against! This is plainly true in the language of the original account of the incident in Numbers 14 (Numbers 14:28, 35). This did not mean he was unfaithful and did not keep his promises to Israel. He had made the promise to bless the descendants of Abraham and was free to choose which ones would experience that blessing. In this case their children were blessed. But this generation received a much lesser portion of Yahweh's blessing than they might have. Their lot, brought upon themselves by their own unbelief was the

ultimate curse—to have Yahweh swear that you would not be among those of his children that would experience his fullest blessing.

We find that though Yahweh's family members are special objects of his mercy and grace, they still experience his justice. In this case, the discipline of God did not allow this generation to reverse its fortunes (See Numbers 14:39-45). It involved a decree against them and a tangible loss on their part that they could not gain back through repentance. That is a point the author of Hebrews will make much of later.

A second observation the author of Hebrews makes is that the real loss on their part was of Yahweh's rest. Rest is an important idea that involves safety and security. The greatness of the promised land lay in this, that it was a place of Yahweh's presence where Israel's daily needs would be met bountifully and where they would rest and celebrate regularly his abundant goodness. It meant rest from all the anxiety and uncertainty of normal life. It meant security in relationship to the Creator of heaven and earth. They would be a model community for all nations to see of rest, the thing that eludes earth's people. In contrast to the nations they would be at rest from the enormous work of appeasing multiple false and whimsical gods. They would rest from all the superstition surrounding the spiritual world. They would rest from the fear of death. They would rest from the struggle of survival. Yahweh sentenced this generation of Israelites to a certain amount of living on the same treadmill that all the other nations live on. They would never enter the full understanding and experience of Yahweh that would complete their freedom from slavery in Egypt.

A third observation made by the author of Hebrews here is that it was their disobedience that brought this about. Yahweh's sentence was based in fact; it was not whimsical. In the next statement the author will clarify the precise nature of their disobedience as being unbelief, but for now he simply says that they were sentenced to wander for forty years because of disobedience. When we look at the original account of the incident, we find that the advice of the spies was split (Numbers 13:27-33). Caleb is the only one reported to have spoken against the majority opinion, though it is certain that Joshua stood with Caleb in opposing the majority (Numbers 14:38). The majority opinion was that trying to take the land would be fool hearty. There came a moment when the negative statement of the ten carried the day and the Israelites collectively decided to reject the leadership of Moses and Aaron, appoint new leaders and head back to Egypt.

This was the point at which the unbelief in their hearts came out in tangible action. In the minds of the congregation who listened to the report of the spies, a decision was made. This is where they disobeyed. Interestingly, the sin occurred simultaneously in the hearts of all of them. They joined themselves to a position of unbelief. They stood against all that God had revealed to them about the land being theirs. They decided against all the evidence they had seen of Yahweh's power and ability. In doing so they decided against God. It is at this point that God intervenes and passes judgment on

them. It was a sentence they wept over (Numbers 14:39). They even repented of their action (Numbers 14:40). But they could not reverse God's sentence.

The point of the author of Hebrews is that the sentence came because of tangible disobedience. There was the decision to reject Yahweh's leadership and his destination for them, appoint new leaders and head back to Egypt. Their action in the wake of the decision confirmed that their repentance and sorrow was just a new look for this willfulness that was deep in their beings. This was not lost on Moses who begged them to submit themselves to Yahweh's will for them (Numbers 14:39-45).

The three observations made by the author of Hebrews in this verse can be summarized in this way. Yahweh's people can take a stand against Yahweh, which he will take sworn action against. That action will result in them missing out on the fullness of their experience with him. This has far-reaching, eternal implications.

**3:19 And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.**

This verse clarifies precisely what the lesson of the wilderness generation is that we must carry forward, learn and re-learn ourselves. Their point of failure was unbelief. Unbelief is distrust. Distrust is what life in a fallen world among fallen people teaches us to do. It is instinctive as we suffer various abuses and violations. Perhaps they rightly had come to distrust people, given their births into slavery in Egypt. They had never known anything but beatings and harsh treatment—that is until Yahweh's rescue of them. So distrust was understandably rooted in them. God was patient with their distrust. But he justly and rightly expected them to learn to trust him.

Now in Moses' narrative we can find many sins the Israelites fell into. There were many instances where members of the community broke different laws of the covenant. But God's assessment of the matter is stated concisely here, they did not trust him. This concise assessment by God means two things are true.

First, distrust of him was the transgression that was the root of the others. All others are symptomatic. Second, distrust of him is the transgression that always proves offensive in a final way to God.

Now, what exactly did they not believe? From Moses' narrative it seems evident that they did not trust Yahweh's character, namely, that he was good and had their good in view. They persistently reverted to a fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-17), and in moments that tested them, they did not believe that Yahweh could be trusted to protect and bring them good (Exodus 14:12; 16:2-3; 17:3). Yahweh regarded their unbelief as putting him to the test (Numbers 14:22). By this he meant that they refused to believe the implication of miracle after miracle that they had seen with their own eyes. These were miracles that clearly revealed his care for them and his intention to bring his power to bear for their safety and salvation. They tested him by making him start anew, as if he

was unknown to them. But more significant, they tested him by demanding things they wanted and desired for themselves as "signs" (Numbers 11:4). They did not trust in what he provided for them, that it would be the good they desired. They did not trust until they saw miracles on their own terms, with their own eyes. In each case when trial and difficulty arose, they would leap to the conclusion they were going to die, and worse, that their death was Moses' and Yahweh's twisted intent.

So there are two lessons to be learned from the wilderness generation. First, that this inability to trust whatever Yahweh provides as good is the great debilitating disease of humanity. It does not miraculously depart when we believe in Jesus Christ, though that is a critical starting point. It can and does flare up in believers and keep us from entering that state of rest that God has for us. Second, by his Spirit we must strengthen our trust in Yahweh's goodness. This is the battle involved in maturing as a child of God. We will rest to the degree that we embrace his power to bring goodness to us through any and every circumstance regardless of how they initially might look.

# HEBREWS 4

**4:1 Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, anyone of you should seem to have come short of it.**

The warnings of the previous chapter are summarized here. The point of them is that we too can fail to enter "rest." The physical feature of the Old Covenant, the promised land, is not our objective. The spiritual state that the people would have been in had they believed to enter the land is still ours to experience. It is captured through the term "rest" and is entered into through a growing trust in Yahweh.

"Rest" is a term borrowed by the author of Hebrews from Psalm 95, which he quoted in the previous chapter (2:7-11). The Psalmist himself had reached back to the Genesis account to borrow the term "rest." The account of the creation is meticulously presented as occurring over the span of six days. The seventh day it is reported, God rested. The idea that God rested and did no work is repeated in consecutive verses (Genesis 2:2-3). There was something God saw as holy and significant about that rest. It led him to bless the seventh day and "sanctify" it (Genesis 2:3). None of the other days, with all the important and significant creative works that occurred on them, were memorialized in this way. So we see from the beginning "rest" held out to us by the Creator as particularly significant and holy, and to be remembered. It is likely that this act, before evil corrupted creation, was a provision for that future era. The idea that "rest" was so sacred to the Creator would be present in the calendar and would rekindle hope that the turmoil and unrest brought by evil would not be forever. The later provision of Sabbaths would be a kind of proclamation that rest, and salvation are found in turning aside to Yahweh.

Psalm 95 employs a word shift that is important. The original report in Moses' narrative of this sentencing of the wilderness generation by Yahweh states that he said that none of them would "see" the land (Numbers 14:23). Implicit in that pronouncement is the idea that they would not experience the promises that were connected to life in the land. They would not experience rest from attacks from their enemies. They would not experience rest from want and lack. They would not experience rest from various wasting diseases.

But perhaps most importantly, they would not experience rest from the craving and wanting that drives humans to unhealthy work and vain, empty, futile pursuits, nor the immoral pursuits that bring so much pain. The land had been presented to them as one flowing with milk and honey that through Yahweh's blessing would provide a lifestyle characterized by rest (Exodus 3:8).

The Holy Spirit, working through the writer of Psalm 95, inspires a word shift that brings out this loss. Yahweh's pronouncement there is said to be that "They shall not enter my rest." So a shift has occurred that is fitting and proper. The loss was not so

much the loss of property. It was the loss of "rest," the experience of the full blessing of Yahweh.

It is this same loss that all of Christ's people can incur. Though the promise of a physical land is not our focus, the "rest" that would have been experienced in that land is a promise that remains, a point that will be developed in some detail in this chapter. The problem Hebrews is addressing is that we too can falter in our trust in Yahweh's good way. We can allow ourselves to be suspicious of the outcome of obedience. Like Israel, we can learn nothing from history of his trustworthiness. We can trust him in matters of forgiveness for sin, but not in the pragmatic matters of life. It is as if we assign him a theological slot, but not a particularly practical one. We go on to shape our lives by our own wisdom and moral standards that please us. When we do this, we forfeit rest. Our experience of him is downgraded. Our quality of life is downgraded to the level of vanity; we have allowed him to save us from the penalty of sin but not allowed him to save us from much else. It is this down-graded Christianity that the author of Hebrews is warning against.

We are to fear this. The author's wording represents him as gathering us all together in a huddle, arm in arm, and saying "Let's live in fear of this danger!! Let's avoid it together" he is rallying us together against this silent spiritual killer. The fear being advocated here is a fear of our own fleshliness. It is a healthy recognition that we fall very naturally into this marginal experience of Christ. We have only to live by our instincts and we will sink to it.

The message and theme of Hebrews is now plainly evident. There is a legitimate danger of an inferior experience of Christ. Though hard to imagine from a theological point of view, any Christian during any era who looks around the community of believers recognizes this phenomenon.

**4:2 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,**

The good news we have had preached to us is readily identifiable. It is the good news of Jesus Christ, who died and, in his death, paid our debt to God (1 Corinthians 15:1-3). The proof of the truth of this lies in the fact that he was raised from the dead (1 Cor 15:4-8). All who believe in him receive forgiveness of sin and are promised everlasting life (John 3:16). They are joined to God in their spirits and so are given capacity for a journey in which they can experience every blessing that is in him (Ephesians 1:3). What we must believe to begin the journey is that in Jesus him, God has made provision for our salvation. What we must trust to experience the full blessing of salvation is to "rest" in God's goodness. We must trust that what he has prescribed for us is good. That trust will lead us to pursue it with all the energy his Spirit has placed in us. So by such faith we are saved from the penalty of sin and enter into a myriad of ongoing salvation experiences from the power of sin.

The good news that the wilderness generation had preached to them was of the same vintage. It related to God's plan of salvation. Though the central figure of that plan, Jesus Christ, had not become a man, the plan was in place and operating. The good news they had preached to them was not what we could call "Christ specific." But it was of Yahweh's love for them and his desire to bring them blessing, or "rest." It is written concisely by Moses in Exodus 2:24-25. "So God heard their groaning; and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of them." It is stated by God in Exodus 3:7-8. "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I'm aware of their sufferings. So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land flowing with milk and honey...." The good news they had preached to them was of "rest" from their burdens of servitude to the Egyptians. Specifically the news was of God's personal attachment to them, of his intervention in their behalf, and of his plan to take them safely to a land of their own, put them at "rest" in it, free from every vain, empty and painful pursuit.

The parallels between their experience and ours are clear. They had to believe in Yahweh and trust that he could and would deliver them from the Egyptians. The ultimate expression of that was in the first Passover, when they brushed blood on the doorpost of their dwellings. All who so believed were freed from slavery to Pharaoh and never experienced it again. Like us, they too had to trust in Yahweh's goodness. There was a myriad of moments when they were called to trust his way over their own and so choose to obey him. This would have brought them into the land and into the "rest" that he desired to give them. It is precisely at such points they continually failed. The result was a minimal experience of Yahweh. They were freed as slaves and cared for in their wandering. But they never experienced all that could have been theirs. It is this that the author of Hebrews is concerned about in our experience. We can make the same mistake and fail to experience God's "rest." The error is a trust error.

The author of Hebrews uses the word profit, or benefit, to describe what is sacrificed through a lack of trust. The wilderness generation did not benefit as they could have from God's clear provision for them, simply because they did not trust as they should. Their lack of trust imposed a ceiling on their experience of Yahweh's salvation.

This lack of trust is described in an important way. The author says that the good news did not benefit them because it "was not united by faith in those who heard." An exact rendering of the Greek text here would be as follows; the message heard was not mixed with faith in those who heard.

The word rendered in the NASB by "united" is found in 1 Corinthians 12:24. There it describes the strategic composition of the body of Christ, specifically the spiritual gift mix that God has brought about for his sovereign purposes. This "mixing together" of

the gifts within the body of Christ is not random. It is presented as a critical and strategic mingling of elements that brings about a precise and effectual result.

It is likely that in the mind of the writer of Hebrews there is something of that meaning in view in the usage of that word here. There is spiritual ignition that occurs when the message of truth mixes with faith and trust inside a hearer. It was dramatically evident in Caleb and Joshua in contrast to the rest of the spies (Numbers 13:30-33). Truth is a catalyst that when mixed with faith and trust produce God-centered action. The result is movement into the arena of God's blessing and the "rest" that comes with it. When trust is missing, the best that will happen is a marginal outward conformity.

**4:3 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.**

The writer of Hebrews is moving toward a conclusion that will be stated in verse 9. The conclusion he wishes to take us toward is that there is a state of rest God's people can enter. It is a spiritual state that relates to our inner being, rather than a physical one that relates to a land and geographical place, or even a lack of effort. Though the promised land is not the objective God has for us, this state of rest Isaiah and indeed, even in the promised land this state was the objective of God for the wilderness generation. This verse marks the beginning of a series of statements that will move us toward that conclusion.

The first phrase states the fact that some are currently entering Yahweh's rest. That is a key idea. The first word in the Greek text can be rendered with the English phrase, "we are entering". So the author wants the reader to know that though the physical promised land is not the objective of our journey, the state of rest Isaiah It is currently being entered. Entrance is being gained by all who pursue fully trust in Yahweh.

With the first phrase then, the author establishes the fact that the presence of faith brings about a significant blessing in our day, as it would have in their day. Of course the opposite is true as well, that a lack of faith brings about a significant loss in our day, just as it did in their day. This is a fact that the next phrase, a quote from Psalm 95 takes us back to.

The little phrase "just as" between these first two phrases can confuse us. It joins the positive statement "we are entering…" to the negative statement, "I swore in my wrath they shall not enter." At first glance these two phrases seem unrelated. They are not. This little phrase "just as" is meant to show us that the state of rest we can enter into through belief is the same one they were denied due to their unbelief. Though the promised land is out of the equation, the state of rest is not. Just as they were denied entry through unbelief, we are gaining access to rest through belief. The two phrases together show that the author's focus here is the existence of this state of rest. This

state of rest is the constant that has been present and accessible to all who sufficiently trust Yahweh with the details of their life through the millenniums of time.

The remainder of this verse and the ones that follow attempt to reinforce this idea that there is a state of rest that exists apart from where one lives physically. This state is one that Yahweh himself is in. He has been in this state of rest since his creative acts of the first six days. On the seventh day he rested, and that continues to the present. But the fact that he is resting, does not mean that all of creation joins him in rest. That is proven by his definitive oath in which he denied the wilderness generation access into the state of rest he was in. Though they were his people, and he was resting, because of their unbelief they did not share his experience. This is precisely what unbelief robs us of—entering the full experience of God.

This verse then, ends with the idea that God is resting. That is the idea the author carries forward and reinforces in the next two verses.

**4:4 For He has thus said somewhere concerning the seventh day, 'And God rested on the seventh day from all His works.'**

This quote from Genesis 2:2 is the beginning of evidence offered by the author that God is resting today and has been since bringing the world we know into existence. It is the definitive statement that God stopped creating and rested. He did not need more. All creation needed was provided. Interestingly, there is no statement in the Genesis account, or in any of the Biblical writings that God ever resumed creating and working. It is revealed plainly that he ceased, but nowhere is it stated than he went back to work. This is not stated by the writer of Hebrews directly, but it is implicit in the second half of the evidence that he offers in the next verse.

**4:5 and again in this passage, 'They shall not enter My rest.'**

These words from Psalm 95 are quoted once again. They are written thousands of years after the time recorded in Genesis 2:2, when on the seventh day God rested. The idea implicit is that God was still resting at the time of the Exodus. He was also still resting at the time the appeal and exhortation of Psalm 95 was written. Since creation then, God has been in a perpetual state of rest, and it was this rest that he has invited humanity back into.

This brings us to an interesting point. The potential at creation was for perpetual rest. God made humanity to live in partnership with him in this state of rest. And so the rest began for them the day after they were created. They were not self-sufficient. But God's goodness and power, working in and through creation, would supply all that they lacked. Adam and Eve were the first to refuse this rest. They could not rest in Yahweh's goodness and live in a state of trust in him for the things they did not know. They were attracted to wisdom (Genesis 3:6). This seems to be an important factor in

their original temptation. The prospect of knowing for themselves, of working for and orchestrating their own welfare and good appealed to them, rather than resting. The result was that the wisdom they gained was destructive and they forfeited the rest they enjoyed in relationship to God. Their own work became perpetual, the striving for their own needs, both real and perceived,

The author's main point here is that God is at rest. He lives in this state of being and invites humanity to join him in it. His offer is to bless them and embrace them under his wise and loving care. None are able to enter the fullness of this blessing in this life, though many trust that he is its source, and they embrace his promise and plan to deliver it to them. In doing that they find a partial experience of that rest. They will inherit it when his plan has run its course.

**4:6 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,**

With this partial sentence the writer gives the state of things between God and humankind as far as us joining him in this state of rest. He says that it remains for some to enter it. In other words, though the wilderness generation failed to gain God's blessing, others can do so. To the present time the invitation to enter this state of rest that he is in remains open to all who trust in Yahweh.

The failure of the wilderness generation is re-stated. First, they had the good news preached to them. As stated earlier, this was the good news that the Creator God, Yahweh, had seen their sorrow and trouble and had come down to rescue them, lead them out of slavery into a land of their own (Exodus 3:7-8). He would bless them there and give them "rest" on every side (Deuteronomy 12:10). This was their good news. Second, they failed to enter because of unbelief. The NASB has rendered the word disobedience. The actual word is απειθειαν, formed by joining the word πειθω, meaning to convince, with the α privative. So it means not convinced or unbelieving.

Presently then, some are entering into Yahweh's rest, even though others failed to enter rest due to unbelief.

**4:7 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.'**

This continues the sentence begun in the previous verse. The author's interest in Psalm 95 is narrow here. He wants to call attention to the time frame expressed in it by David. This means he is only interested presently in one word. The word "today" indicates that from David's perspective in his day, rest could be either forfeited or gained. So the failures of previous generations over many years, had not negated at all the potential to enter the rest and safety of Yahweh's presence. To all who do not harden their hearts, rest can be gained.

This idea is ultimately offered to show the readers that this is their present situation as well. But for now the point is that the offer extended to the wilderness generation was still being extended unchanged to the people of David's day, who were living in the land, a fact the author will pick up in the next verse.

**4:8 For if Joshua had given them rest, he would not have spoken of another day after that.**

The author makes an important observation here. Conquering the land and living in it did not automatically mean living in rest. The Israelites had been warned extensively of this (Deuteronomy 28). Despite the best efforts of Joshua and Caleb, the years that followed their leadership and influence confirmed this truth. Trust in Yahweh was too soon cast aside in favor of the pursuit of other gods. The book of Judges records these spiritual wandering of the Israelites. It is a book of unrest, turmoil, danger and oppression. Living in the land did not equal rest. Yahweh's rest proved very illusive because of hardness of heart and unbelief.

It is this history that inspired the words of David in Psalm 95. The story of him leading Israel, along with the songs he wrote reveal that David was well informed through the book of the law of Moses of all that Yahweh wished to bring about through Israel. He knew of the rest that had eluded them, and he believed in it. This gave him courage on the battlefield and a passion for things like the Ark and a house for Yahweh. He knew that it was not Yahweh's rest that was illusive. Rest eluded Israel because they were prone to harden their hearts. So David speaks to this rest hundreds of years after the Israelites had arrived in the Promised Land. He summons a people not to fail as the wilderness generation had.

The clear implication of the author of Hebrews is that a few other generations had failed to enter this state of rest after the wilderness generation and after the time of David. It was not just the problem of one generation; it is the challenge of every individual.

**4:9 There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God.**

This is an important conclusion. There is this state of rest that exists apart from and independent of the Promised Land. Life in the Promised Land has its divinely assigned historic eras. The state of rest can be entered into during any era, while living in any part of the world. It occurs when we trust Yahweh's goodness enough to have our lives determined by his truth. We serve and obey him while trusting him with the unknowns. We are resting in or relying and depending on his goodness. This brings us to a level of spiritual, emotional, and physical rest that we sorely need by design.

In English versions the term Sabbath appears to be an adjective describing rest. The author has discarded here the term he has been using for rest. The term "Sabbath rest"

is the rendering of a noun that only occurs here in the New Testament. It is derived from the word for Sabbath and could be understood as "Sabbatism"—a Sabbath kind of experience. It has similarity to our modern term "Sabbatical." The idea is that people of faith we may not live in a culture with Sabbaths. We may even live in circumstances that dictate the details of our days. But this rest, a "Sabbatism," need not elude us. The use of this term is an attempt by the author to bring further understanding of the meaning of the idea of rest.

**4:10 For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works as God did from this.**

The conjunction "for" at the beginning of this verse shows that its function is to add an explanation to what has just been said. The reason for this explanation is the author's rather sudden use of the term "Sabbatism" where the simpler term he has been using, "rest," would be expected. It was a very intentional shift that he wishes to have fully understood.

This explanation takes us back to the account of creation. After Yahweh worked for six days creating the world, we are told that he rests (Genesis 2:1-3). Earlier the writer of Hebrews has said that Yahweh has remained at rest ever since (4:3). We could say that in the works of the six days, all that was needed for the good of the earth and for humanity on the earth had been provided. Nothing was lacking. God was done. All the changes that would come in time were provided for by the thoroughness of his six days of work. The quality of what he had done he pronounced "very good" (Genesis 1:31). That judgment of his work was trustworthy. So he rested and has remained at rest. This was an important point. It indicates that to be joined to Yahweh is to be at rest, since that is what he is doing. It is to rest from one's work. So the writer states the idea plainly here that the feature of entering rest is primarily this, that the individual who has entered "rest" has stopped working, just like God.

Now, in what sense does a child of God stop working? There are two primary ways in which this can be explained. First, we know that they can cease from the work of currying God's favor by all the normal human practices involving superstition and lore. So the work of compensating for every evil deed by good ones can be stopped. The work of appeasing multiple spirits and gods can cease. All that is normally and naturally associated with currying God's (or gods'), favor can be let go of once one realizes that faith and trust are the currency of the Kingdom of God. So the entire religious work that is normally considered a life-long responsibility can cease.

Second, we know that the choice of Adam and Eve was essentially not to rest in God's goodness and not to trust him with the unknown. It was to become wise themselves, to know good and evil, to make their own moral choices, to set their own direction, to meet their own needs, to obtain a life of their choice. What was lost by that decision was the Divine purpose for them for which they were designed, to rule creation. What

was lost was also any hope of obtaining all they longed for. God alone had the power and wisdom to provide that. This violation of design, brought about a loss of purpose with its moral and emotional heading. This in turn led to a fundamental loss of rest at the deepest level of each human being. Their union with God had been life-giving. Life became a perpetual state of grief. Striving to obtain took its place. Work that falls continually short filled their lives.

Humanity toils to feel re-aligned with God, to bring value to themselves, to affirm their worth, and to meet the insatiable need of their souls. The person who returns to absolute trust in God's goodness, who allows their lives to be determined by his truth, finds rest from these pursuits of the soul. The deeper their trust, the deeper their rest. This is the journey the author wants the readers to persist in.

**4:11 Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fail through following the same example of disobedience.**

With this verse the author returns to the thought the chapter started with. he has taken the time to establish that there is this state of rest that we can enter in the present, today. He has proven that it is possible to fail through unbelief to enter that rest. Now he summons his audience to diligence in the essential work of trusting Yahweh.

The summons to be diligent in the matters of faith and in faith itself is one that is often overlooked in favor of a more miraculous view of how sanctification comes about. In other words, we tend to expect God to bring about change in us apart from letting go of our own striving and diligently practicing trust in him. Yet the mere presence of commands in the New Testament writings shows that decision and follow through on our part is required for our trust in him to flourish. There are also multiple examples of the summon to diligence in faith like this one from the other authors of the New Testament (Ephesians 4:3; 2 Timothy 2:15; 2 Peter 3:14).

The word rendered "disobedience" in the NASB is απειθειασ, which is a word that means "not convinced." So it refers to the state of unbelief. It is important to remember that trust and faith are to be the focus of our diligence. When we speak of "works" and that which God wishes us to do, belief is that work. Jesus made that very clear in his ministry to a people steeped in ceremony and ritual, and other classic good works (John 6:28-29). Israel failed to enter rest because they failed to believe in and trust in his goodness. There were ample ceremony and tradition. There was also ample effort at pursuing life's trappings. But there was a lack of trust in the promises of God.

**4:12 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.**

Like all words, these have a context. This verse has become one of the great verses of the faith, well known and often quoted as a statement on the pragmatic value of Scripture. The context however reveals that the primary word of God that is in view here is the oath that he gave regarding the wilderness generation that barred them from entering his rest, and the offer that stands of rest to all who will not harden their heart. So the defining word of God in judgment is the primary subject here, though the statement applies to all that is uttered by God whether written, spoken, or in some way unknown to us established as his mind and heart. So the value of Scripture is implicit in the verse, but the accuracy and certainty of God's just sentence is what is being explicitly stated.

Once again, we see that this verse is linked to the previous verse by the conjunction "for." So its thought is attached to the previous idea that we should be diligent to avoid the mistake exemplified by Israel of unbelief. The reason we should be diligent is stated by this verse. It is because there is no evidence that can be concealed to alter the decree of God concerning us. Who we are will determine what we experience of his blessing and what we will miss out on.

The author uses five terms to describe the word of God. The first term, placed in an emphatic position as the first word of the sentence, is a participle meaning living. The list of ideas that are captured in the use of this term is inexhaustible. A few important ones are these. The word of God is alive in the sense that it is considerably more than ideas or concepts. Though it is these, it is not like the word of any other being in that it is just these. It is always producing activity of some sort, dramatic in the case of creation, more subtle at times as it works in our minds and hearts. It is active as opposed to inactive. It is never dormant, never neutralized. It is living in that it produces results, impact, and change. It is living in the sense that it brings about that which is observable and visible in real life. It is such that it imparts life, so that every created thing including inanimate objects respond to it. It is living and there is that about it that is the source of life, bringing into existence things that are not. In virtually every other being, action is a separate act of the will that they enter. It seems that in God, his word and his actions are consistent so that when something is spoken it always produces an appropriate action at the right time.

The second term used is an adjective describing that which displays energy and power. Ultimately the power of anything uttered is dependent on the power of the one who utters it. This is why the word of God is unique. It does not merely have potential energy. It has actual and real power because of the infinite power of God. In such a being (there is no other like him), a word spoken has such authority that there is the immediate response of every being and every force so that reality conforms in the

appropriate time frame. It is both true, and it is a great understatement to describe God's word as powerful. Yet it is the limit of our words to have to do so.

A third term used is a comparative adjective that describes God's word as "sharper." To this the defining phrase "than a two-edged sword" is added. The word rendered "sharper" is derived from the word that means to cut. It describes that which cuts by a single stroke as opposed to other available words that might describe cutting by repetitive action. The addition of "than a two-edged sword" seems to add emphasis to the idea of swiftness and efficiency. A two-edged sword is not cited because they are known to be sharper, but because they have a second edge that allows for a greater volume of work. The idea being expressed seems to be that of the certainty of enforcement. Because the word of God is the word of the Sovereign One, it will certainly be brought about even if resisted. God has the means and power to deal with all who may resist. The two-edged sword's association with God's word is imagery that appears elsewhere in Scripture (Revelation 1:16; 2:12). It is continued in the following phrase.

The fourth term used is another participle which means "to reach through" or "to penetrate." Two phrases are added that express the extent of this penetrating power. The first is a prepositional phrase that speaks of this power being such that it extends to the parting of soul and spirit. This is largely an imaginary line to us, since our spirits are invisible and our inner being is certainly an elusive idea at best to us as well. The point is that God's word can make judgments commensurate with what goes on in these entities of our being. It considers for example, what is a product of God's Spirit stirring within ours, and what is simply a product of our own thought processes. The second phrase added to express the extent of this penetrating power of God's word is "of both joints and marrow." The idea here is one of depth, specifically the capacity of God's word to do a work in the deepest part of our being, one that effects our very movement through life.

There is much that humanity can conceal in terms of their motives and true feelings. The decree of God does not miss these. We can enter rest or be barred from it by his impartial and all-knowing judgment. And so we must apply diligence to our faith. The remainder of this verse and the next will build further on the penetrating knowledge of God that powers his decrees concerning us.

The fifth term used in this verse to describe the word of God is another adjective, this one expressing power of discernment. It is a word that sounds like the English word critical. It is expressing the power of critique and the power of analysis latent in God's fiat command, his decree. the revelation of his wisdom, all that is encompassed in the phrase "his word". This phrase states more plainly what the imagery of the two-edged sword pointed to. The two-edged sword parted soul and spirit, joints and marrow. We have in the word of God a living document that offers us a critique of our inner being, our heart, that which shapes our actions. It identifies for us both the passions

(ενθυμησεων) and thought patterns (εννωωοιων) that are motivating our behavior. As such it is a necessity in the pursuit of personal holiness because it reveals our hearts, the very source of our evil.

The subjects or objects of God's analysis make his judgment different from that of any other being. His critique focuses on the thoughts and intentions of human hearts.

Those things which are concealed from our examination of each other and even our examination of ourselves is dealt with in the decisions and verdicts handed down to us through the word of God.

The final phrase of this verse is problematical. προ ον η μιν ο λogos has been rendered in several ways in English versions, all of which are certainly legitimate. It seems to me that the author has been highlighting the purpose of all that Yahweh has accomplished by his various utterances. We have a written record of many of these. These help us discern our inner motives to lead us deeper into his ways, which in turn impart to us rest. This short phrase simply affirms this. It can be understood as saying, "to which purpose or benefit the Word is to us."

**4:13 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.**

There are three important ideas expressed here about the discernment of God that shapes his assessment of us. The first has to do with its scope, the fact that it extends to all creatures. There is no being that escapes his watchful eye. In virtually every human system of justice there are loopholes and there is effective evasive behavior. Every bit of data available can be altered to one's advantage. No creature, seen or unseen, will escape the justice of God. They will receive what is justly due them.

The second idea given here is that all things are open and laid bare to his eyes. Three words are used to express this idea. The first is an adjective, a word that means unmanifested. The second word is a little more intense than the first. It is the word naked. The third word is still more intense. It is a participle in the perfect tense from the word τραχηλιζω, which means to seize by the throat or neck. The perfect tense reflects that this is the present position of all creatures with God, he has seized them by the throat! The imagery is that of a predator who has obtained an advantage over the prey that is irreversible. So the three words chosen by the author increase in intensity culminating in this final word. God will personally and effectively confront each person. We are accountable to him, and he will keep the appointment. He stands squarely in the path of all creatures, and we must reckon with him, a point that the author will state again later in his message (Hebrews 9:27).

Together these words form a literary device to emphasize the idea that before God there is no capacity to conceal motives and actions from inspection to avoid detection of evil. God sees every possible perspective of everything. This includes all the forces

of manipulation and diverse courses of evasive behavior. There is no unfamiliar thing to him, and all is seen by him exactly as it is. There is no image crafting in God's eyes. There is no capacity to resist or thwart his decision. Every creation of his and ours is precisely dissected and thoroughly identified by him. A sure sentence is passed on it all.

Were these last two verses viewed in isolation from the rest of the author's message, the words he has chosen would make the message ominous and intimidating. But it is all said in the broader context of the merciful and faithful High Priest, Jesus, God incarnate in human flesh who provides salvation and care for us. The verses that follow will return to that idea.

**4:14 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.**

The idea that will continue to be developed in this section of Hebrews is that of a great High Priest, even though that is a subordinate idea in this sentence. The verses that follow will speak to the greatness of our High Priest. Here he is identified by name and origin. He is Jesus. He is the Son of God. He is great because he was not merely the offspring of some human priestly order. He is God incarnate in human flesh. That we should hold fast our confession is the main idea of this verse. This will be developed by the author in some detail later.

It is said of Jesus that he has passed through the heavens. This is the word used of Jesus when his enemies had seized him and were preparing to throw him over a cliff. It is said that he passed through their midst and went on his way (Luke 4:28-30). Jesus was passing through the heavens before he became a man. He passed through and came to earth. Then he ascended, passing back through them. Heaven is a place familiar to him. We can view heaven as his country of origin. Though he is human, he is not bound to earth as we are and not of the earth in the same sense that we are.

The verse gives an important command. This command is the practical end toward which the author's entire work is pointed. It is the main idea all the rest are under-girding. The readers are to direct the course of their lives in the same direction it was originally set when they first confessed belief in Jesus Christ.

To hold fast means to use strength, to seize or to retain. It is the word used of the soldiers who seized Jesus and led him away to judgment (Matthew 26:48, 50). So we are to bind ourselves to the faith we originally grasped and continue to pursue the course it directs in. We are not to lose direction, zeal, or focus.

**4:15 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.**

Christ is a great high priest because he is of Heaven, though he is human. The previous verse made this point. He is great because that is his nature and identity. But he is also a great high priest because of his capacity to empathize and sympathize with the challenge we face of holding our course as ones scared by evil and living in an evil world.

Jesus' capacity for sympathy is a matter first of his nature. He is human and participated in the human experience in a fallen world. He lived in a body subject to all that ours are subject to. He knows the vulnerability that comes with fatigue, hunger, loneliness, and the sin of others close to us. He knows what it is to be surrounded by inconsistent models. He knows the power of false ideas and supposed truth. He knows what it is to be wronged.

His capacity for sympathy is also a matter of his experience. He was tempted by evil. He came into the world in which Satan tempts every person and succeeds in drawing them into personal sin. He knows what it is like to face spiritual pressure (Luke 4:1-13). He knows the attraction of that which is not God's will (Matthew 17:24-27). He faced moments when fulfilling God's desire was daunting (Luke 22:39-46). He experienced situations when it would have been easy and even just from a human point of view, to abuse his power (Luke 9:54; Matthew 26:53). He knew how to express anger without sinning (Mark 11:15-19). He faced a myriad of spiritual tests that could have led him into sin, but in every case did the will of God the Father (John 5:19). He is a great high priest because he has accomplished what we must, but he has done it to a greater degree than any other person can hope to do, perfectly, without a lapse. He passed through life and time and never committed personal sin.

The writer says he was tempted in "all things." Luke had written in his account that the devil left Jesus when he had finished "all temptation." We do not know the exact meaning of such expressions. We know that there were things Christ was tempted in that we have no exact experience of. Examples would be when Satan tempted him to turn stones into bread, or when he tempted Jesus to throw himself off the pinnacle of the temple to prove he was the Son of God (Luke 4:1-13). We know that he did not experience some of the temptations of the modern era. But since all sin comes down to a violation of a principle—the principle of submission to the will of the Father in the moment—it is accurate to say that he was tempted like us. So the writers point seems to be that Christ was tempted to violate the same moral principles that we are. Common sense would seem to say that he was tempted to a greater degree than us. This because he was the Son of God and was by essence and calling, capable of accomplishing so much more for humanity than we are. It would stand to reason that Satan would have increased the pressure on him. The temptation to avoid dying for the sins of humanity would have been tremendous, a kind of temptation we would

know nothing of. He is a great high priest because he understands the spiritual pressure of temptation.

**4:16 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.**

There is the record in the book of Moses that the Israelites did not draw near with confidence to God at Mt Zion. In fact, they asked not to do so due to their fear of Yahweh. They asked that God not speak to them, but that he speak to Moses who would convey Yahweh's words to them (Exodus 20:18-20; Deuteronomy 5:24-27). It seems this was not Yahweh's intent. His show of lightning and thunder and smoke was only to bring them to a point of proper reverence for Moses, for Yahweh and for his commands (Exodus 19:9; 20:20). In the end his purpose was to show them that Yahweh intended to give them an experience of himself unlike any other people (Deuteronomy 4:33). It may be that their disbelief in his goodness was present in their fear, and this led them to request a less intimate experience of him. This incident will be touched on by the writer of Hebrews later (12:18-29).

For now, the writer summons us to "draw near." He urges us by command to come to what he calls the "throne of grace." The imagery is that of the throne room of a ruler, of entering it to seek personal audience with him.

The account in Scripture of Esther helps us understand this figure. It was a serious thing to come uninvited into the ruler's presence (Esther 4:11). It could result in the punishment of death. It is no understatement to say that the term "throne of grace" was an oxymoron, as was the idea of coming before a ruler's throne confidently. But the idea behind the use of this figure is that we have been summoned to personal audience with Yahweh. As the record of Esther indicates, this changed everything. So the writer of Hebrews summons us to draw near. In the imagery of the Pentateuch, we are to come up the mountain. Through a little different imagery, he will repeat this command later in his writing (10:20-22).

The throne of God is characterized by grace and mercy. That is the reason we can draw near. The One who occupies that throne, God himself, has relentlessly loved us and reached out to us. Our coming satisfies his longing. This longing was embodied in Jesus Christ, who affirmed to us the length and breadth and height of God's goodness. The persistent doubt of his goodness that ruined the Israelites experience of Yahweh, should not be part of our experience. Yet the presence of this command shows that we are not confident of his goodness to jump at the opportunity to speak with him.

The purpose of entering his presence is not just for a tourist kind of experience, that of observation. We can be so confident as to ask for his help. So anxious is he for relationship with us that he will gladly give it, though as Sovereign it is all on his terms. So the command to come near has a clear objective, that we find grace to help in time

of need. There is no situation we find ourselves in where his wealth of power and wisdom is not available to us. Our first use of grace may be to correct our view of our situation and ourselves. But the fact is that we can find his mercy and grace in time of practical need. They are freely available due to the depth of his love and goodness.

# HEBREWS 5

**5:1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins;**

Having spoken briefly on the greatness of Christ as a High Priest, the author now begins to speak of the normal human high priest who presided over the worship system of the Old Covenant, before the coming of Christ. His purpose will be to demonstrate the superiority of Christ through comparison with those of that earthly priesthood. The way in which he structures these phrases emphasizes the shortfall of the old system.

The first phrase reminds us that under the Old Covenant, every high priest was taken from among men. The wording makes clear that they became different by designation. But there was no moral superiority of essence in them that led to them being a high priest. Their essence was that of fallen humanity.

The second phrase states that these were appointed on behalf of men. So they were appointed or ordained on behalf of other men, though there was moral equality among them all. The phrase maintains the dignity of the office. It is a matter of ordination. It was not a sham. At the same time, it raises the issue of what one fallen human can do on behalf of another one.

The third phrase brings out the fact that their calling and ordination is rather ironic. It is in things pertaining to God. So the high priests of the Old Covenant were men by essence, ordained on behalf of men, to serve in God-related matters! In these three phrases the shortfall of the ministry of these high priests is implicit.

The fourth phrase of this verse states the specific practical end of what the high priests and those under them did. They dealt with the offering of gifts and sacrifices for sins. There was nothing inherent in the high priest that in any way mitigated the worshiper's sin. Rather the gifts and sacrifices provided by the worshipers themselves, those that the priests took and presented to God, had been assigned value in this regard by God. So the service the high priest and those functioning under him provided, though ordained of God and essential, was primarily procedural. The worshippers themselves bore the brunt of the burden of their own sin.

**5:2 he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness;"**

The advantage of the system of the Old Covenant was its potential to have empathy and sympathy between priests and worshipers. The priest, knowing their own weaknesses, could and should have remained humble servants. Sin being what it is, this did not generally play out well. But that was the design of the system, and it did happen that way in the case of those priests who stayed in fellowship with Yahweh.

None of the parties involved in this process are spoken of in flattering terms. Two terms are used of the worshipers. The first is ignorant, literally the unknowing. The second is the wandering. It was a term used of vagabonds and deceivers, referring to those who have wandered from the path. The terms used of the priests describe them as "surrounded by weakness or sickness." It is their own sickness and weakness that is being viewed as hemming them in, not that of the congregation.

The common experience in the battle against evil did have the advantage of providing a certain atmosphere among worshipers and priests. In times of renewal and revival there was a healthy relationship between them. But the fallen nature of the priests, while creating sympathy, meant that in the end they were locked in the same spiritual struggle as the congregation. So in a sense they had limited capacity to raise others, and a moral log jam persisted. There was no one who could break the stalemate so that people could rise to a fuller experience of the blessing of Yahweh. There was a congregation, and there were priests, and there was capacity in the system for them to relate and get along well. But there was no solution to the moral dilemma of humanity under the Old Covenant.

**5:3 and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself.**

Because of his own moral weakness and frequent failure, the Old Covenant high priest and all the priests under him were under obligation to continually offer sacrifices for their own sin. That was all they could do. The high priest could not bring an end to those offerings because he could not bring an end to sin in himself or in others.

All of creation was on what was, at best, a moral treadmill. This Old Covenant system, however, was never meant to be a solution. It was ordained by God deliberately, according to the normal human thought patterns regarding achieving the blessing of divine beings. It was a merit system through which the blessing of God could be gained. But since that is impossible, it was not the purpose it served. It pointed to a solution to this dilemma. It was meant to convince the users of the absolute need for a New Covenant, which God spoke in greater detail of as its time approached. The New Covenant would impart the blessing of God to humanity through the merit of a Priest King. One would be provided by Yahweh who had no moral blemish. He would have capacity to lift worshipers from the treadmill and bring real transformation.

Until this Priest King arrived, Jesus the Christ, the sacrifices of the priests of the Old Covenant persisted. They were for the time being, the only thing prescribed by Yahweh. The faithful people continued in them, and the priests faithfully passed along the tradition in hope of the Person to which it all pointed.

**5:4 And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was."**

Though the high priest was appointed on behalf of men and selected from among men, the office was not man's for the taking. It is certain that during times of corruption the office was assumed, perhaps even purchased by godless men. But this was not by God's design, and God never relinquished claim to it and gave reminders of this even in the darkest hours (John 12:47-52).

This verse points to the divine ownership of the office. Though the high priests served humanity, they more importantly served God. They were high priests due to God's initiative not their own. So in speaking of high priests all that has been said is true. They were sympathetic due to their own imperfection. They were equipped to gently deal with the ignorant and misguided by their own personal spiritual weakness.

The presence of such weakness in them did not mean that anyone else should be appointed. Were all held to the standard no one would be able to qualify or rise to the office. They were chosen and appointed by God and so were affirmed and to be respected. They followed in the distinguished tradition of Aaron.

**5:5 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.'"**

In the same way that the high priestly office was not gained through ambition and power or by popular vote, Jesus did not become the High Priest over Yahweh's great congregation by his own decision. He sought only the glory of the One who chose him, God the Father. It was by Yahweh's choice that Jesus became Lord and Savior and by his own seeking of God the Father's glory that Jesus was obedient to that summons. The choosing of Jesus by God the Father gets a little hard for us to fathom because of the nature of the Triune God and considering his eternality. But it remains the thing explicitly taught in the Scripture (John 17:24; 1 Peter 1:20).

The author cites an Old Testament Scripture as proof of the fact that the appointment of Christ was initiated by Yahweh not Christ (Psalm 2:7). This Psalm was probably composed based on the thought of Yahweh God conveyed to David through Nathan the prophet in what we have termed the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7). This second Psalm in our Bibles, like many, may have been inspired by some incident in the experience of Israel under David or one of David's descendants. But its statements on Yahweh's anointed was made because of the knowledge of the coming Messiah, David's descendant. To this Anointed One Yahweh had given the right to rule the whole creation for all time. So Psalm 2 speaks to the fact that David and certain of his descendants had been chosen to rule. They would not be resisted without consequences. One of these would reign eternally. To this One all the Davidic dynasty pointed. To fight this decree of Yahweh that his anointed would rule is futile. It is ordained of him and so is unthwartable.

**5:6 just as He says also in another passage, 'Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'"**

The author of Hebrews quotes a verse from Psalm 110 here that serves several purposes. It strengthens the idea that Jesus was appointed by Yahweh to be the High Priest over Yahweh's great congregation. It introduces the idea that Jesus' occupation of this office is eternal, and so we are left with the idea that he is the one for whom the office was created, in numerous ways superior to all others who have occupied it.

But then it also introduces a rather complex idea that will be developed in greater detail later (Hebrews 7), the order of priests to which Christ belonged.

For now the readers are left with this idea to ponder, that Christ as High Priest is better and significantly different than all others who have occupied the office. The present argument is that he has been appointed by God and remains a priest in perpetuity. We need never be concerned with a new and different regime. Historically it is well documented that such regime changes had great impact on the spiritual climate of Israel (2 Chronicles 24:2,15-22; 26:5).

The order of priests that Christ is considered part of is re-introduced in Scripture here. It is the order of Melchizedek, an order that surfaced momentarily in the account of the life of Abraham, then disappeared over the centuries as God worked through a different order of Abraham's descendants. Among them, the priests were after the order of Aaron and were of the tribe of Levi. Christ was not of the tribe of Levi. He was of the tribe of Judah, which was the tribe of kings. The two offices, priest and king, had been separate throughout the history of Israel. The order of Melchizedek reaches back to the pre-Israel era where the two offices were united in a man named Melchizedek.

Melchizedek's greatness will be spoken of later (Hebrews 7). In the only text in Scripture that narrates an incident in Melchizedek's life, we see that he is referred to as king of Salem, ancient Jerusalem, and priest of God Most High (Genesis 14:18, see Appendix 1). In occupying these two roles, king and priest, he prefigured Christ. He is the only one we know of who belonged to this order. It is as if humanity was given a glimpse of this order, then it was reserved by Yahweh as the one that would be taken up and perpetuated by his Son eternally. So the designation of Christ as being of this order is profound, referring to the fact that he is both priest and king.

**5:7 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."**

The author now speaks to the readers about the "days of His flesh," making a series of observations about the period when Jesus lived as a human in a fallen body, yet without sin. These are meant to show his ability to sympathize and empathize with us. They identify some areas of common experience.

When this verse is read thoughtfully, one cannot help being struck by the humanity of Jesus. This is achieved in large part through the structure of the verse, which enables us to feel his experience. The structure of the Greek text reflects the influence of Hebrew poetry, where parallel thoughts are carefully strung together so that emphasis is given to main ideas. In this case, three main ideas are expressed about Jesus' earthly experience through three pairs of similar words. We first find two words that speak of asking, rendered "prayers and supplications" by the NASB. Next, we find two words that speak of strong emotions, rendered with the words "loud crying and tears." The word for crying is a word that describes a scream or loud noise uttered to summon help. Next, we find two participles joined together by the conjunction και, expressing Jesus' action and the action of God the Father. These actions could be rendered by the English phrase "He offered up and was being heard." Though separated in most English versions, these two ideas occur together in the Greek text. So in this verse we have words chosen and put together in a structure that effectively portrays Christ as a vulnerable, approachable fellow-human. Christ's experience is defined for the readers and felt by them.

Christ is said to have offered up prayers and to have been heard "because of his piety." The word piety is the English rendering of a Greek compound word formed from joining the words for good and receive. It occurs in the New Testament only twice, both occurrences in Hebrews (see 12:28). It is a word that expresses being cautious or circumspect. We might say such a one who has this has "right perspective." It speaks of the search in practical matters for what is good and wise, a practice that wisdom literature would call the fear of Yahweh. This is a search that God always honors. The text expresses the idea that Christ's prayers were heard because they flowed out of this greater search that occupied his life.

So we have Christ presented as a normal vulnerable human being. He was on a deeply personal quest for Yahweh's heart and power to shape the events of his life. Due to his single-minded approach to life, his prayers in specific matters were effective.

**5: 8 Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered"**

When we think of Christ's loud crying and tears, and all the emotion connected with his suffering, we tend to identify it with the experience of Gethsemane, along with his trial, his torture, and his death. The words of this verse indicate however that his sufferings were ongoing from some early age so that he "learned obedience" through them. This is not to exclude the suffering of what we have termed "His Passion." But these were the ultimate exhibit of his obedience, a demonstration of what he had learned, not the learning process itself. He learned obedience before the garden of Gethsemane that enabled him to pray to the Father, "Not my will, but your will be done."

The author states clearly that Jesus' obedience was learned, and this was true though he was the Son of God. There is an implicit affirmation of Jesus' humanity in this verse. It is because of Jesus' humanity that he participated in some way in the process of learning obedience. This is hard to fathom, as most things are within the hypostatic union—the joining of the divine and human natures. But obedience was not innate in him as God's Son because Jesus was also fully human.

There is no secret revealed about this process of learning that went on in Christ through the word "learn" itself. It is a very normal word for learning. The noun form of this word is the word disciple, which means "a learner." The prophet Isaiah echoes the thought of the Psalmist, describing the Messiah as one who had been under normal childhood instruction (Isaiah 50:10; Psalm 22:9-10). He is represented as a learner. We are left to accept and ponder the simple idea that Jesus experienced the learning process, which makes his sinlessness even more spectacular. How does one learn anything without making mistakes? How does one learn moral judgment without making errors in judgment? Ultimately, Isaiah's words may provide the only clue. They say simply that the Messiah behaved like one who had learned because he had an "opened ear." This likely describes an exceptional willingness to listen and implement the instruction of Yahweh (Isaiah 50:4-5), all of which was demonstrated in his passion. It is the willingness that Adam and Eve began with, except Christ perfectly executed at the point of decision.

As to the specific sufferings that taught Christ obedience, we can only say that Jesus had to have lived with frustration from the earliest of his days on earth. The frustration we are talking about here could only be experienced by one with an "opened ear," a person who learned extremely quickly from Yahweh, and so knew from an early age the Scriptures and the heart of God in so many practical human matters. Such a one would be frustrated to an unimaginable degree by the slowness of heart in those around him. We catch glimpses of this in Jesus, beginning with his own parents (Luke 2:49). The frustration extended to his peers (Matthew 16:8; Mark 4:40; Luke 9:19), to those in positions of spiritual authority (John 3:1012), and to all of his generation (Luke 11:29-51). Such a One agonized over how the will of God was to be brought about during such resistance. The sufferings of Christ included the constant experience of being misunderstood, being spoken against, being resisted, maligned, and shamed, though perfect in thought, judgment, and action.

**5:9 and having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation;"**

This verse starts with a further statement of this complex idea that the Son of God learned obedience. Jesus did not arrive on earth complete, which is the biblical idea usually in view when the English word perfect appears. He did not have some robotic kind of instinct so that he always did what the Father wanted. He was made complete in his obedience by suffering. It was a learned behavior. Yet at the same time this

learning progressed with no imperfection, without any shortfall in judgment resulting in sin.

This sinless life was critical. It qualified him to die on behalf of humanity and pay the demands of God's justice that stood between them and God. Through Jesus' death all who believe can be rejoined to God. So what Adam did through his disobedience, so that our relationship to God was broken, Christ undid by his obedience. The result is that we not only can be saved from sin's penalty, but also from its power. We not only receive forgiveness for sin, but we can also experience daily rescue from sinful patterns of thought that enslave us. It is through him that we will be raised from the dead, never to die again and be delivered forever from the evil in us and around us. This is the good news of the gospel, and it is good news each day if we believe it.

Christ is the source of eternal salvation. The author speaks twice in Hebrews of Christ being the captain or chief of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10; 12:2). That word emphasizes his authority and headship in the matter of our salvation. Here he uses a word which conveys that he is the cause of our salvation. He not only has authority in the matter, but he is what we could call the artisan whose work has brought it into the realm of reality.

Christ has brought about and presides over what is called here our eternal salvation. This is a term which emphasizes what salvation brings about from the moment of belief in Jesus Christ. It saves today from sinful patterns, it saves us when we stand before God to answer for our deeds, and it will save us from slipping back into evil when we are part of God's new creation.

The writer of Hebrews says Jesus is the source of this eternal salvation to all who obey him. The chief factor in the biblical idea of obedience is belief (John 6:28-29). We cannot receive anything from Christ if we do not believe he is, and if we do not place confidence in his message. Our salvation experience expands each time we chose to trust and so obey him. In each moment of such trusting obedience we are saved from some evil and its consequences. As we persist in trust and obedience we are delivered from whole patterns of thought and action that have been sources of destruction to us. Trust is the key to the fullest possible experience of God, and his desire is to enable us to choose and execute it in the moment. All of this comes to us because of the work of Christ, and as we trust him and put confidence in him in the details of our life.

**5:10 being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek."**

This idea of the priestly order of Melchizedek is an important thought to the writer, planted a few verses earlier, and refreshed here. He apparently wants the readers to hang onto it. So this idea is restated that God solidly couples Christ to an order of high priests, of which we know of only one other, Melchizedek.

We have noted that in this order of priests the office of High Priest and the office of King were joined. Though the author's thoughts are focused on Jesus' high priestly ministry, it is implicit in this designation by God that Jesus is also king. God's act, making Jesus Christ a high priest according to this order, was a profoundly important and significant one to be developed later by the author (Hebrews 7).

**5:11 Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing."**

The idea of Jesus Christ being of the order of Melchizedek is set aside here and will not be picked up again until the last verse in the next chapter (6:20). The reason is abruptly stated here. There was a condition in the hearts of the readers that was hindering their ability to comprehend what the author wished them to understand about the person of Jesus Christ. He calls this condition that of being "dull in hearing." The term he uses for dull is a rather derogatory one that speaks of laziness. He will use it again in 6:12. It is derived from the word for an illegitimate child—a bastard. This word is followed by the verb commonly used to express the idea of the generation of children—γινομαι. This verb is placed in the perfect tense, indicating action that has produced an abiding result. So if we were to take a purely etymological perspective, we could say that so far, this short expression has spoken of an illegitimate child having been born. It then names the mother of this illegitimate child, hearing. The phrase could be rendered in the vernacular of our day in the following way: "bastards you have become of hearing." In other words, the author wants to confront the readers with the fact that they are no longer giving what can be called legitimate attention to the things of the faith. Theirs is not real hearing or listening. It is a cursory attentiveness, cosmetic and illegitimate. There attentiveness has been corrupted by laziness.

Besides the language itself being strong, the idea it expresses has an ominous, even apocalyptical idea to it from a biblical point of view. To a reader familiar with the Old Testament this statement would draw them back to Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 6:8-13. There Isaiah is commissioned by Yahweh to "Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim…" Through his prophetic ministry, Isaiah would bring about a judgmental hardening of hearts among Israelites. Rather than repenting at the hearing of truth, they would become desensitized and calloused to it, unrepentant, and therefore objects of Yahweh's discipline. Their cities would be destroyed, and they would cease to be a nation. They would lie dormant as God's people and subject to repeated ruin for an unspecified period until God brought about a renewal in them. This "letting go" by God that allowed them to experience the consequences of their own rebellion was reiterated by Jesus (Matthew 13:15). It was also cited in the writings of John (John 12:37-43), of Luke (Acts 28:27), and of Paul (Romans 11:7-10).

It is again obvious that the writer of Hebrews is seeking to keep Christians in the early church from repeating the mistakes of the Israelites. It was a real danger. The reality was that they had already journeyed down this road and the signs could be seen. Throughout, the author will remain positive about their ability to repent and move back into a position of vibrancy. However, his language shows that they have already entered a danger zone and could travel further down the road. They were in danger of creating a history that would show they followed the path and duplicated the mistake of the nation of Israel.

**5:11 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."**

These mark the beginning of statements that define the spiritual condition of the readers. Their faith is at an elementary level. It is below the line in terms of normal spiritual development. It is even infantile. The statements are direct and hard-hitting. Who likes to be told they are not rising to meet normal and legitimate expectations? The readers have failed the same test generations of Israelites were put to through the ministry of the prophets of Yahweh (2 Chronicles 36:15-16; Jeremiah 7:25-28). They had not passed. This test is the test of truth. It is given continually to us by God to this day.

It seems that the truth never comes to us in an attractive package. We can only surmise that this is because growth requires humility, so Yahweh very deliberately allows our pride to be offended up front. Truth then, is always hard to receive. Our ability to face what the plain, raw truth reveals about us will determine the degree to which we enter the experience of Yahweh's salvation. As Cain demonstrated, to react against truth is catastrophic. To be lukewarm towards truth leads to the mediocre and compromised legacy of great men like Solomon. It is only in acceptance and repentance that we progress as we should. If we react to its tone, balk at its spokesperson, or if we are offended by its implication, we will not experience the truth's ability to renovate and reinvigorate our faith. The person who can get past all the perceived imperfections of the delivery and packaging to focus on and receive humbly the message itself, lays hold of the greatest treasure in Yahweh's universe, which is truth.

Besides any emotional power of the words chosen here, there are concrete and applicable ideas that need to be a part of our thinking. First, passing time should bring with it spiritual growth. That seems simple enough, but we often demand too little of ourselves and others as Christians. We tend to stop making progress against thought and behavior patterns so that we are perennially babes in spiritual things.

Second, spiritual learners should become spiritual instructors in a shorter amount of time than usually happens. Though the level of instruction they are capable of depends on spiritual gifting, everyone can provide instruction at some level. At least at a

relational, conversational level, believers should quite quickly contribute to the core strength of the movement rather than load it.

Third, there are elementary ideas upon which spiritual progress is built that can and should be mastered. In this verse we have communicated the idea that the readers need to return to earlier un-mastered lessons. These involved "elementary principles of the oracles of God." The term "principles" is στοιχια, which means an orderly arrangement. The term "elementary" refers to that which is first in that order. The idea of these two terms together is just as the NASB has rendered it. There is a body of concepts and propositions that build a foundation for the process of spiritual learning. Some of these will be named in the next chapter (6:1-2).

The body of truth toward which these relate that is to be eventually mastered is called "the oracles of God." The word "oracles" is the NASB rendering for λογιων. That word is derived from the term λογοσ, which most Christians are very familiar with. It is a term for truth that has been revealed by God through his spoken word, written word, and his incarnate word. So the entire phrase communicates the expectation that certain "first principles" will be mastered so that the learner has a foundation to learn more complex concepts encountered later.

This process referred to here has been very familiar to us for centuries and is today almost universally familiar through the education process. There are basic intellectual skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic, that enable higher learning. These are the goals of the elementary level of education. There is a reasonable timeframe during which they can be mastered. It is a reasonable expectation to place on teachers and students, so much so that target dates are set and adhered to.

The author of Hebrews suddenly speaks to the achievement level of the readers with a word picture. He describes them as needing milk, not solid food. They are in a state of infancy, though no longer the age of infants. This is a figure that he will develop in the next two verses. But the picture is meant to convey to the readers that their situation is abnormal. In the realm of physical development it would signal that something was wrong with a child. We would expect to find sickness where we found this abnormality.

To summarize, the readers were behind developmentally. They still needed that which they should have moved beyond, given the amount of time that had passed since they became believers in Christ. They were responsible for this condition in themselves.

**5:13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe."**

This verse continues the imagery of the development of infants into children, weaned from milk to solid foods to picture spiritual development. Just as an infant's diet begins with milk, so a new believer gets what they need through the foundational principles of God's revelation of truth. This was the state of the reader's spiritual development.

The examples of these elementary principles given in the next chapter indicate that these believers were still learning some of the foundational practices of faith. They had not begun to understand the underlying principles of these practices.

Because they lacked an understanding of the principles that drive the practices of the faith, the readers are said to be “not accustomed to the word of righteousness.” The term “not accustomed to” means untested by. It conveys the idea of a lack of skill caused by inexperience. It does not mean necessarily ignorance. The term “word of righteousness” identifies the precise sphere of their inexperience. That term could be rendered “the message about righteousness.” In the imagery of these verses it is represented as the food of adults.

What exactly is this “message about righteousness”? In the New Testament the gospel is regarded as the message of righteousness. It is the good news of God’s power bringing to bear in our behalf his own righteousness and then infusing his righteousness in the very beings of all who believe in it (Romans 1:1617). The message about righteousness includes the simple truths one must wrestle with to be born again (Acts 24:25). But the word righteousness occurs more often in the book of Romans than in any other book of the New Testament. There we find the far-reaching implications of the gospel. The entire message about righteousness is more fully presented there. Students of the Bible would recognize that the message of righteousness is really the message of the entire Bible. So when the author of Hebrews speaks of the message of righteousness, he is likely speaking of the propositional truth repeatedly conveyed by God through all the literary genre of his written revelation. That revelation reveals what true righteousness is and it debunks human ideas about righteousness and how to become righteous in God’s eyes.

The readers were untested in their understanding of this revelation. Now untested does not necessarily mean a lack of familiarity with the words of revelation. It speaks more to the practical handling and application of its concepts. The readers had apparently been believers for a period. Merely coming to the point of belief in the Gospel demands some understanding of the message of righteousness. If their background was Jewish, as most have assumed, there is a strong possibility that they were quite familiar with the words of revelation. That they were untested, or unproven in its message means they had a lack of skill in discerning and processing its implications. Their thoughts and actions in real life were not shaped by the message of righteousness.

The picture given in these verses is of an older child who by their age should have been weaned. However they could not be because they had not developed the ability to process solid food. In the case of the readers their problem was not opportunity or some lack in ability. It was that they had become “dull of hearing.” There was a stubbornness or inactivity on their part that was keeping them from moving ahead in the things of the Spirit.

**5:14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil."**

The first phrase of this verse continues the imagery of the previous verse, that of the developing child being weaned from milk to a diet of solid food. The words "solid food" in the NASB are an accurate rendering of an adjective meaning steadfast, stable, sure, or strong, and the noun meaning food. So the expression speaks of the food that brings about the strength of adulthood.

This solid food is for the mature, or the complete ones. It is not for infants. They cannot take it in and so will not get from it what they need to mature and develop. There is nothing wrong with this in infants. Nothing more would be expected. The problem in the case of the readers was that enough time had passed that this was no longer the legitimate expectation of them.

The second phrase of the verse leaves the realm of the figurative and moves into a plain literal statement of the thing mature Christians possess—what the readers should have possessed by this time. The unmistakable mark of maturity is the power of discernment in matters of good and evil.

This verse conveys three statements about this power of discernment that are significant. The first is that it is present in the mature because of practice. The word rendered practice appears only here in the New Testament. It is derived from the word εχω, which means to have. It means a practice or a habit and so refers to something that is possessed as a habitual practice.

The imagery that has been used of child development has set up the use of this word habit or practice. A child is not weaned abruptly. At the appropriate time, solid food is gradually introduced into their diet. At appropriate times the food becomes more solid. The child develops the ability to handle it with their hands to get it into their mouths on their own. They cut new teeth that enable them to chew more complex foods. Their digestive systems develop to process it. As these things happen milk is slowly withdrawn from their diet. The result is that through a daily routine a new habit is formed. It all happens very naturally through the parent's cultivation of a new habit in them. Christians become mature because of such a learned ability regarding good and evil. Maturity comes because of habit or a set of habits they acquire.

The second significant idea we see about this power of discernment is that it is the result of certain senses. These senses are both spiritual and mental. An infant learns to like certain foods by physical sights, smells and tastes. A Christian learns to discern good and evil by thought, and by recognition of the leadings of the Holy Spirit. They must learn that things are not always as they appear. They must learn subtleties. They must learn about deceit and deceptiveness in ideas and people. They must learn about patterns of truth that help reveal the presence of what is false. They must learn to think in terms of how things are, not how they wish they were or hope them to be. These

abilities are cultivated through habit and involve spiritual abilities created in humanity and brought to life by the return of God's Spirit to unite with our spirits through the work of Christ.

The third significant idea we see about this discernment is that these senses must be trained. Part of being created in God's image is the capacity resident in humans for moral behavior instead of mere instinctive behavior. Due to the fall of Adam and the loss of relationship with God this ability is shaped apart from truth. Beginning with Adam's choice, human behavior has drifted toward being instinctively driven rather than being morally driven. This is because as unbelievers we have a conscience that is increasingly weak due to the absence of God in our lives. Our conscience is weak because we get use to not using it, and it is weak because it is shaped by human ideas not divine ones. When we believe in the gospel, the Holy Spirit joins himself to us. At that moment we have a new capacity in terms of our conscience. But the reality is that our conscience must be retrained. We must get use to using it and it must be retrained to give impulses that accord with the truth. This is the training of the senses that every new believer must undergo. It is this process that was behind schedule in the readers.

When habits have not been cultivated so that certain senses remain atrophied and untrained, there is not clear discernment in matters of good and evil. The result is a kind of moral stalemate. The infant believer is still victimized and enslaved to some degree by evil in its various forms, including legalism. This situation should not be perpetual, nor should it become normal. Believers should move into a stage where, along with others, they can hold a steady course even though drawn toward evil. A group of mature believers strengthen themselves and each other in the experience of God's will in every moment. This is the high road that the author is calling the readers up to, the one that Yahweh's salvation is designed to lift us to.

# HEBREWS 6

**6:1 Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,"**

The author has spent the last four verses speaking very directly to the readers about their need to learn to process the more substantive matters of the faith. The reason this was important was not so that they would be smarter. It was so they would have greater discernment in matters of good and evil.

The bottom line of the human experience is that we need this discernment. It is essential to discern the evil and the good within our own beings. We must wisely, graciously, and forthrightly discern good and evil in others. We must be discerning as we process the ideas and thought systems that bombard us daily as a part of the world system. So moving on to be able to discern more complex matters is essential to what Scripture calls completeness or maturity.

The author calls the readers to go away from the beginnings of the message of Christ. The entire context demonstrates that he is not calling them to abandon these for a different body of truth about Christ. He is calling them to move on to the sequel. They are to ponder all that naturally follows in the Christ message. His call is given in the third person. It is an exhortation for them to join with him in an ongoing journey. He exhorts them "let us be carried along to maturity." The verb the Spirit inspires the author to employ in this exhortation is descriptive of this spiritual journey. It is a verb in the passive voice that means to be carried or borne along. It is the same word Peter used to describe the process by which the Holy Spirit brought about the Scriptures through human authors (2 Peter 1:21). These human authors were borne along by the Spirit in articulating the message of Christ. The result is that we have a message that is authored by both men and by God. We can say that just as they were borne along by the Spirit to give us the message, the message becomes an instrument of the Spirit to bear us along to maturity.

It is then, a different mental and spiritual diet that nurtures our growth to maturity than the one that enfolded us in the faith. This verse is a summons to graduation and movement. More elementary teachings about Christ will be retained as a lens through which more complex matters of faith will begin to be processed and understood. The summons is to a special effort, deliberate tackling of the more challenging and difficult subjects of Yahweh's revelation. These are things that require more time, a higher level of focus and concentration, greater faith and trust, more interaction with others who are processing the ideas, deeper prayer and meditation, a greater anointing from the Holy Spirit, a pursuit of relationships with those further along in the process, and more instruction.

The author follows this call with concrete examples of the things they had learned as part of the elementary practice of the faith. The importance and significance of them is affirmed. They are not part of a foundation that must be re-done. They are in place and do not need to be addressed again. We should not treat any of them as insignificant or unimportant. They are foundational and a building is only as good as its foundation. You cannot build a skyscraper on a foundation for an outhouse!

The first thing he lists as a part of this foundation is repentance from dead works. Repentance means to change one's mind. We are to change our minds about "dead works." Dead works are thoughts and actions that produce death—a loss of fellowship with God. These "dead works" are called sins. Sins happen because of sin—a force in us that leads us to think independently of God. Sin leads to sins, actions that are not God's will, desire, and plan for us. It is what is rooted in our being, sin, that we must continually recognize in ourselves and turn from. If we do not recognize the attitude and it brings about sinful action, we must turn from that as well. It is essential to understand that to experience Yahweh's salvation in day to day matters we cannot indulge sin. We must turn away from it. So the practice of Christianity is essentially the practice of repentance. Repentance is a foundational habit that we must never let go of.

The second thing listed as part of the foundation is faith toward God. A relationship with God requires that we trust him, because it is obeying the will and desires of one, we have never seen. We must trust his goodness and entrust to him the eventual outcome of our lives. It is as we do this that we are saved from who we would become were we to follow mere human instincts. The Christian life is to a large degree a journey of trust. Our experience of it will correlate to our willingness to entrust to Yahweh's control the things of real life such as our possessions, our relationships, our image, our leisure and pleasure, our happiness and fulfillment.

**6:2 of instruction about washings, and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.**

With this verse the list of things that the author considers elementary regarding the faith is expanded to six things. This list is not exhaustive but representative. Each of these things is important. But the author is saying that they should be mastered by now by the readers so that they move on to tackle more complex matters.

Having named two examples of elementary teachings the author continues with a third. The third example is instructions about washings. This is the NASB rendering of the Greek word baptisms. While we cannot say with absolute certainty what this is referring to, we can be certain it had to do with the fascination among Jews with being ceremonially clean. This was referenced by Jesus in his teachings in a way that helps us understand that it had taken on a life of its own (Matthew 15:1-20; Matthew 23:25-26; Mark 7:1-7). It likely involved instruction about Old Testament regulations, or we could

say against them. It was not that these were bad. They had simply served their purpose in the plan of God, and they were part of a few regulations that could now be set aside. They related to the Old Covenant, and a new one had been instituted. Every Christian must learn basic distinctions between the Old Covenant practice of the faith and the New Covenant practice of it. So instructions about washings likely related to the equipping of first century Christians to properly discern the purpose of such Old Covenant ceremony.

The fourth example of these had to do with the laying on of hands. We know that the laying on of hands was practiced by Jesus (Matthew 9:18; 19:15). It was also practiced in the early Church (Acts 6:6; 8:17). There has been some argument as to whether this gesture had mere symbolic significance, or if it was an actual means of imparting grace. It would seem almost certain that it could be accurately understood in both ways. It was a display of faith on the part of those who laid on hands, which God honored. He conveyed power through it to the one in need. It was also a display of submission on the part of the recipient, which God honored and blessed with an inflow of his power. Instruction in the laying on of hands has largely disappeared from Protestant Christian practice to our detriment. It likely was how believers came to an understanding of the spiritual authority resident in the Church leaders they functioned and lived under. Submission to such authority, largely passed over in the local church today, from a biblical standpoint is essential to the successful practice of the Christian faith (Titus 2:15; 2 Corinthians 10:8-11; 13:10). This is a point the author will state very definitively later (Hebrews 13:17).

The fifth elementary understanding had to do with the resurrection of the dead. That Christ was raised is the central truth of the Christian faith. If he was not, there is no legitimate Christian faith (1 Corinthians 15:13-19). That we will be raised is also central to the practice of the Christian faith (1 Corinthians 15:32).

The resurrection was a primary motivator and source of hope given to early Christians by the apostles (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 5:9-11; 1 Peter 5:12-14; 2 Peter 3:8-14). A clear understanding that all will be raised from the dead was given by the early Church.

The sixth and final example given by the author of the foundational teachings of the faith is the principle of eternal judgment. The aftermath of the resurrection is clearly different in the case of believer versus unbeliever according to apostolic teaching. Unbelievers will be raised to condemnation and punishment for their deeds (2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; 2 Peter 3:7; Revelation 20:11-15). Believers will be raised to forgiveness, but also accountability for their stewardship and reward for service (1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Luke 19:11-27). The author of Hebrews knew and taught that the principle of accountability on the part of believers and nonbelievers is foundational to the practice of the Christian faith (Hebrews 9:27).

As important as all these ideas are, they are foundational in nature. We are to master them and then use them as the foundation on which the end of faith begins to take form and become visible.

**6:3 And this we shall do, if God permits."**

The author's intent is to spend no more time building a foundation, but to take the readers to the next things they needed to master. The flow of the journey of ideas that he will lead them on will begin with a warning. It is a warning that this journey forward must be taken. Should we simply sit on our faith, it will atrophy. We will fall into the experience of the wilderness generation, the very one he has warned against. We will find ourselves condemned to wandering just as they did. God will give the opportunity to others and allow us simply to separate ourselves from the company of those who are moving forward in the journey.

Like all New Testament writers, there is the acknowledgment of the fact that time itself is in God's hand. Even a noble venture like the writing of this book, getting it into the hands of the readers, and teaching them in it, could be cut short by God's plan in time. Even though the early church had a strong understanding of God's prophetic plan, there was this submission to an unknown element in it. Even though they were skilled in determining the leadings and movements of the Spirit, we see this concession that our efforts and plans depend on Yahweh's blessing (Acts 18:21; Romans 1:13; 1 Corinthians 4:19; James 4:13-16).

**6:4 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,"**

The thought of this verse continues into the next two verses and is incomplete apart from them. The NASB rendering attempts to make this long sentence more readable by a slight shift in the word order. The first word in the Greek text is the adjective impossible. This word does not occur in the NASB version until down in verse 6. By shifting the word to verse six, they render the text more readily understandable. But it loses some of its emphatic tone. As it was originally written the word impossible starts the entire thought. This adjectival expression occurs a total of 10 times in the New Testament. It is used of that which is humanly impossible but divinely possible (Matthew 19:26; Mark 10; 27; Luke 18:27). It is used to describe those who are physically incapacitated (Acts 14:8), or in a similar way spiritually incapacitated (Romans 15:1). It is used of the law's inability to bring about righteousness in us (Romans 8:3). It is used four times in the book of Hebrews. It is used of God's inability to lie (6:18). It is used of the inability of animal blood to remit sin (10:4). It is used of the impossibility of pleasing God apart from faith (11:6). So we have a word that describes something that cannot occur in the purely human realm. Where it is used of God, it speaks of

something that absolutely cannot and will not occur because it would violate his character.

Now what follows this word is a long, definitive announcement of a certain spiritual impasse that can develop in one's life. The specific thing that becomes impossible is named in verse 6 a renewal that results in repentance. The intermediate description defines with some precision a series of spiritual experiences in an individual that brings about this final state where there is an impossibility of renewal.

There is considerable controversy among interpreters over whether this impossibility could come about in the readers themselves. Some suggest that it is written about a group that has existed perpetually in the covenant community. This group are professors of faith but not possessors. They are masqueraders. Their faith is a façade. They have no saving faith at all. Others say this is written about believers and so proves that saving faith can be lost. A person once saved can abandon their faith and so be eternally lost all over again. These are the extreme positions. Others embrace this as a warning to Christians of a legitimate danger they can face of having an extremely limited experience of Yahweh's salvation. If our interpretation has been right of what the author has stated thus far in his treatise, then this last position makes the best sense in terms of this text.

The author begins to describe a specific pattern of response to spiritual things in which this impossibility of renewal then arises. The string of verbal adjectives which define this experience are all plural. Using the plural the author leaves us with the impression that he is describing an experience which is common to several people, or that tends to happen collectively. He will list six things that happen to such people. The first of the six is that they have once been enlightened. This term appears nine other times in the New Testament. It describes an actual physical light in only a few cases. In most cases it is used metaphorically of personal recognition of truth (Ephesians 1:18; 3:9; 2 Timothy 1:10). It occurs one other time in Hebrews (10:32), where it is used of the experience of the readers turning to the truth and the accompanying suffering they endured. So the term is speaking of a person who has properly perceived truth, made the distinction between it and what they had previously believed and embraced it.

The second characteristic of the journey of this group of people is that they have "tasted of the heavenly gift." The word taste occurs twice in these verses. We will see it again in verse five. Tasting in the English language refers to an activity of tasting something as opposed to eating or drinking it completely. This distinction is not inherent in this Greek word. There are occurrences of this word where there appears to be just a sampling taken as in our English word taste (Matthew 27:34; John 2:9). But in New Testament usage it refers just as often to eating (Acts 10:10; 20:11). When used metaphorically such a distinction disappears and it refers to participating in an entire experience (Luke 9:27; Hebrews 2:9). So when the author says that these people have

"tasted of the heavenly gift," we should understand that they have participated fully in it.

The third characteristic spoken of by the author is that these people have partaken of the Holy Spirit. The word used here is a significant one to this author. It is the word he has used to describe that to which his readers have arisen to already (Hebrews 3:1), and it is that to which he wants them to continue to rise (Hebrews 3:14). The Greek term is μεταχουσ. It is formed from the preposition which means "with" joined to the word "have." The Septuagint uses this word for a Hebrew word that describes one who is joined to another in classic close friendship (Ecclesiastes 4:10). It is used to describe the relationship between Christ and angels (Psalm 45:7). It is used to describe the close friends one would have in their wedding party (Song of Songs 8:13). It is used of those who band together for a common purpose such as battling a common enemy (Judges 20:11). It is used in a bad sense of those whose hearts share an evil agenda (Proverbs 28:24). In the New Testament the Greek term occurs six times, five of which occur in Hebrews. The only other occurrence outside of Hebrews is in Luke 5:7, where it is used of the relationship between Jesus' disciples. The idea of being an active participant with someone or something and of having intimate knowledge of them or it is being conveyed. It is not a word that can be construed to speak of one who has passing knowledge of someone or something or mere knowledge of its existence. There is the idea of mingling together inherent in it. It describes the relationship a child of God experiences with the Holy Spirit, and through the Holy Spirit with other Christians.

**6:5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,"**

This is a continuation of a rather long sentence moving toward its conclusion in the verse that follows.

The fourth characteristic of this spiritual journey that the author is describing is that it involves having "tasted the good word of God." This is the second time in this long sentence he has used this word "tasted." As mentioned earlier, we might be tempted to view this as a superficial dabbling based on our English usage of the word tasted. But while the Greek word could be used of sampling, it is more often used as a synonym for eating a meal (Acts 20:11; 23:14), or metaphorically for sharing in an entire experience (Luke 9:27; John 8:52). Here then the author is speaking of the experience of the understanding of revelation and the application of it. The group of people he is referring to have known what it is like to live by the pattern taught by the Scripture.

The fifth characteristic is that these people have tasted "the powers of the age to come." To the apostolic company there was a future age they awaited when Christ would return to earth to rule (Acts 1:6; 3:19). He would rule with justice, punishing the enemies of truth and righteousness (2 Thessalonians 1:5-10). He would be visibly present and so his power would be uniquely apparent. This miraculous power of God is

a part of the experience of his children in the present age. Though our actual perception of it may for various reasons be paltry, the idea that we are witnessing and experiencing it is everywhere present in the writings of the New Testament (Romans 15:18-19; 2 Corinthians 2:4-5; 12:9; Colossians 1:11; 2 Timothy 1:7; 2 Peter 1:3). To see the transformation brought about by the Gospel is to witness the power of God (Romans 1:16), power that will continue its work in the age to come.

**6:6 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."**

The sixth and final experience of the spiritual journey of these people is that they fall away. They have done all the previous five things and then have done this. All the action is presented to us as completed. There were five good things that were remarkable signs of redemption, and then this that sounds like a spiritual catastrophe strikes. The author does not feel the need to delineate any more detail here. We are told simply that they fall away. This is the only use of this specific word in the New Testament. We are left to determine from the broader context of Scripture what exactly the experience of falling away involves.

This is the second time the author has used an expression involving the word "fall" with his readers (4:11). He has felt no need to explain precisely what he means by "fall." This is likely because the metaphorical use of "fall" is common in the Old Testament. Besides its use there as a euphemism for death, fallen is also used metaphorically of a change for the worse in a political, social or economic position. More significantly however, fallen is used to describe a loss of a position of privilege and blessing with God (Proverbs 28:18; Isaiah 8:13-15; Jeremiah 6:14-15). This use is utilized by the New Testament writers.

The exact Greek word rendered here by the English phrase "fall away" does not occur elsewhere in the

New Testament. It is a form of παραπιπτω, a compound word formed by prefixing the preposition "alongside" to the word πιπτω, which means to fall. This word πιπτω in its various forms is the one used by New Testament writers in a way like the metaphorical usage of the word "fall" in the Old Testament. When used of a spiritual fall it generally describes the loss of a firm spiritual footing and the movement into false doctrine and disobedience (1 Corinthians 10:12; 2 Peter 1:10; 3:17).

This sixth experience then is a reversal. It is a lapse in spiritual vibrancy that leads to a return to the ways of thinking that characterized the person before they had the previous five experiences. It is a giving up of all the ground gained. The readers, obviously believers, are warned about it so we must assume that the danger to them of taking this sixth step was legitimate. The danger is laid out in the remainder of this verse, and it is very serious.

The author returns to the word that began the sentence in the Greek version, the word impossible. The NASB, to improve readability, has moved this word from verse four and has placed it here in verse six in their translation. The writer states that it is impossible to renew such people once again to repentance. There are three things about that statement that should be noted. First, they have been renewed once. The very experiences they have had in the faith show that. The problem is to bring them into that state once again. Second, the problem is to renew them. This word occurs only here in the New Testament, though the idea of newness brought about through the gospel of Christ is clearly fundamental to Christian doctrine (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15; Ephesians 4:24). They were made new once, but a remodel of these who have fallen is impossible. Third, the ultimate visible result of renewal, repentance, is forever lost. The practical result is that these will remain in their fallen away condition through the remainder of their lives.

The reason that this needed renewal is impossible is never stated but seems to be implicit in the broader context of the book. We know that anything that is impossible for God is so only because of his unwillingness to violate something within his character. We know that he has allowed humanity some measure of free will in spiritual matters. Renewal is impossible because the persons themselves do not desire it. The author had earlier warned the readers against being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:12). This section of his letter indicates that they could conceivably become so hardened that restoration to a healthy faith will never be experienced in their lifetimes.

The example of the wilderness generation has served as the author's backdrop thus far in this letter. In their case they reached a tipping point with God. They continually faltered in their trust of his goodness. After ten major incidents of corporate rebellion and accusation against him, he banned them from the promised land (Numbers 14:20-35). They could not regain the promise even though some sought it (Numbers 14:40-45). It is part of God's disciplining of his family that they are punished at times by their sins. All along the author has been warning the readers against the danger exemplified by the spiritual sloth of the wilderness generation. This is a statement of the end which that generation experienced, an end that remains a possibility for every member of God's family. It is possible to have a very limited experience of the transformational power of the Gospel and the salvation of Yahweh. That does not make one less a child of God, but it makes one a disobedient and rebellious child of God.

The phrases that follow in this verse describe vividly the effect that such rebellion has in our relationship with God. When we allow our hearts to be carried away to this point, we share common ground with another rebellious generation that repeated the mistake of those under Moses. We become hardened, exactly the same thing that happened to those who crucified their Messiah. The generation of Christ got to a point where they did not recognize Yahweh, even when he stood in their midst (John 12:37-

43). The author's words create a new crucifixion event, and place such people as fall away there on site, joining in the taunting of Christ. It is spine-tingling imagery.

This is a very dramatic statement of the position one who falls away takes up by reason of whom they align themselves with. The same type of statement is made of those Christians who partake of the Lord's supper in a fleshly way (1 Corinthians 11:27-34). These are not statements that excludes them from the possibility of forgiveness from God. As Jesus hung on the cross, he clearly left the door of forgiveness open to his torturers (Luke 23:33-38).

What is the point the author is making through this statement of crucifying Christ again? It is that Christians who fall away place themselves on the same ground as those who are away from God's blessing and subject to his discipline. But it does not necessarily follow that they lose their salvation from hell. The agricultural figure of speech that follows brings out the fact that such people will be judged by God. They will be subjected to the loss of everything. They will have nothing to show for their lives. They will however themselves be saved from eternal death.

**6:7 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;"**

The ancient world was one in which most of the population was directly involved in agriculture. In western culture today, that way of life is largely gone. Many who interpret this passage have lost their connection to agricultural practices and so do not capture the picture painted by the author's words here. The picture is not particularly complexed, but it does require us to place ourselves in the agricultural world.

In this figure the soil becomes symbolic of a person. That is important. The person is not the crop. The crop is symbolic of that which the person produces their thoughts, their actions and undertakings. The one for whom the ground is tilled is God, the maker of all things and the one for whom they are made (Colossians 1:16). Like much of what the author of Hebrews writes, this figure has roots in the Old Testament picturing there Yahweh's discipline of Israel (Isaiah 10:17).

The meaning of the picture created in this verse is clear and simple. It harmonizes with the pictures of other authors in the New Testament. The person who produces thoughts and deeds useful to God, is blessed by God. This is just like ground that brings profit to the one working it. It is cared for by them in a special way. That is the simple meaning of the first half of this figure.

A companion piece to the figure in this verse is the picture of stewardship presented throughout the New Testament (1 Corinthians 4:1-5). Individual Christians are held responsible for their response to truth and are either blessed or disciplined by God during their lives on earth.

**6:8 but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned."**

This is the negative half of this imagery where the Christian is represented by soil, and the produce of the land is symbolic of their thoughts and deeds. The thorns and thistles are a crop not useful for the one for whom the ground is cultivated. Such a crop represents thoughts and deeds that are not useful to God. In such cases in the agriculture of the ancient world, the field was simply burned. That is the same in many cases today, although the availability of herbicides has greatly altered this practice. It is that burning, the common and normal practice of the day, that is being referenced here. Though in the U.S. it is becoming rarer, there are fields where thistles and other noxious weeds are so persistent that profitable agronomy is impossible. They are in this sense cursed, abandoned for productive and profitable use. Such fields are no different than the most barren desert land, though they certainly had a different potential.

It is important to note here that dirt cannot be burned. The crop that is on it can be. So the imagery of this author parallels that of the apostle Paul. A person's work perishes, but they themselves are saved (1 Corinthians 3:15). Nothing they have worked or labored for crosses over into eternity. They enter eternity having produced nothing in either themselves or others by means of the wealth of truth available to them. They utterly flunk the test of stewardship but were in fact appointed by God as stewards.

Taken in this light, verses four through eight constitute a warning against a legitimate danger that every Christian must avoid. It makes the doctrinal instructions of other epistles essential. It heightens the importance of endurance and persistence in sound doctrine. It lends impetus to the call to diligence on the part of Christ and the New Testament writers.

A classic Reformed or Calvinistic interpretation sees this entire passage quite differently. It takes it as a warning to those who are masquerading as believers. Their interpretation of the metaphor as a picture of one who is not really chosen or elect, does violence first to the plain literal statement of verses four through six. They must marginalize the enlightenment, and the partaking of the Holy Spirit mentioned there as something other than a genuine conversion experience. Then secondly, they must do violence to the metaphor itself, making the thorns and thistles the person. The burning then becomes hell, and the curse eternal judgment. Then in their thinking, the entire passage becomes a warning of a danger that cannot legitimately happen to a true believer. Such interpretation renders whole sections of this letter not applicable to a portion of the original hearers. One need not worry about things like diligence, because it will naturally spring up in them if they are true believers. In the end this is the imposition of a theology on a text.

The person who is of an extreme Armenian position takes this section of Scripture to be a warning against the danger of losing one's salvation entirely. That interpretation

allows one to take the plain literal statement of the person's past in verses four through six at face value, as a genuine conversion experience. But it does the same thing in the figurative literal statement of the person as the Calvinistic or Reformed approach does. It makes the crop the person, who in their interpretation loses their position as a child of God and returns to their natural condition as God's enemy. The effect is the same in terms of the type of person the section of Scripture is speaking to. The Armenian position, however, does not do the violence to the emphasis the Apostles put on diligence and follow-through that the Reformed interpretation does.

**6:9 But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way."**

Though the warning of the previous verses was legitimate, and though the readers were at risk, the author is convinced that they will right themselves. Why is he confident of this? When we read this verse, we can lean toward thinking something like this: the readers could never fall because they were actually and truly saved. Their salvation is genuine; therefore their faithfulness is predestined. In other words, the author is confident because he believes their fall is theologically impossible. So we could see this as confirming that true believers can never fall away from the faith. There are several reasons why that reads too much into this statement.

The first has to do with the word rendered convinced. In usage it refers to someone who has been acted upon by evidence so that they have arrived at a state of believing something. The word itself does not mean that their belief or confidence is well-founded or accurate (Luke 11:22; Luke 18:9; Acts 27:11; Romans 2:8). It simply means that the one holding the belief believes it. So the author is not expressing here some Biblical rule or axiom that because they have believed it is impossible for them to fall away. He is stating a personal belief that he has embraced, the common experience we all have of coming to believe in someone's character. The word does not exclude the possibility that he will be disappointed or that the readers will let him down.

Second, we have already seen that the word "salvation" refers to more than one's justification. To narrow the term salvation to mean justification is to impose a 21st century American usage of the word on a first century writing. We have already shown that the Scriptural view of the salvation of Yahweh is that of an ongoing experience for which there is a new chapter each day. It is the ongoing experience of being freed from old habits and patterns of thought. The author is saying that he has confidence that the readers will turn to God for renewal and so resume their journey into the experience of Yahweh's salvation. Because they are people of diligence (11), he believes that they will not take the path of the wilderness generation. He believes that their future experience will be that of being rescued from the lies and deceit of godless living.

Third, the statement "though we are speaking this way" confirms that his expressed concern is indeed that they themselves will fall away. This is a confirmation that his words of warning painted an accurate picture of a potential ending. Their present spiritual state had placed them in a precarious spot. Their falling away and their potential sluggishness is not an impossible scenario.

What then is our conclusion about this verse? We should see it as looking back over the warning and expressing that the conversation has been legitimate and the author's concern well-founded. A catastrophe is possible.

But the author believes in the readers. He believes that through his warning that potential catastrophe will be avoided. He believes that they will not respond as the wilderness generation had responded to Moses. Instead, by means of this warning, the entire salvation process will gain renewed momentum among them.

What are the things that accompany the salvation process? There are many. The entire Bible describes things that accompany Yahweh's work in individual lives. But the next verse will speak of the primary thing the author has in mind here.

**6:10 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."**

We have already seen that in the author's mind there is a tipping point that exists in the mind of God when his justice demands that he cease extending opportunities of stewardship to his unfaithful servants. As evidence that such a tipping point exists, he has given as "Exhibit A" the wilderness generation. He could have offered other exhibits using individual examples such as Lot, Saul, and Solomon.

The author does not believe that the reader's dullness of hearing has approached that of the wilderness generation. He does not believe it is at the point where the justice of God demands that he cease giving them opportunities as stewards of truth. On the contrary, the author summons as evidence in their behalf their past diligence in matters of the faith. It was such that he could legitimately appeal to the justice of God in their behalf. He could even see in their present practice of the faith legitimate reason for God to justly continue imparting grace to them. So at the very worst, their faith was in a state of decline. It still had signs of life.

We see solid linkage here between our love for Yahweh and ministry to his people. This was the same linkage Jesus established (Matthew 25:34-36; Mark 9:41; John 13:35). So when we speak of the things that accompany salvation, we would expect to see Yahweh build into us a deeper concern for the needs of his children and a greater commitment and sacrifice to meet these needs. The Spirit's activity in us aims at choreographing in the family of God specific things that strengthen the faith of others (Ephesians 4:1116; 1 Corinthians 12:12-26; 14:26). This was the activity the author saw being orchestrated within the lives of the readers. His words are specific to this point.

They had fully engaged in ministering to Christ's family and were presently engaged in that ministry. Where this is occurring, we can be reasonably certain that there is sufficient spiritual health that other issues can be successfully addressed.

There is an important implication in this verse. The presence of love and ministry toward God's people is a sign of life in Christians, but not necessarily assurance that they are spiritually healthy. It is easy for us to have the view that love is all that matters. It is certainly a critical piece. It is accurate to say that if love is not present everything else is diminished (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). But there are other critical elements of spiritual health that must be present if the danger of falling away is to be avoided. That is the obvious message of the writer of Hebrews to this point.

**6:11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end,"**

History has shown that it is not easy to understand or articulate a crisp definition of the role of God's Spirit in our thought process and the thought processes themselves. Christians have quarreled over how that should be understood for centuries. Along this same line, it is not easy to understand the exact makeup of the thing this author calls diligence. It is a quality the New Testament writers often call us to in matters of faith (Romans 12:8, 11; 2 Peter 1:5, 10). What is our role in summoning it, and what is the Spirit's role in providing it?

The Old Testament writers spoke of us needing to "incline our hearts" toward Yahweh (Joshua 24:23; Isaiah 55:3). However they also asked Yahweh to incline their hearts toward him (1 Kings 8:58; Psalm 119:36). Though living historically under the Old Covenant they understood their fallenness and the necessity of his work of grace within themselves. They spoke of practicing the "fear of Yahweh," and this being the key to wisdom (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 14:27). These terms refer to a diligence in spiritual practice.

The New Testament writers assume that when we exercise trust and choose to bend our minds toward the things of God, we are at that point participating in the Spirit's leading. Such initiative in the sanctification process is both ours and the Spirit's (1 Thessalonians 4:1-8). Increase is given to our diligence both by the Spirit and by the human force of habit. Diligence in the minds of the New Testament writers, is a faith-diligence. Its result, in the end, is attributable to God. But all along the way we have exercised choices of stewardship.

The author of Hebrews, like Peter (2 Peter 1:5), and like Paul (Romans 12:11), is presenting diligence as something we must summon ourselves to. If it was provided miraculously merely by the Spirit's presence, if we did not have to make some sort of decision in the matter, we would not have to be urged and commanded regarding it. On the other hand, if it was entirely in us to be spiritually diligent, the old covenant

would have worked. It seems then that the diligence spoken of here is impossible apart from the Spirit, but also is something towards which we must take intentional steps.

This faith-diligence partnership with God himself through his Spirit sets the entire tone of Hebrews. The author's focus is to inspire response to the faith initiative of the Holy Spirit within us. It is our trust, even a small amount of trust, that God seeks, attaches his power to, and increases. It is a series of tiny moments in each day in which our thoughts are tipped or inclined toward our Creator. In similar Old Testament terminology, it is the presence and practice of the fear of Yahweh. It provides a series of watershed moments in each day in which God can bless and give increase. This seems to be the Biblical concept of spiritual diligence.

There are some ideas in the words the author uses in this exhortation that are noteworthy. He describes his desire with a very strong word that most often describes coveting or lust. So this desire for diligence in the readers is a longing or ache in the author's soul for them and in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's vision was not for a select few people to exercise such diligence. He longed for consistency in the Church and the strength of many on a common course.

The author then speaks of the particular purpose in view for them, toward which spiritual diligence aims. That purpose is named as realizing "the full assurance of hope until the end." Spiritual diligence imparts hope. Hope is the great motivator that inspires persistence. We maintain hope to the degree that we are reminded of the truth of the unseen. The author longed for the readers lives to be lived to the end fully convinced of the hope of God's promises.

**6:12 that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."**

The alternative to spiritual diligence is the sluggishness of spiritual apathy. We do not need to choose to be lazy spiritually. It gradually creeps over our lives if we do not choose diligence. The word used here was used earlier by this writer (Hebrews 5:11). It is linked in its etymology to the word for an illegitimate child—a bastard. Without delving into such etymology we can certainly say that the author wants the readers to assign a certain illegitimacy to any course of action other than the diligence he is setting forth in faith matters.

He calls the reader to mimic the lives of certain ones. So there is a way of thinking and living that we are to be acquainted with so that we can shape our own lives after it. It is described in Scripture and models of it are provided in each generation. The author here clearly states the kinds of models that are to be mimicked. It is not a simple matter of copying those who lead a disciplined or successful life. It is searching out and copying a pattern of life that is marked by faith and patience and what is the ultimate success, that of inheriting the things God has promised. There are many who

have lived productive and successful lives by human standards. That is not the point of our lives. We are to live in a way that we are rewarded by God with all the blessings He has promised to his faithful managers.

When the letter is completed, the readers will have a backdrop against which those whom they are told to imitate can be discerned. In the first part of the letter that they have read thus far, the wilderness generation has been cast as providing a pattern of sluggishness. They are to avoid falling into the pattern those people have provided. They failed to experience all God had for them. They were his children and experienced freedom from slavery, and his special care. But their distrust of him kept them from the destination and entrance into all the abundance Yahweh had for them. Their story is recorded for us so that we will learn not to follow their path (1 Corinthians 10:1-13).

Toward the end of this letter the readers will be given names of those who trusted God and so accomplished great feats by his power. During the most difficult circumstances they experienced Yahweh's salvation. They trusted him and he proved faithful to them and so they are depicted as presently experiencing the promises he has made. Their names and stories are recorded with the intention that we should mimic them.

Either path could be walked by the readers. The author believes in them, that they will exercise diligence. But he clearly marks the potential of them taking a different direction with these words.

**6:13 For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself,"**

The writer has expressed his desire that the readers show diligence so they will enter the full experience the hope of salvation provides in this life. He has called this "rest," He also wants the readers to show diligence so that they will persist in the godly course and so lay hold of the things God has promised as the inheritance of the faithful. So there is both a temporal and eternal motivation to the letter to the Hebrews.

The author now will speak more specifically to the certainty of our hope. his purpose is not to give an emotional pep talk. Instead he will provide principles that will serve as a strong foundation for a hope that can be re-embraced each day.

We can see clearly in the words of this verse that our faith is founded on the Creator God himself, the greatest and most powerful being that exists. It is not founded merely on ideas or concepts, with the accompanying hope that these will lead to a lifestyle that will curry God's favor. That is the way of classic human religion. Our hope is based on a personal relationship with Yahweh our creator and on who he is. There is no one greater either in terms of power or in character. All that is, has been created by him to serve his purposes. Whatever else exists finds its rank, its meaning, and its existence in him. There is simply no one greater than him and he has initiated relationship with us.

his character, his resources, and his power guarantee that the hope he has extended to us will be realized. But there is more.

Our hope is built on personal guarantees he has made to us. The message of this verse is sourced in Genesis 22:16. There God states to Abraham, "By Myself I have sworn." He has given us his solemn personal word, going so far as to establish a covenant with us through Abraham (Genesis 15; 17:1-8; 22:15-19). Yahweh is no moral or emotional weakling who will simply walk away. In fact, by very nature he is bound to his word. he can sustain only that which is true and good, and which extends from who he himself is he will bring all else to a just end. So our faith rests in the solemn decree of a person who cannot fail. He is the person all things, including evil, serve.

The force of this idea is huge. Our hope in the promises of God is more certain than anything else we routinely place our trust in through the course of our days on earth. We routinely trust in human testimony taken under oath in human courts of law. We trust that others will be held to the boundaries of civil and criminal law. We routinely exercise trust in financial instruments that absolutely depend on the character and performance of many others. Though we feel very secure in many life details, the reality is that our hope rests in the actions of many, many imperfect people and processes.

Our faith is distinctly different than hope we must muster and build in these more routine matters. If a contract for anything else gives us assurance, then we can certainly trust Yahweh's word. And if we cannot trust in him or his word, then there is no certainty in anything at all in this world.

**6:14 saying, 'I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply you.'"**

These words appear to be taken from the Septuagint version of Genesis 22:17. The equivalent message of blessing occurs several times in the ongoing dialog between Abraham and God (Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-18; 15:1-6; 17:1-8; 18:18-19). It is not that before Genesis 22 and the specific incident of Abraham's obedience in the willingness to offer up his son Isaac, Yahweh's words had been uncertain. The words of God are when uttered certain. But God takes the unusual step of reinforcing them in the mind of Abraham by making a sworn statement.

The writer of Hebrews rightly sees the significance of this rather unusual gesture by Yahweh as being done to strengthen hope in humanity. It reflects the fact that God puts the promise in a form we will understand clearly as binding and certain. It is not that otherwise Yahweh's words were not certain. It is that he knows the scars produced in us by an evil world, the uncertainty of anyone else's word and our distrust in promises. And so he subjects himself in a sense to our world of worthless guarantees and broken promises and voluntarily gives a sworn statement (17-18). This is done to foster faith and trust in Abraham, Isaac, and their offspring.

As in every contract, the words themselves are important. Yahweh is a person of his word, and so when he makes a promise, he can be counted on to fulfill the actual words he has spoken. The writer to Hebrews rightly brings the readers to focus on the words stated by Yahweh in his sworn statement. They are words of promised blessing to Abraham and the promised multiplication of his seed. They are indicative of God's larger purpose of restoring the blessing lost by Adam and Eve through one offspring of Abraham.

**6:15 And thus, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise."**

We know that Abraham was blessed. The statement of his death in Genesis 25:8 captures the richness of his personal life experience of Yahweh's salvation. We also know that he did not live physically to see the multitude of his offspring that Yahweh promised him in Genesis 22, where they are projected to be as the sand of the seashore in multitude. The writer of Hebrews expresses this reality himself later in this letter (Hebrews 11:13-15). So there is persistent testimony that Abraham's life ended before he realized the promises, yet there is this testimony in Scripture that conveys that Abraham saw and obtained the promise (Hebrews 11:13). Jesus even spoke of Abraham as having seen him (John 8:56). In what sense then did Abraham obtain the promise?

This question is best answered by the Bible's own projection of the end toward which God is taking humanity in his divine plan. There is a grander promise that the salvation experiences of this life are installments toward. That does not make them insignificant. On the contrary these experiences have great bearing on the later ones.

What we know is that Yahweh's plan is to restore glory to himself by restoring the glory of humanity and creation. So to demonstrate and proclaim his greatness he has embarked on a great restoration project in fallen creation. Through his salvation humanity is restored to him by belief in the gospel. By that belief they are also blest and empowered by him so that they experience a lifestyle of salvation, being constantly saved from the effects and impact of their fallenness. The promise of a land for Abraham's offspring was to demonstrate this salvation on the current earth. The land was where a people would live a lifestyle of salvation marked by blessing from Yahweh. There was the understanding however, that our present experience would be flawed and incomplete due to our spiritual inability. There was also a growing understanding that this creation is temporary, that a new heaven and earth was in God's long-range plan. It is difficult to determine at what point that understanding became clear to people of faith. But it seems quite likely that it was passed down from Adam.

By the plan of God then, the present life and the present experience of salvation on this earth will be entered into by multitudes. Their experience of his salvation will not end when they die. By virtue of Christ's death, their spirits in death's aftermath remain

joined to his, and so are in God's presence. Their bodies will be resurrected and transformed at the appointed time and rejoined to their spirits to reign with Christ on this earth. Then the plan of Yahweh will bring about the destruction of this earth and the creation of a new one. The author of Hebrews indicates that Abraham knew of these experiences after death of Yahweh's salvation. So Abraham was looking beyond what he himself would see of these promises while on earth, focusing on the finished picture (Hebrews 11:8-15). All of this would have been more perceptible to Abraham once he died and so it is accurate to speak of him as having received the promises. Once one crosses the line in death into eternity, the fuller experience of the eternal aspect of those promises begins. And so it is in this quite normal sense that Abraham obtained the promises.

In the book of Moses the Pentateuch, Abraham's life is sharply contrasted with the wilderness generation, and even with Moses himself. Both the wilderness generation and Moses miss the rest of the promised land, though for different reasons. They are projected as falling short. Abraham is projected as righteous through faith and is continually promised the land. The writer to the Hebrews apparently reads the Pentateuch in that way and so captures the difference in Abraham as being that he "patiently waited." As we see the failure of the wilderness generation, we see impetuousness rather than patience. We also see rebellious, willful action rather than waiting. In Moses' failure, though less definitive, there are hints of the same thing. Patient waiting, a state of trusting or resting in legitimate hope, continues to emerge as that which the readers needed to rise to. By using the words "patiently waited," the author is reinforcing earlier exhortations to diligence.

**6:16 For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute.**

Here the author begins his movement toward showing that God took an oath for our benefit. It was not that his word without an oath was dubious. It was that our own sin plus our experience in an evil world gives us a propensity toward doubt. Yahweh wanted us to be able to trust his word and so he chose to demonstrate its unalterable character in terms we would clearly understand. This is the objective side of his enablement which includes the more subjective enlightenment of his Spirit within us. Here the author states the human practice that God decides to embrace so that we might have confidence in his promise to perform.

Among humanity we swear by one greater than ourselves. In taking an oath we are submitting ourselves to the scrutiny and accountability of another. Their authority guarantees and makes certain that the terms of the oath will be enforced should we default. The oath is of value because of the superior power and trustworthiness of the person or thing we swear by. In the case of a person, their power and willingness to enforce the terms means the one receiving the guarantee is protected. So among

humans an oath is a legal instrument that warrants the truth and truthfulness of a matter.

**6:17 In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath,**

The intent of God in any matter will eventually be brought about. That is a key difference between him and all other beings. Now by definition there can be only one such being or force in the universe or to some degree there will be chaos. That is the essence of what we mean when we say Yahweh is sovereign. All other intentions are realized only to the degree that they work toward the outcome he desires. His omniscience includes absolute foreknowledge. And so the course he sets is informed of every contingency and cannot be thwarted. The result is that his every intention is a certainty. At the heart then of our confidence in God is this idea of his omnipotence and his sovereignty along with his unchangeableness.

His uniquely sovereign power and purpose is one of the things that makes faith difficult for us. Because he alone is unchangeable, we have no other experience with someone whose word is certain and always prevails. We are painfully aware that intentions guarantee nothing, even all that may be affirmed by written contract or oath.

Both God's love for humanity and his justice led him to provide that which would enable us to trust in his promises. And so to enable our faith he "interposed with an oath." This word the NASB renders "interposed" means to come in between, to arbitrate, or to mediate. And so we have God, who has every right to be insulted by any question of integrity and trust, willingly assuming the role of mediator. He creates an escrow account in these eternal matters whereby we are guaranteed his promised inheritance.

Motivated by love for humanity, he meets our need for assurances. We are left with a remarkable irony. The only one whose word cannot fail willingly subjects himself to our need for assurances and takes an oath we are the beneficiaries of.

**6:18 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."**

The promises made by God are certain because of two things that are unchangeable. First, God is unchangeable so he will not have a change of heart and decide to do anything differently. He will not get a new idea that he likes better. He is not subject to any kind of re-invention of himself. Second, since they are sourced in him, the unchangeable One, it follows that his decrees and promises are unchangeable. So we have two unchangeable things, God and what he promises.

In agreements among human beings there is the possibility of us lying to each other. And so the author affirms that this is impossible with God. Lying is impossible for him because truth is innate in him. It is as instinctive in him as self-centeredness is in humanity. It is not that he shapes his testimony or actions by the external standard of truth. It is that truth is in him so that it does not simply define him. He is truth. All that is a lie, or just wrong information is outside of him. This means that to lie he would have to be shaped by some need that his power and knowledge could not address. Were this to be the case, we would have to say he was no longer independent, and therefore not God in the absolute sense. Anyone capable of lying is compensating for weakness or inability at some level. God knows nothing of such inadequacy. There is no possibility that God has lied under oath.

What then is the reason for God placing himself under oath? It is to give us strong encouragement. This entire verse is a purpose clause that points to this that is the purpose for the promises and covenants that God has made with humanity. The covenants are not meant to make God's intentions certain. All that God intends is certain, awaiting only the arrival of its appropriate time in his plan. The covenants are for us, so that we might be enabled to trust in them and endure in that faith.

The bottom line for humanity is that we understand oaths. We cannot comprehend absolute perfection and trustworthiness. So when we exercise faith and trust in God's promises we are from a human point of view taking a huge risk. Now the reality is that it is no risk at all. The reality is that Yahweh and his truth are a refuge from the horrible storm of evil we live in. They are our only legitimate hope. God's willingness to swear his allegiance to us is meant to bridge this reality gap that we must live in. In our minds his Spirit can take us to these promises to give us eyes for realities we do not see. his sworn word is his tender provision for us in those times when holding the course seems futile.

**6:19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one that enters within the veil,"**

The author puts forward two ideas here about our hope in the promises of Yahweh. First, our hope in Yahweh's promises is an anchor for our souls. This is a metaphorical expression that the author then gives more literal definition to—our hope is "sure and steadfast." English words like secure and grounded, could also capture the force of these words. These are important ideas.

Anxiety exacts a huge toil on humanity and would be more destructive if it were not for hope. Without hope we are listless and adrift. Yet hope is itself a tricky thing. It is uncertain. The human experience is such that we can develop and hold many hopes that are groundless and groundless hope may in the end be more dangerous than no hope. Because of the character of Yahweh and his word, we have hope that serves as

an anchor. And because of the things his promises relate to, we can withstand the natural forces that can carry us all over the emotional map.

The second idea about this hope is more complexed It is that this hope of ours "enters within the veil."

This statement is informed by the layout of the Tabernacle, which is itself symbolic of the realities of God's presence. The Tabernacle was a holy place. The average Israelite did not enter the tabernacle because it was a holy place. The first "veil" served as the door of the Tabernacle and the priests alone were allowed to enter through that curtain into the holy place of the Tabernacle. This first veil then was passed through only by Levites for specific purposes related to their duties and service (Hebrews 9:1-6). But there was yet another curtain, deeper in the tabernacle beyond which was the most holy place. Of all the places on the planet that could have been considered holy, this place was designated by Yahweh as the most holy of them all. It was called the Holy of Holies. Only the High Priest was allowed to pass through this curtain into the Holy of Holies, and him only once each year (Hebrews 9:7). So in effect, a double door separated the worshipper from the presence of God.

Later when the temple was constructed this same Holy of Holies existed. Its veil, like that of the ancient Tabernacle, was passed through only once each year by the High Priest. It was this veil that was torn in two, from top to bottom, at the death of Christ, an event noted in Matthew, Mark, and Luke's account (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). This was an act of God. It symbolized the new reality that the blood of Christ had provided satisfactory payment for humanity's sin. Access to God was fully provided for in Christ to all who believe. There was no need for anything other than the blood of Christ to shield humanity from God's judgment and welcome them into his fellowship.

It is this historic change that is being referenced here. Our hope is centered in a person, Jesus Christ and in the specific event that was central to God's purpose for his life. It was an event carried out in time and recorded in history. It is certain and sure. Jesus' cruel torture and death atoned for our sin and tore the veil so that we have ongoing relationship with Yahweh. That makes fulfillment of all the covenant promises of God certain. He has dealt decisively with the only barrier to our future hope, our own guilt and unworthiness. It is this act of Jesus Christ, completed in our behalf, that gives solid foundation to our hope. Nothing needs separate us from God.

**6:20 Where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."**

This verse finishes the picture established in the previous verse and introduces the next idea the author will develop in detail in the ensuing chapter. The picture is of Christ passing through the veil which kept even priests out of the Holy of Holies in the

temple, except for the High Priest once each year. This is imagery of the impossibility of humanity enjoying the blessing of God's presence with them due to sin. Christ's sinlessness enabled him to live in the presence of God and allowed him to die for our sin. When he rose from the dead, he entered the true Holy of Holies, the very dwelling place of Yahweh, and sat down at his right hand.

The first significant thing we see in this verse is the phrase "forerunner for us." It is as Christ himself promised. Where he is, we are enabled also to be (John 14:1-3). A forerunner went ahead of a ruler or dignitary so that the citizenry would be prepared to welcome them. So there is the noticeable blurring of roles that we see wherever servant leadership is practiced. We have Christ clearly presented here as the One of ultimate dignity. We also have him presented humbly, announcing the arrival of a distinguished group of visitors. We are implicitly portrayed on the one hand as those who need Divine intervention and help. Yet on the other hand we are persons of great dignity. The significant thing—we will be where he is. That is our destiny.

The second significant thing we see in this verse is Christ's association with a particular order of priests called the order of Melchizedek. The readers were introduced to this order of priests back in chapter five (5:10). There is the idea of "the order of Melchizedek" is presented and left dangling. The author seems to know that in speaking of this order he will be introducing a completely foreign concept to the readers, beyond their ability to ponder. This was not due to its complexity, but due to the reader's own lack of diligence in spiritual matters. So he introduces the idea of the priestly order of Melchizedek, then leaves the subject to speak to them about their own spiritual infancy. He tells them that they are unable to digest such ideas because they have allowed themselves to remain stuck in the phase of spiritual infancy (5:11-14). Having thus chided them; it is as if the author now believes the readers will exert appropriate effort to process this important idea of the Melchizedekian order of priests. And so he returns to deal with it in some detail.

This order of priests that Christ was a part of is spoken of only twice in Scripture. It is introduced in Psalm 110, and it is re-introduced in Hebrews. It appears that this "order of Melchizedek" surfaced briefly during the life of Abraham through Melchizedek himself, then disappeared over the centuries as God worked through a different order of priests among Abraham's descendants. The priests among them were after the order of Aaron and were of the tribe of Levi. Christ was not of the tribe of Levi. He was of the tribe of Judah, which was the tribe of kings. The two offices, priest and king, were kept separate throughout the history of Israel.

We know very little about Melchizedek. In the only text in Scripture that narrates an incident in Melchizedek's life, we see that he is referred to as King of Salem, ancient Jerusalem, and as priest of God Most High (Genesis 14:18). In occupying these two roles, king and priest, he pre-figured Christ. He is the only one we know of who belonged to this order. It is as if humanity was given a glimpse of this order, then it was

reserved by Yahweh as the one that would be taken up and perpetuated by his Son eternally. The order of Melchizedekian priests then, reaches far back in time to the pre-Israel era where the two offices of priest and king were united. The designation of Christ as being of this order is profound, referring to the fact that he is both priest and king.

The author will now paint a picture of this order of priests that shows that it was a superior order than that of Aaron. his point will be that Christ is superior and his work superior to that of the priests of the Covenant of Sinai.

# HEBREWS 7

**7:1 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,**

The author is recapping the story recorded in Genesis 14:18-20. Abraham has rescued his nephew Lot, who had been taken captive, along with the other inhabitants of Sodom, by a confederation of four kings. Abraham and his allies had pursued them, defeated the four kings, rescued the people and recovered all their goods. As Abraham is returning the king of Sodom goes to meet him. It is at this point that Melchizedek comes on the scene, with no mention of any connection or alliance between himself and any of the participants in the battle. It could be that his gratitude motivated him, since these four kings had been troubling the region for some period (Genesis 14:1-7).

Melchizedek greets Abraham with this blessing: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand." There is a noted emphasis in his pronouncement of Abraham's special connection to Yahweh. There is the unmistakable deduction that Abraham will be strong because of this relationship to the "Possessor of heaven and earth." This is the first recorded incident where Abraham's privilege is understood and announced by another human being.

Two significant titles that Melchizedek held are noted by the record in Genesis and by the author of Hebrews. Melchizedek was king of Salem, and priest of the "Most High God." his title of king will be spoken of again in the following verse. his title of priest is the primary concern of the author and will be spoken of in greater detail.

**7:2 to whom 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.**

The author notes the record of the Genesis account, that Abraham gave a tenth of all he had to Melchizedek. This is a significant point that he will come back to later. It was no doubt recognition on Abraham's part of the greatness of Melchizedek and more significantly, of the distinguished nature of his role before God as priest.

Melchizedek's royalty is reflected by his name and of course his actual position. The author sees in both this man's name, and the meaning of the city over which he was king significant symbolism. In the author's mind these indicate that Melchizedek was some official representative of both Yahweh's righteousness and his peace. He completely passes over the possible significance of the city that Melchizedek presided over as king and priest, ancient Jerusalem. From an eschatological perspective that idea would have been a significant one to explore. But the ideas of Yahweh's righteousness and peace fit the more immediate concerns of the writer. He was trying to pry the readers from loyalty to the worship practices of the Old Covenant. Showing

that righteousness and peace were found apart from it was his concern. This observation of Melchizedek being the king of righteousness and peace helps strengthen his overall theme.

**7:3 Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually.**

The writer of Hebrews assesses here the character Melchizedek as he appears in the narrative of Moses. He is not suggesting that his observations are true in the case of the real life of the man. But in the narrative of Scripture Melchizedek appears on the scene without previous mention as one with significant honor. He then disappears from our view. We know nothing of his story before or after this incident.

This seems intentional in that it is not at all uncommon for biblical characters to be introduced as sons or daughters of someone. We know a little about the lineage of most of the significant figures in Scripture. The author of Hebrews tells us that the intention of this is that Melchizedek serve as a type or prefigure of the Son of God—Jesus Christ. For the purposes of the narrative Melchizedek is made like Christ. So details of his greater life story are rather deliberately withheld so that his origin and his end remain mysterious. Whatever his priesthood and kingship involved it is left hanging in the story of Scripture. The result is that through Melchizedek we see pictured the One greater than Abraham, Aaron, David, Solomon, all the priests and kings that would come out of Abraham's lineage. An order of rule that predated the Old Covenant and even the Abrahamic covenant is revealed that Yahweh's anointed priest/king would follow in.

**7:4 Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils.**

The writer's immediate goal in the next few verses is to show the greatness of Melchizedek. His end in doing that is to give his readers the freedom to let go of the Old Covenant to lay hold of life under the New Covenant. He has already shown that Christ is greater than Moses (3:5-6), that the "rest" found in Christ is greater than that offered by the Promised Land (4:8-9), that Christ is a greater High Priest than all who served in the order of Aaron (4:14-16). Now he is seeking to show that before Abraham, Moses and Aaron there was a greater one. Not only have greater things followed the Old Covenant, but greater things preceded it. The inadequacies of that covenant will become a key component of this author's treatise.

To accomplish his end the writer calls attention to a detail in the story. It seems almost secondary in reading the Genesis account to the blessing pronounced on Abraham and to Abraham's refusal to accept any kind of payment from the king of Sodom. But it is stated clearly that Abram gave a tenth of what he had to Melchizedek. It is the first instance in Scripture of the idea of tithe, the meaning of which is a tenth. We are not

told in the account if God had given Abram instruction on this matter, nor are we given any other details. We are told only that Abram did it. Given who Abram was, and the greatness of his various offspring, his act of presenting a tithe was a demonstration of the greatness of this unknown priest and king, Melchizedek.

**7:5 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.**

The author cites the example of the Levitical priests in receiving tithes from their fellow Israelites. This was a practice ordered in the Law and so became customary in the economy of Israel. It was a privilege and honor accorded them by the Law and pointed to the honorable work which they carried out. There was not inherent moral superiority in them over that of their fellow-Israelites. The honor was inherent in their birth and calling to the priesthood.

This verse serves as the first point of what will be a contrast. The author's point seems to be not primarily the privilege of the Levites, but the legal obligation of the rest of the Israelites. Though they are children of high honor, being descendants of Abraham, they have this responsibility to bestow honor on those of their brothers who were the priests. So within a family of honor, we have certain ones assigned greater honor, and of course the patriarch Abraham honored by all. The verses that follow will provide the other elements of this contrast, the aim of which is to show the greatness of the priesthood to which Christ belongs.

**7:6 But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham, and blessed the one who had the promises.**

The superiority of the order of Melchizedek will be brought out now in both the act of receiving tithe and bestowing blessing. The writer of Hebrews states his observations here in the reverse order the events themselves occurred in. The fact that Abraham was blessed first and then appears to have paid the tithe in response to the blessing is not important to the writer's purpose. His point will be made simply out of the idea that in the event Abraham paid tithe to Melchizedek and Melchizedek blessed Abraham (Genesis 14:17-24).

The author of Hebrews wants to remind the readers that Abraham paid a tithe to one who was entirely outside the covenant community of Israel. Whereas Levites were later singled out by the Law for special honor as members of the Abraham's family, Abraham himself singled out for special honor one outside the family. There was some greatness in Melchizedek that Abraham the patriarch recognized.

There was also some greatness in Abraham that Melchizedek recognized. Just as Abraham had given formal recognition to what he saw in Melchizedek and paid him tithe, Melchizedek had given a formal blessing to Abraham and linked him in

relationship to God, the one whom they both acknowledged as supreme. Evident in the language of the account is the use of the term "God Most High" (see Appendix 1). It occurs four times in five verses (Genesis 14:18-22). In Abraham's use of the term, he states the name, Yahweh, of this "God Most High." (verse 22). Clearly both men were seeing a kind of godly prestige in each other based on the exalted and holy nature of Yahweh.

This transaction orchestrated between these two men by God, appears intended to demonstrate two things. First, it established the existence of a spiritual order of authority that superseded that of the Levitical order of priests, those that would later be naturally born in the line of Abraham. The authority of the Levites had clear limits with respect to what it could achieve for humanity. There was another order that would achieve more. Second, this transaction added to the bits of information given about the One of Abraham's descendants that would be greater than Abraham and would provide redemption for humanity. All the families of the earth would be blessed through this coming King Priest.

**7:7 But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater.**

The significance of Abraham being blessed by Melchizedek is stated concisely here. Melchizedek was greater. That is inherent in the idea of bestowing blessing on someone. One of lesser rank cannot bestow blessing on a superior. The superior already has what the lesser person has. Blessing comes from one who is greater. That Melchizedek was greater is indicated by the fact that he gave public and formal blessing to Abraham. Abraham affirmed this by paying tithe in response to the blessing.

**7:8 And in this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on.**

In the record of God compiled by Moses, the Levites are always presented as mortal men. That they received tithe for their sustenance is a witness to their mortality. Like other men, they themselves had to offer sacrifice for their own sins. We see that the work they were given by God was perilous for this very reason, that they were mortal men. They themselves could suffer death if they did not follow precisely to the detail God's instructions in the offering of the people's sacrifices (Exodus 19:22; Numbers 3:4). There is a sense in which they are presented as fragile men in a tenuous position.

In this same record of God/Moses, one gets a different image of Melchizedek. His celebration of Abraham appears somewhat spontaneous and abandoned. Melchizedek is not cast in the narrative as one who is serving under a cumbersome system of regulations and precise procedures. He appears quite free of the trappings we see in the Levitical order of priests. We have already seen that the brevity of the record and lack of information is taken by the author of Hebrews as intentional, done to create in

the written literature of the Bible a type of Christ. And so that idea is continued here. Melchizedek is to be considered immortal, even though it is certain that he was born and did die. The lack of information is viewed as information about the message God is conveying to humanity through his book. This way of reading an author's work is legitimate when one is viewing the record as intentionally crafted and the characters in it as serving specific purposes of the author.

There is considerable evidence that this is how the writers of the New Testament read the Pentateuch. This is not to take a lower view of the text as the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God. It is to acknowledge that historic people and events, represented and reported accurately, were nevertheless not reported in exhaustive detail. Events were recorded only to the extent that served the purpose of the Divine author. Melchizedek is an example of this. As this author has said, we have no record of his birth or death in the story composed for us by God through Moses. What is recorded of him is accurate and it is purposeful. Because the record does not witness of Melchizedek's death, he is in this literary sense immortal, a picture of the Immortal Priest King who would be incarnate in human flesh. This character, a real historic figure who engaged with Abraham in the precise way Moses reports it, was intentionally planted in the record by God. He was intentionally surrounded only with these selective details of his life to serve a specific purpose in the larger book God was authoring. God would use other authors (David in Psalm 110:4; and the author of Hebrews), to reveal the specific picture he was creating through what details of Melchizedek he chose to include. In God's book, Melchizedek provided a promise and hope of a Priest King, Christ, who would restore the blessing lost in the fall.

None of this is to give us freedom to take liberties with the literal words of Scripture, or to stray into wildly allegorical interpretations of it. Nor should this lead us to suggest that Scripture's real meaning lies beyond the words themselves. It should lead us to consider its detail closer and look carefully for what later human authors were inspired to bring to light about the purposes and literary functions of various details. To the greatest possible degree, authority must remain in the Scripture not in any interpreter, and this rule will save us from false doctrine.

**7:9 And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes,**

This statement begins with the curious phrase "so to speak." This exact phrase occurs nowhere else in the Greek New Testament, nor in the Septuagint, though it is common in Philo. It is a way of introducing a startling statement or one that might appear problematical to the reader. The author knows the point of view about to be expressed here, that the Levites through Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, would stretch the readers somewhat. It requires them to think as the evidence indicates that God thinks.

The statement is startling to our way of thinking today in western culture as well, where we value individualism so highly. We tend not to think in terms of common

bond, community, and the solidarity of humanity. However, when we force ourselves to think as God does, the statement is not so problematical. For example, God sees the entire human stream as in Adam. He sees the entire community of believers as in Christ. He made covenants that embraced descendants, whereby they received promises made centuries earlier to one individual. So this is a way of thinking that seems quite ordinary to God.

Within the Christian faith this has been explained differently over the centuries. There is absolute recognition that God views individuals in this way, as offspring of some lead person. But there are several theories about the basis of such headship.

Some describe this relationship by the term "federal headship." Just as a country has an official spokesperson/leader, so God views Adam as the legal representative of humanity, Jesus Christ as the legal representative of believers, and so on. Applied to this verse, Abraham is regarded as the federal head of the covenant people. By him paying tithes to Melchizedek, all who would one day come under the covenant God made with Abraham, also paid that tithe, including the Levitical priests.

Some describe this relationship by the term "seminal headship," or "natural headship." According to this view Adam's offspring were physically present in him when he sinned. Abraham's offspring were in the same way physically present in him when he paid tithe to Melchizedek. Were we to rename this view in terms of modern understanding, we would likely call it "genetic headship."

Regardless of how we understand why God thinks this way, the fact is that students of the Scripture recognize that he does so. So when the author of Hebrews says, "so to speak," he is asking us to view the incident as God does. This adds to the significance of the event considerably and strengthens the case for the greatness of the order of Melchizedek. He was so great that all kings, priests, and high priests that descended from Abraham are projected in this way by God as having submitted themselves to Melchizedek in that great moment. This teaches us that the One who revived this great order, Jesus Christ, God's anointed ruler over all creation and its Savior, Redeemer, and High Priest, is to be submitted to and worshipped above all others.

**7:10 for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.**

Here the idea that the Levites were present in Abraham is stated plainly. They are viewed as being in the loins of Abraham. The phrase "out of the loins of Abraham" has already appeared in this context (5), where it is rendered by the phrase "descended from Abraham." The term "loins" can be used in an external sense to describe the area of the body known to us as the midriff or the hips. So the phrase "gird up your loins" refers to the act of gathering up one's flowing outer garment and tucking it into the waistband to move about better and work unimpeded. "Loins" can also be used in the internal sense as in this case, where it refers to the entire reproductive capacity. Once

again, were we to speak of this idea today we would speak of Levi being genetically present in Abraham.

This verse seems to offer strong evidence for the idea that God views headship as a natural or seminal issue. But to grapple with the idea of headship is a more complex issue than can be dealt with just by the information in this context. A key passage in this matter is found in Romans 5:12-21.

Regardless of how we might explain the issue of Abraham's headship, the fact remains that God blesses us because he thinks of us in this way. Just as we are separated from him through the act of Adam, we are reunited with him through the faith of Abraham, and through the death of Jesus Christ. So, that Yahweh thinks in terms of solidarity results in great benefit to us.

The author has now established the fact that Melchizedek was superior to the Levitical priests. The only incident in the Scripture that Melchizedek is a part of was intentionally included by God to point to this idea. This was done ultimately not to elevate Melchizedek, but to elevate the One by whom Yahweh would bring salvation to his people, the Christ, Jesus.

**7:11 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?**

The psalmist projection about the Messiah is clear and was stated earlier (5:6). The Messiah would be a priest forever, but after the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4). The author puts forward a pivotal rhetorical question here to the readers. Why, if the priesthood of the Levites was so important to God, was it projected that another order would be established, and that God's anointed one would belong to it? Why, if the Levites could deliver through their service salvation, did Messiah not come from the tribe of Levi? What was God saying about the Levitical order by not himself perpetuating it? The answer is clear. That order could not produce perfection, or completeness in anyone, not even in the Levites themselves. It was powerless in the lives of the readers as well.

An important theme in the heart of the author appears here in the word perfection, or completeness. The readers had to shift their thinking on how one moved into maturity or completeness in the faith (6:1). Was it through serving the Law, or was there a different focus they were to maintain? That is an important question for Christians in all eras to be able to process.

We naturally turn to the Law when we think of becoming complete in Yahweh's sight. It is our first reaction The appeal of the Law is great when one ponders the goal of shaping character. The Law is straightforward and clear. It is certainly useful in the

journey toward completeness, but the Law itself does not enable maturity. It confirms our incompleteness but does not equip us for progress and movement. It may even feed the pride and arrogance that are the very root of our sinfulness.

The author links the Levites solidly to the Law here. That is because their very office was provided for by the Law, the Law is what they taught the people, and the requirements of the Law were what they helped the people meet and serve. The parenthetical phrase could be crudely rendered as saying that by the Levitical priesthood the people were "lawed." So the entire occupation of the Levites depended on and served the Law. Turning to the Levites and the Law, while instinctive, are not how we will gain the full experience of Yahweh's salvation.

**7:12 For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also.**

The basic practices of those who were a part of the kingdom of God had evolved into a new stage. The new stage had long been projected by Yahweh (Deuteronomy 30:1-8), during which he would do a very special work among his people. Now the time had arrived, and the readers were in danger of missing the new by hanging on to the old.

The little phrase "of necessity" is an important one. Necessity is the NASB rendering of a Greek compound word formed from the preposition "up," and the word for "arm." It is a word which speaks of constraint and implies distress of some sort and intervention. What is common in humanity, an after-the-fact scramble to make law conform to action we have already taken, is not the distress in view here. The necessity grew out of humanity's need. It occurred in the forethought of God as he foresaw the distress of humanity, specifically their inability to bring about their own salvation. It is the arm of Yahweh, his decisive intervention and action that brings salvation (Isaiah 59:16; 63:5).

In the forethought of God was the knowledge that fallen humanity could never merit the experience of his salvation through obedience to the Law, his own moral standard. Those standards were simply too high. So he decreed that humanity would be justified by faith. This has been true in every era. However he chose to confront this instinct in us that leads us to attempt to please God through a merit system. And so he gave his Law to humanity through Moses and covenanted with a people that were justified by faith that they would experience his blessing based on their obedience to his Law. They swore to do so. They failed miserably! So this people, because they were justified by faith were not at risk of eternal punishment. They were placed at risk by their own choice (Deuteronomy 25:23-33), for the good of humanity and likely for an eternal exhibit. They were placed at risk in terms of the ongoing experience of Yahweh's salvation and blessing. This Old Covenant was a temporary Law set in place to prove this very point, that humanity could not achieve Divine favor by a merit system. The Levitical priesthood presided over this demonstration.

The time arrived in the plan of Yahweh for the end of this demonstration. God changed the principles by which he is bestowing blessing on his people. It was not that the Law was changed. It was that what was our law for receiving God's blessing changed. Justification, the initial experience of salvation from sin's penalty, has always been by faith. Under the Old Covenant sanctification and its blessing came about through the Law. No longer is the experience of Yahweh's blessing through the Law, as in the Old Covenant. It is through the leading of his Spirit within his people, the leading that takes us into the experience of his blessing.

This change was not an afterthought, or a midcourse adjustment borne out of an experiment. It was ordained in eternity past. Both the previous Law and the era of the Spirit were predetermined and set as to their order. So there has come about a change, but it was not haphazard, impulsive, or whimsical. It was predicted (Deuteronomy 30:1-6), promised (Jeremiah 31:31-37), and now fulfilled.

With this change in principle and law, came a change in the priesthood. There was no need for the former order of Levites. They presided over the demonstration that was now over. Now there is a High Priest and King, like Melchizedek. We are now a kingdom of priests who serve Yahweh's purposes that are orchestrated by him through his Spirit.

**7:13 For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar.**

Early in the prophetic messages about Israel it was revealed that their hope rested in a ruler that would arise out of the tribe of Judah who had been given by Yahweh the right to rule (Genesis 49:10; Numbers 24:17-18). So there was never a question about the Messiah the anointed one coming out of the tribe of Judah. That this one would bring about the forgiveness of sins was projected in later prophecies (Isaiah 53), though strongly alluded to in the words to Eve in the garden (Genesis 3:15). Implied in this projection of redemption was the cessation of the work of the Levitical priesthood.

The idea of a non-Levite having accomplished this great work was a signal event. In the end, blessing had been achieved from beyond the boundaries of the Law, by one from the tribe of Judah who offered a greater sacrifice on a greater altar. All of this action of God through his Christ set aside the Law, though Jesus himself conformed perfectly to it. To those astute in the Scriptures, this could only result in one conclusion—that the moment had arrived in the plan of God for the new era. The Law, its priesthood and its altar were gone in terms of their function of guiding in the pathway of Yahweh's blessing. Something greater had arrived. The new Law was embodied in Christ and was inscribed on the hearts of God's people through his own Spirit that now was joined to believers. This all happened because of the work of Jesus, the Christ, the anointed one, from the tribe of Judah. He accomplished what no one from the tribe of

Levi could have done, because this was his ordained right and privilege. A greater Law was operating.

**7:14 For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests.**

Both the gospel of Matthew and that of Luke provide genealogies of Jesus. Matthew begins with Joseph, and traces Jesus' roots through Joseph's father Jacob, back as far as Abraham. Luke also begins with Joseph, and traces Jesus' roots through Joseph's father-in-law, Mary's father Eli, all the way back to Adam. Both Mary's and Joseph's genealogy pass through David and through Judah. Either way his life is reckoned, Jesus is of the tribe of Judah.

Clearly in the Law of Moses the only permissible lineage from which a priest could come from was from the tribe of Levi. Rather than there being a central passage early in Moses writing where this is laid down, it becomes evident gradually with the total picture emerging in the book of Numbers (1:51-53; 3:9-45). As the writer to the Hebrews says, there is no provision in Moses' account anyone outside the tribe of Levi to serve as a priest in Israel. He understates the matter here in this verse. In fact, according to the Law if someone attempted such service who was not of the tribe of Levi, death would be the result (Numbers 3:9).

So it is as the author of Hebrews stated earlier, for Christ's work to have been accepted by God, a fact that the resurrection bore witness to (1 Corinthians 15:13-17; Romans 4:25; 8:31-34), there had to have been a change in law. The change was not in what we understand as "The Law," as much as it was a change in law, the entire principle by which God imparted his blessing to humanity.

**7:15 And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek,**

That a change in law had to occur is made clearer on the basis of what the author is about to point out. This verse reaches back to that idea, stated in verse 12. It introduces the series of thoughts given in the following verses that build toward the very logical conclusion of verse 22. The conclusion will be that not only has a change in law occurred, but it is a change for a better, more effective law.

**7:16 who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life.**

The clarity that a change in law was necessarily had to do with the fact that Christ was different in moral essence than any Levite or other human being. He was without moral defect, sinless in every sense of the term. Therefore he was not subject to separation

from God in life or in death, except for that moment in time when he bore the sin of humanity. His life was indestructible due to its character as morally perfect.

It was on this basis that Christ became our priest. It was not because the Law in mercy designated by birth that privilege to him. He earned the right based on moral capacity and actual performance, the only creature to do so in all of time and in all of God's creation. He went far beyond the physical requirement of the Law, merely being born a Levite, to meet the Law's moral requirement. He was in fact, the Law embodied and fulfilled.

The perfection of Christ changed everything about what the Law said priests could and couldn't do. So many of the ceremonial regulations and procedures were in place because of the sinfulness of the priests themselves. For example, none of the limits of entry into the most holy place applied to Christ. None of the laws of uncleanness applied to him who had done no sin.

But it was not just that the laws procedural and ceremonial elements did not apply to Christ. It was that he fulfilled its sacrificial demand for humanity's sin and so eliminated the need for the entire Mosaic code. Since he was without moral blemish, he could offer himself to God by the very terms of the Law, in humanity's place, and so bring forgiveness to all who believe. He could be the sacrifice that the animals only offered a facsimile of. As such he could bring about God's forgiveness, not just his temporary appeasement.

His indestructible life allowed him to eliminate the need for the Mosaic code. He restored humanity to a place of blessing in God's eyes, and a whole new way of living life became possible for all who believe.

**7:17 For it is witnessed of Him, "Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."**

The author returns to the promise of Psalm 110:4, pointing out the use in that sworn promise uttered by God of the word forever. This he gives as proof of the indestructible nature of Christ's life. There was no limit to the time of his holding of the title or office. He simply had a capacity by virtue of his moral essence that allowed him a different privilege than the rest of humanity. And, since he was appointed forever, it means that the Levitical priesthood had been eclipsed. This ending had been brought about according to the standard of the very Law that had ordained and maintained it, and it had been done by the one who authored the Law, Yahweh himself.

**7:18 For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness**

In this action of Yahweh, specifically the incarnation of his Son, his living a perfect life, his bearing of humanity's sin according to the requirements of the Law, two things

become evident. The first is given in this verse, with the explanation completed in the following verse.

So first, there is in this comprehensive action of God the setting aside of the former commandment. The word rendered "setting aside" comes from the word , a word that means to put or place, as in a foundational idea or truth. The privative is prefixed to it, so that the word is made to have the opposite meaning. The idea is to bring some established principle to a legitimate, just end. The author will use this word again to speak of the sacrifice of Christ "setting aside" sin (Hebrews 9:26). In that usage there is this idea of a just and legitimate end to sin's claim against humanity being legally satisfied. In saying that the

Law has been set aside; the author is not implying a casual casting off something. This should be understood as Christ bringing to a designed and legitimate end an era and its primary institution by fulfilling the moral requirement of the Law, then fulfilling its sacrificial requirement. Because its purpose is finished and its requirement met, it can be legitimately set aside.

This "setting aside" is done because it is "weak and useless." Those are strong words. Elsewhere in the Scripture, Paul makes it plain that this is not because the Law is inherently unholy. It is weak and useless because of our moral ineptness (Romans 7:7-25). The Law was holy, but it was unable to impart holiness to us. Were we holy ourselves, we could rise to the high standard of holiness the Law exemplified. But because we are not, it was useless. It was a crown jewel entrusted to hogs! Because the Law was only words, it had no power to raise us. It only had power to convey a standard to us. So it was useful in that it confirmed our guilt. It justified God's condemnation of us.

There are several ways of looking at the Law. One is to say it served God's justice, an essential, and an intermediate purpose of God. But it did not serve his ultimate objective of supplying salvation. Another way of looking at the Law is to say it served a portion of God's ultimate purpose of displaying his character but could not do so completely. It had to be fulfilled so that his justice remained intact, then set aside so that his goodness could be clearly revealed in the blessing he would bestow. From either point of view the Law was an important ingredient, but in terms of raising humanity from the consequences of the fall, it was weak and useless. This is the first thing that becomes evident when the incarnation and work of Christ is viewed—that the Law was inadequate and so "set aside." However, it should be noted that it was set aside even as it was honored, exemplified and fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

**7:19 (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.**

This verse provides the second half of the statement of contrast begun in the previous verse. However first it explains and confirms the meaning of the previous thought with a parenthetical statement. So in this parenthesis we have the concise statement of the sense in which the Law was weak and useless it made nothing perfect. It was weak and useless in that it had no corrective power.

The parenthetical statement confirms that the setting aside of the Law does not reveal a defect in either the Law or the Lawgiver. This is important to embrace, since the Law came from Yahweh. The weakness of the Law in saving us does not reveal a weakness in either it or its originator. The problem was in humanity. They by nature are inept when it comes to the righteousness of God, which is what the Law is an expression of. Though the Law exposes this in us, it cannot correct it, nor was it meant to. It gives us the standard to which we must rise. It does not enable us to rise. Though it is a perfect standard, the Law gives no hope of making humanity perfect, and this is due to their inherent moral inability. In fact, the Law takes hope from us. If the Law was Yahweh's proposition for the dilemma of evil in humanity, there would be no hope. Fortunately it is not, which leads to the main point of this verse.

The second thing that becomes evident about the comprehensive work of Yahweh in the incarnation is the bringing in of a better hope. Whereas the first thing noted by the author was the undoing of an old order, the second thing, which happened simultaneously, is the establishing of a new order.

Appropriately the new order is noted first as one that brings with it a better hope. Whereas the Law was useless, the new order "brings in" a realistic solution and therefore a legitimate hope. The word rendered "brings in" is used only here in the Greek New Testament and the Septuagint. By etymology it is formed from the preposition "into" joined to the word meaning "to lead." Prefixed to this compound word is the preposition επι, which adds the meaning of "upon." This affirms that the Law had not been useless in terms of God's overall plan, but it was incomplete. It was part of the foundation, being an expression of his justice and so also a revealer of human guilt. It established the truth about holiness—that it was noble and lofty, and that humanity could not rise to it. The new order is built on these lessons the truth of God's justice and humanity's guilt. Because it was founded in truth and reality, the new order offers hope.

The hope of the new order is that through it we draw near to God. The inclusion of the author and readers in the action represents a sudden leap in thought. It has the effect of stunning the readers. So far there has been talk only of Levites, Melchizedek and Christ and of the privilege these had of drawing near to God. Suddenly we are brought into the picture as those who now are drawing near to God. By choosing this moment to inject this idea the author sharply accents the prospect of hope that the new order

provides. He has for an instant skipped over Christ and shouted out our privilege in him.

**7:20 And inasmuch as it was not without an oath**

The new order is one of hope, because it is something God has sworn to and so given his word about. All that is involved in it is guaranteed because it is sourced in a sworn agreement made within the Godhead. The following verses will affirm this, that promises were made to humanity based on this sworn agreement between the Father and the Son. So the author is setting out here to speak to the certainty of our hope.

**7:21 (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, 'Thou art a priest forever'");**

Again we have a parenthetical statement added here by the author to emphasize the guaranteed nature of the hope embodied in Jesus. It will point toward the better hope Yahweh has established for us through Jesus.

Under the old Levitical priesthood, the Levites became priests without any guarantee. Their entire livelihood was yoked to the Old Covenant, and so it was dependent on the obedience of the people, including themselves. Together they were notoriously fickle and disobedient to Yahweh. This had the effect of making the Levites ordinary citizens who had to provide for their needs in the same way that everyone else did. In the end they experienced the curse and the loss of their inheritance except for relatively brief windows of time when revival took place among the priests and people. They proved to be morally incapable of inspiring any consistent spirituality in the masses and bore the brunt of the blame in the pronouncements of Yahweh against the nation (Jeremiah 5:31; Ezekiel 22:26; Micah 3:11-12; Malachi 2:1-4).

On the other hand, Jesus the Christ has received the sworn promise of Yahweh that his office and function are eternal. They will never be terminated. This is possible because in Jesus the essence of God and humanity are united. There is within Christ the perfection of God and so the very mind, heart, and character of Yahweh will never be violated by him. So Yahweh could legitimately make a sworn statement to Jesus regarding a perpetual role Jesus would fulfill.

The author cites Psalm 110:4 once again. Previously his focus in that passage was on the phrase "after the order of Melchizedek." Now he leaves that portion of the verse completely out. He focuses the readers on the phrase leading up to that one, and specifically on two ideas expressed by the words sworn and forever. This injection of this verse with these ideas back into his argument has the effect of startling the reader into recognition that something profoundly different was being projected long ago by Yahweh. That different thing has now arrived. There is substantial difference from the

old order in it. This different, new thing Yahweh was doing, provided legitimate reason for deep and abiding hope.

**7:22 So much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.**

Jesus is a better priest. The Levites were the holy servants of Yahweh. But they were incapable of bringing our salvation. Notwithstanding the fact that many were exemplary servants of Yahweh, they were all fallen men. They fell short of what humanity needed and this was by design. Yahweh had another priest who would meet our need for salvation. He was better morally, and this meant he was stronger in terms of the help he was able to render humanity.

But just as significant as providing a better priest is the fact that Yahweh also provided a better covenant. The verse begins with the short phrase "So much the more." Literally it could be rendered "so vast as this," or understood as "By the same measure." So to the degree that the person of Jesus surpassed any of the Levites, and to the same degree that his eternal priesthood surpassed the short duration of any other person's term of service, and to the same degree that Yahweh's oath to Christ surpassed any promise made to a Levite, to that degree the new covenant is better than the old. So the change in law that came with the change in the priesthood was a dramatic change for the good.

There are several important words used here by the author that have the effect of highlighting this sentence and its message. We have already noted the way the verse begins. It is not only connected to the previous line of logic, but the introductory words alert us to the fact that a climactic thought follows. The next word in the sentence is the word rendered "better" in most English versions. The word itself refers to something that is stronger. In the figurative usage it always refers simply to what is better. It is a favorite word of this author, appearing a total of 13 times in Hebrews. In this instance it may have been used by the author in its more literal sense of strength and vigor. He likely is striking a contrast here with the previous statement (verse 18), that the Law was "weak and useless." The new agreement is better in the sense that it is strong—inherently endowed with vigor and adequacy.

The very next word is the word rendered "covenant." It is the word διαθηκησ. It is the same Greek word used in the Septuagint text of the Old Testament for the Hebrew word berit. Whether this author wrote Hebrews in Hebrew and others translated it or wrote in Greek (which seems more likely), the work's vocabulary follows that of the Septuagint here. This is the word τιθημι, meaning to place or put, with the preposition meaning through prefixed to it. It describes a legal instrument through which things are ordered or placed in a relationship. Now the word used in verse 18 to describe that the Old Covenant had been "set aside" was also derived from τιθημι. So again in this verse we see a relationship with words just used that adds to the contrast the author is attempting to demonstrate. The contrast brought out through these related words is

this: whereas the old covenant was displaced, there is now a new one through which matters between humanity and God are ordered or placed.

The author uses the word covenant for the first time here. It is as if he has purposely saved the word for the moment when he is making this dramatic contrast. It will become frequent from now on, appearing sixteen more times. The idea of a new covenant is introduced here without being fully developed. It is not the main idea of this sentence grammatically. It is an important and central theme of the writer. This will become evident in the more thorough discussion in chapters 8-9.

Yahweh has historically entered covenants with humanity. They are critical elements to understand in terms of Yahweh's relationship to us. Yet, providing a concise definition of a covenant is not easy using English words addressed to current western minds. A covenant is a kind of agreement that expressed the obligations of both parties, and the penalties should such obligations not be met. But because of the strength of both the obligations and the penalties, the word agreement falls short of capturing what a covenant is between Yahweh and humanity. The term contract or treaty sounds stronger from a legal point of view but still fall short. The best way of describing a covenant is likely this; that a covenant is a bond in blood, punishable by death. That captures both the relational and legal implications of Yahweh's covenants, though it falls somewhat short of conveying the spirit in which God offered them.

Covenants can be understood by more lengthy statements. Covenants are legal instruments; agreements entered by God with humanity. They govern how his blessing is restored to humanity. Some covenants are conditional, having been dependent upon the obedience of a people. The most outstanding example of this is the Sinai or Mosaic Covenant made with Israel. In this Covenant God agreed to bless the Israelites based on their obedience to the Law. This Sinai or Mosaic covenant is called the Old Covenant by later writers of Scripture. Other Covenants are unconditional. The most outstanding example of this is the Covenant between Abraham and Yahweh. In it God promised to give Abraham certain blessings such as the promised seed, a certain position as a source and instrument of Yahweh's blessing, along with a specific land for his descendants. This covenant was unconditional and was dramatically revealed to be such by Yahweh in the incident of the smoking firepot in Genesis 15.

Because the New Covenant is rooted in this Abrahamic Covenant, it too is unconditional. When we say it is rooted in the Abrahamic Covenant, we mean this: it is a covenant which conveys to all people (as per Genesis 12:2-3), the blessing bestowed on Abraham of having Yahweh as his "shield and great reward" (Genesis 15:1). It conveys that blessing on all people who follow in Abraham's faith. This is the blessing forfeited by Adam and Eve in the fall. The New Covenant is the agreement whereby this great loss is restored to humanity. It is the primary instrument that shapes Yahweh's salvation of humanity.

A better covenant is what the New Testament reveals. The great challenge of the times during which its authors wrote was to get people to release from their pursuit of the blessing of Yahweh through the terms and conditions of the Old Covenant and embrace the implications of the New Covenant. That need to switch was most pronounced among the Jews. The book of Hebrews provides an intellectual and theological defense of action that promoted this great transition.

The subject of this sentence does not occur until its very end. It is Jesus. The verb occurs near it and is "has become." This verb is in the perfect tense, expressing a state that has come about as the result of a past, completed action. So this verse mentions a subject that is biblically important—the New Covenant. But its subject, message, and primary concern is what Jesus has become to us. What he has become is captured in one more important word in the text of this verse. He is said to have become a guarantee.

The word guarantee always sends a significant message to readers and hearers in any document. A guarantee is important to the way humanity thinks in the uncertainty of a fallen world. In this case a person, Jesus, is said to be the guarantee, so perhaps the word guarantor would express the idea better. Used as it is as a substantive, this term refers to a person who mediates a judicial matter and guarantees against the liabilities of either party. In American culture a bail bondsman, a cosigner, or even an escrow company provide a limited illustration of this idea. The reality is that these provide only backup in the unlikely event a party doesn't perform. In the relationship between humanity and Yahweh, the entire agreement depends on the person Jesus and his performance of work in our behalf. Our performance is solely to have faith and trust in him. It is in this more complete sense that Jesus is said to have become the guarantor of a better covenant. Jesus is such through the inalterable decree of Yahweh himself, and his own submission and obedience to this great plan.

This section of the author's work is full of words and phrases that are chosen with exceptional care. For example, we are told that Jesus has become to us is a guarantor (εγγυοσ), one with sufficient influence to bring about a desired result between two parties. The result desired by both parties is that we would be allowed to draw near (εγγιζομεν), to God (19). These two similar sounding words elevate Christ and enhance the contrast between the Old Covenant and the New. That is typical of what we see in these verses. The point is clear and apparent in such detail—let go of the old and be a part of what God is doing now.

**7:23 And the former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers, because they were prevented by death from continuing,**

The writer of Hebrews brings death into the discussion to further enhance the superiority of the New Covenant. Ultimately death is the symptom of our fallenness. Though this is not the primary point here, the fact is that if the purveyors of a spiritual

movement continue to die, we should rightly conclude that the ultimate solution to the separation between humanity and God has not been realized. Their death indicates that as high as they might lead us, they themselves were still fallen.

Under the old Levitical order there were many priests. Each generation had their spiritual leaders. The only continuity was in the Law they served, though this too was subject to their varied interpretations. History shows that the personalities and spiritual climate these many priests established varied greatly. Continuity and consistency were impaired by one important thing—physical death. This reality was there in the background during the entire era of the Old Covenant. Its leaders, its teachers, its practitioners all died. The Old Covenant was powerless to alter this. The result was that a great number of priests served. Each had their impact, but it was short-lived. The whole system tended to have its brief golden ages, but there always seemed to be a worm in the fruit. Even the era of ones so great as Moses and Aaron was characterized more by spiritual failure than success. As the years went by, individual priests did the same. It was all indicative that something better needed to be provided by Yahweh.

**7:24 but He, on the other hand, because he abides forever, holds His priesthood permanently.**

The rhythm of physical death among the leaders of God's people was broken in Jesus Christ. It was not that he did not die. It was that he died, and conquered death. This was because his death was not his own. He died because of the sins of humanity. He himself had none. The result was simple. He did not stay dead. Once humanity's sins were atoned for, he could only come back to life since he had no sin of his own. His resurrection was a dramatic and miraculous statement that there was a profound difference between him and a long line of leaders in God's movement. He was clearly greater than all of them.

The author's point will develop more fully in the next verse. His intermediate point is that since Jesus overcame death, he remains a priest and will do so permanently even as Yahweh had promised (Psalm 110:4). There has been no change in the spiritual leadership of God's covenant community since Jesus Christ. He remains its head. The entire order has changed.

**7:25 Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.**

This verse speaks to the thoroughness of Yahweh's salvation plan. The word forever is the NASB rendering of παντελεσ, a word that means entire or complete. Though this word can be an expression of time, it more commonly is an expression of completeness. This idea of the readers moving forward to maturity, or completion is clearly the concern of the writer (6:1). Here his use of this word should be understood

as an expression of the completeness of the provision of the salvation plan of Yahweh. His work is brought to maturity and completion in all of those who continue to draw near to him.

This drawing near to God will be mentioned again in 10:22. There the author includes himself in the exhortation to draw near. This indicates that this drawing near is an ongoing course of action, like that of the priesthood in Israel, whereby fellowship is maintained with Yahweh. Drawing near was and is the ongoing practice that keeps one's spirituality fresh and effective. In more theological jargon, this is not the one-time drawing near that leads to one's justification. It is the ongoing practice of drawing near that leads to one's sanctification.

At stake is our sanctification, our being conformed to the image of Christ. The action we take to open ourselves to this great work God wishes to move along in us is to draw near. Drawing near is as simple as ongoing prayers of the heart. They might be prayers of repentance, petition, or submission. Drawing near is any personal expression of our search for his will in the moment. As we do this we are saved from old habits and our instinctive fleshly reactions. We become conformed to Christ rather than this world.

The writer states that Christ lives forever to make intercession for us. That is a great truth in terms of our comfort. It is a complex one in terms of our understanding. Is this the kind of prayer intercession we see in what we have termed his high priestly prayer? Is it an individual intercession for each of us? Is this intercession not speaking of prayer but of the continual testimony of his sacrificial work for us?

The word rendered intercession appears four other times in the New Testament. It can mean an official legal complaint against someone (Acts 25:24). It is used of Isaiah's complaint to God about the actions of Israel in resisting his message to them (Romans 11:2). It is used of the prayers of the Holy Spirit in our behalf when we do not know how to pray (Romans 8:27). It is used of Christ interceding for us at God's right hand (Romans 8:34). Christ's intercession for us includes his official role as our redeemer and our advocate. It also includes prayers offered in our behalf of the sort recorded in John 17, what we have called his High Priestly Prayer.

As part of the triune God, Jesus is one with the Father in a different way than we can be. His intercession is deeper than conversation. Their communication is a matter of thought and mind. So there is an unbroken unity of thought that involves our journey to maturity that is going on between the Father and the Son. It continues for all time, since the Son lives forever in this relationship to the Father. Jesus is for this reason the ideal priest. No greater capacity to represent humanity to God is possible than that inherent in the Godman Jesus.

**7:26 For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens;**

So far in this chapter the idea of a better priest has been the subject, one of a different order, one who brought a better covenant to bear on the relationship between God and man. This is the first use of the title High Priest in this chapter. Due to the unique character of Christ, which is carefully delineated here, it is both apparent and appropriate that he be appointed high priest.

The words of this verse are intentionally chosen and placed so that we have an emphatic affirmation of Jesus occupying the office of high priest. The word fitting is central to this statement. By etymology it means "to tower up." It came to be used as it is here, of action that evolves naturally as a logical and appropriate response to some reality. In this case the reality is Christ's character. The idea of the author is this; so impeccable and distinct was Jesus' character that he towered over all other persons. His appointment as high priest was not contrived. It was devoid of the politics that had come to characterize appointment to the office in Israel. It was fitting by every standard established by Yahweh's Law. Verse 28 will also bring out that it is fitting in the sense that something better than the Law has come, so it is fitting that someone better than the Levitical Priests serve as High Priest.

There are five terms used to portray the greatness of Jesus. They can be understood as defining his "towering up" and his fitness to fill the role of high priest. There are no surprises in terms of the meaning of these words themselves. It is apparent however, that the author has avoided the more usual words used in Scripture to express these same ideas. This appears to be a deliberate choice that helps highlight the uniqueness of Jesus.

The author describes Jesus first as holy. He uses the unusual term οσιοσ, rendered in most English versions by the simple word "holy." The usual term for holy in the Greek New Testament is αγιοσ, used 232 times. Θσιοσ, occurs only eight times in the New Testament. It is uncertain what the origin of this word is, so that etymology does not help us assign meaning to it. In non-Christian writings of the day, οσιοσ referred to a person who was pious in religious matters. So the author is noting that Christ demonstrated spiritual drive and motivation. A further examination of the word reveals something significant about how the biblical writers understood piety.

Of the eight times οσιοσ appears in the New Testament, it is used five times to describe Christ or God (Acts 2:27; 13:35; Hebrews 7:26; Revelation 15:4; 16:5). So we certainly find in the usage of the word that Christlikeness and godliness are understood in the term οσιον and the concept of piety. Two times this term is used in Paul's writings to express what is desirable in leaders (1 Timothy 2:8; Titus 1:8). However it is a single usage in Acts 13:34 that leads to considerable insight into what was envisioned in potential church leaders by Paul in using this term. In Acts 13:34 οσιοσ appears in a quote of Isaiah 55:3, as the rendering of the Hebrew word "chesed,"

the term for the covenant love of Yahweh (Acts 13:34). This quote from Isaiah 55:3 is from the Septuagint version of the Old Testament. A quick glance at how this word οσιον is used in the Septuagint is informative.

In the Septuagint οσιοσ has strong ties to words derived from the Hebrew term "chesed." Οσιον is used 33 times to render "chasid", a term referring most often to the "saints" or "holy ones" in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 33:8; 2 Samuel 22:26; Psalm 4:4). We see an interesting practice in this Yahweh is presented as one of "chesed," and his people are referred to by a related term. Whether they were called "chasid" because they were characterized by "chesed" (as seems likely) or were called such because they were objects of Yahweh's "chesed" may not be known with absolute certainty. In either case, in being seen as Yahweh's people, they were seen as what we could call "chesedian"—a reflection of his "chesed." So we find this term οσιον solidly linked linguistically to "chesed" by the translators of the Septuagint. The significance of this is that piety in biblical understanding is linked to the imitation or demonstration of Yahweh's "chesed."

Understanding the association of this word for piety with the Hebrew term "chesed" helps us understand why οσιον is paired with the word δικαιον (as in Titus 1:8). This pairing is common in Greek literature, and much has been written about it. What is perhaps most significant is that δικαιον speaks of one who is just and equitable. But Yahweh is everywhere presented as one who is not simply just, but one who is "chesed" kind indeed and merciful. Church leaders are called to this same balance in character, to the kind of justice that is marked by "chesed." Christ is presented by the author of Hebrews as One who demonstrated this character of Yahweh in his conduct as our priest.

This term οσιοσ provided the author with a less anticipated but strong term by which to catch the reader's attention. He is intrinsically holy as the one and only Son of God, the unique Godman. He manifested this not only by his sinless life, but by his flawless demonstration of Yahweh's "chesed."

The author then describes Jesus as innocent. We might expect the more normal word for righteousness, δικαιοσ, to be used here as it is 81 times in the New Testament. Instead the word ακακοσ is used, a word that occurs only one other time. This word is formed from the term for what is bad or evil, with the α privative, which has the effect of reversing the meaning of the word to which it is prefixed. In its only other use this term conveys the idea of being naïve or inexperienced (Romans 16:18). So like our word innocence, this term can convey the idea that someone is not injurious, devoid of what we expect in depravity. By choosing this word the author has conveyed much more than the absence of sinful deeds.

The next descriptive term used to describe Jesus is undefiled. Here we might expect to find the Greek word καθαροσ, used 28 times in the New Testament where the idea of

purity and moral cleanness is being expressed. Or we might expect the word αγνον, used 8 times by New Testament authors in their classic calls to purity (Philippians 4:8; 1 John 3:3). Instead we find the word αμιαντοσ, used only twice outside the book of Hebrews. This word is another α privative word formed from the word that describes what is morally tainted or contaminated, μιαινω. The readers are given a less common word again, likely to bring out the absolute uniqueness of Christ. In this word's uses in the papyri it refers to real ethical cleanness, as opposed to mere ritual purity (A. T. Robertson).

Two descriptive phrases are added to these three words that summarize the uniqueness of Christ. The first is the phrase "separated from sinners." Because all humans are sinners, Christ towers over them and the role of high priest is fitting. The word used here is a perfect tense verb form of χωριζω. This word can be traced back to the word from which chasm comes. The idea is that of separation by a fixed space and boundary. Of its six uses in the New Testament, three of them refer to divorce (Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:9; 1 Corinthians 7:10). Two uses have to do with leaving a physical location (Acts 1:4; Philemon 15). Many then take this short phrase to mean Christ's departure from the earth, his exaltation to heaven which the next phrase will state. While we generally find comfort in the presence of Christ with us, it is of great comfort to know that he stands outside the realm of evil and is in no way subject to it or shaped by it. He is separated from it by a great gap, unlike every other spiritual leader we might rely on. He is distinct from all the great leaders of the faith whose tradition we might follow by this great fact, that he transcends evil.

The second phrase clarifies the first one and adds the fifth and final idea to this description of Christ. Christ is separated from sinners in the sense that he is exalted above the heavens. The previous phrase speaks to him transcending the evil world. This second one speaks to him transcending heaven, which is itself his creation. As the maker of both heaven and earth, he has returned to function in the exalted position as ruler of all of creation. As the perfect human, he can occupy the role meant for humanity to occupy, that of ruling over creation (Genesis 1:26). From all vantages he is the Anointed One, the Christ, God's appointed ruler over his entire kingdom. Christ then, is no mere heavenly being, as we will become and as great as such beings are.

It is appropriate and fitting that Jesus be our high priest. His character completely eclipses that of any other being. Yahweh's sworn statement that Jesus was a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek, was deserved. The following verse will speak to the more excellent intercession his excellence in character allows him to provide for humanity.

**7:27 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.**

The high priests who served under the Old Covenant offered up sacrifices for themselves just as they did for the people because they too were transgressors (Leviticus 9:8-24). This is evident in the events of the original ordination of Aaron and his sons, and in the routines that they were instructed in and maintained daily in Israel (Exodus 29-30). It is evident as well in the original ordination of the Levites as a whole (Numbers 8:5-13). It is also evident in the prescribed routine of the Day of Atonement, when once a year the high priest would enter the most holy place to atone for the sins of the people (Leviticus 16:11-19). This he did only after offering sacrifice for his own sins. This practice was ongoing because these high priests were fallen men. The Law made the same demand on them and by its standard they too fell short continually. So in the Old Covenant we find priests presiding over a system which bore constant witness to their perpetual moral inability.

Christ was without sin. He had no need to offer up sacrifice for his own sin. Where other priests had moral liability, he had moral perfection. He had no personal sin to make atonement for. Besides not having to atone for personal sin, Jesus' moral perfection allowed him by the Law's standard to be the substitutional sacrifice for humanity. And so he offered himself as a sin offering for all who would believe. This needed to happen only once since he was perfect and was the sacrifice God had prescribed (John 1:29). As his words indicated, uttered while hanging from the cross, the sin of humanity had been atoned for in his suffering. So under the New Covenant we find that the continual sacrifice is finished and the Law's claim against humanity is finished in the case of all who believe. We find an impeccable high priest presiding over a family of priests whose sins he has atoned for with his own blood.

**7:28 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.**

The Law prescribed that all men who were born from the family of Levi were by virtue of their birth designated as priests. In Moses' account the role of the Levites emerges rather slowly. We have Moses introducing himself in the account as a descendant of Levi (Exodus 2:1). We have his fellow Levites responding first and foremost in the golden calf event to Moses' call, "Whoever is for Yahweh, come to me!" (Exodus 32:25-29). So their first assignment in "ministry" was to be instruments of God's judgment and purification. Next, we have the Levites charged with the transportation and care of the tabernacle (Numbers 1:50ff), and we begin to see in the orders for the encampment some special status they enjoy with Yahweh (Numbers 1:53). Then finally, we see them designated for his service with a redemptive impact on the entire community (Numbers 3:1-13). The timing of all this is hard to establish. But in the

narration of Moses the emergence of the Levites as priests is presented as a rather deliberate process.

Within all the instructions of the Law given to Aaron and the Levites, the account is remarkably free of any kind of character or moral qualification for either priests or high priests. It is, however, full of instructions about their ceremonial purity—multiple washings, sacrifices, garments, anointings, etc. This conspicuous absence of some qualifying written standard of conduct for Levites has the effect of affirming their normalcy from a moral point of view. The Law assumes their weakness, by its many routines for them personally to follow. It views them as perpetually weak in moral terms, creatures of moral shortfall. Implicit in the Law then, we find Yahweh's testimony about the moral reality of the Levitical priesthood.

Yahweh's testimony about his Son, the Christ, is different. Progressively revealed from the time of Adam's fall, this redeemer son would provide for this universal shortfall of righteousness among humankind. His testimony about Christ gathered detail as the centuries passed by. Several hundred years after the giving of the Law, Yahweh issued the sworn statement through David he had made to Christ, that Christ was a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. His eternal designation could only be made due to his moral perfection that rendered him immune to death and judgment.

# HEBREWS 8

**8:1 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,**

One of the great desires of this writer is to give to his readers an understanding of the kind of person/priest Christ is so that they would draw near to Yahweh in confidence. He expressed this forthrightly in the closing words of chapter four. Since then he has been seeking to pass on to them a fuller realization of Christ as our priest, one who radically altered how we relate to Yahweh. Such deeper knowledge of Christ will help us draw near to Yahweh and so become complete and mature people whose view of life, time, the world, and death is accurate.

The author chose at this point to bring the readers a concise statement of what can be positively concluded about Christ our priest, given the truths that have been exposed in chapters 5-7. In the Greek text this verse begins with the word κεφαλαιον. This word comes from the word for the head literally the body part, or figuratively a chief, or that which is principle. This word signals the reader that they about to receive a core statement, a meaty one that captures the essence or heart of the matter. What follows then, is an idea that gives life to the other ideas about the Christ-God-man relationship. With the understanding of it in hand, the truths that will follow can be processed.

The first part of this core statement captures Jesus' oneness with Yahweh, the One to whom all humanity answers. Jesus "has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens." These words are like those of Jesus himself, speaking while on earth to the high priest of his day about his own identity and future role. In the gospel accounts of this incident we see that to that high priest, to be seated at the right hand of God was to occupy an unimaginable place of influence and authority (Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69). It was preposterous to his unbelieving mind. But this statement captures Jesus' greatness by stating his position at the right hand of God. The little phrase "in heaven" significantly adds to it. It shows that the entire statement is a literal one. Jesus' position is not merely something mystical. It is actual—a physical and spiritual reality. So it is a fundamental reality of the universe that Jesus is seated at the right hand of Yahweh.

We know from the testimony of other Scripture, that this oneness with Yahweh is relational. There is a mutual love between Father and Son, and so shared thought and activity (John 5:19-20). This oneness however is not simply that of two close friends. There is a shared authority (John 5:21-23), and we see that the things God is said to have done (Genesis 1:1), were done by the Son (Colossians 1:16).

But the oneness goes beyond even this. Somehow, in a way that is mysterious to us, the Father and the Son share the same essence (John 14:9-11), together with the Holy

Spirit. So when we speak of the oneness of the Son with the Father we are speaking of something entirely different than any of our normal usages of that term.

The important thing to the writer is that our Priest, the one who is our advocate with Yahweh, occupies a place of unimaginable influence and authority with him. That is the good news of the gospel.

**8:2 a minister in the sanctuary, and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.**

Christ occupies the majestic position of being seated at the right hand of God. The statement of the previous verse reminds us of his transcendent greatness. In this verse we are reminded of his more pragmatic role, that of ministering or serving in the very dwelling place of God.

It is rather surprising to learn that there is an actual holy place in an actual tabernacle in heaven. Because God is spirit, our thoughts of him generally move toward the world of the invisible and abstract. We think of the thought of Solomon, the great temple builder, that heaven and earth cannot contain him (1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chronicles 2:6; 6:18). We think of the dwelling of God being a mystical place, because he is everywhere present. In our experience of him that is how we encounter him. This idea of the existence of a visible tabernacle in heaven is stated here but will be more concretely developed in verse five.

The word rendered “sanctuary” in the NASB, occurs only in Hebrews, where it is used 10 times. It is an adjective used as a substantive derived from the word holy. It should be understood as it is elsewhere in the author’s words, as referring to the holy place (9:2-3). The word rendered tabernacle is the usual word for a tent, rather than the word for temple. Here the author makes two observations about this tabernacle in heaven. First, it is the true one—the place where the actual and essential business between

God and humanity transpire. Second, the tabernacle that houses this holy place has been established by God himself. It is not the work of humanity. So there is an actual place ordained and established by Yahweh for our benefit in his presence. The author wishes to emphasize that this reality is a result of initiative taken by God.

The author also wishes to emphasize that Christ ministers there in that place. This is the locus of the work he is occupied with as our high priest. We should likely understand this tabernacle as the human embassy in heaven. Christ, the sinless, glorified human is our emissary, transacting all that needs to be done in our interest with Yahweh. Christ, in whose being humanity and God are joined, is both his and our means of achieving that which Yahweh himself desires. The entire place and process is the result of the effort of God to restore his blessing to humanity.

**8:3 For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer.**

The author, seeking to complete our picture of the risen Christ's current work, points out that there is only one reason for the designation of someone as a high priest. It is to designate who will present on behalf of the people of God the prescribed gifts and sacrifices, whatever they are. So the high priest's function is to do this in the prescribed way to keep the relationship between Yahweh and his people right. The sacrifices offered to God were regarded as gifts to him (Matthew 5:23-24; 8:24; 23: 18-19).

Christ then was supplied and appointed by God for this purpose. The word ordained is the rendering of the Greek word καθισταται, a compound made up of the word to place prefixed with the preposition down. By etymology it carries the idea of placing down something or establishing it. It is used of actions of both God and man that bring about a certain state or condition. In the case of Jesus, there was a sacrifice he was "placed down" to make. He was certainly in this sense a gift from God to humanity. But as truly human, he was also one who brought a great gift to God, the very thing that Yahweh wanted, a legitimate means of redeeming humanity. This is the great work Christ was appointed or ordained for (Luke 2:34; Romans 5:19).

**8:4 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;**

With the exaltation of Christ, we have the order beyond that which God had established through the Law given by Moses. The Law related to what was on earth. We have just been told that Christ is a high priest in heaven. The author's point in this verse is simple. Were God still approaching man according to the previous order of the Law, Christ would not be a priest at all, since he was not of the tribe of Levi. That the Christ is projected by the Old Testament Scripture to be a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, that this is a sworn promise by Yahweh to him even though Christ is not of the tribe of Levi, is no less than testimony from Yahweh himself that there was an appointed end to the Old Covenant. So if the old earthly order was to be maintained, Yahweh certainly would not have violated it by ordaining a priest who was not of the designated tribe. By God's own rule and practice, that priest would have died (Numbers 3:10). That Christ is designated a high priest is indicative of a rank and privilege, a scope and impact far greater than all that is demonstrated in the Levitical institution. The purpose of that entire institution will be summarized in the author's next statement.

**8:5 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."**

Here we have a very important statement about the objects and routines of the worship system the Levites oversaw. Two things are said about those things. First, they were a copy of the heavenly things. Second, they were a shadow of the heavenly things. The two terms copy and shadow have overlap in meaning, but also distinctness. The word rendered copy is used of something that is a legitimate display and representation of a certain ideal (Hebrews 4:11; 9:23). The objects and routines of the Levites were visible displays of invisible realities. The word rendered shadow is used literally of a shadow cast by an object or person (Mark 4:32; Acts 5:15), or figuratively of the presence of something not yet visible (Luke 1:79; Colossians 2:17). The objects and routines of the Levites spoke of spiritual realities not yet actualized in the experience of humanity.

Both terms indicate in their own way that the objects and practices associated with Old Covenant worship were congruent with realities in the domain of God but were not themselves the realities of our earthly experience. There was a most holy place where that which made fellowship possible between man and God was transacted. The earthly tabernacle looked like it but was not it. Its objects looked like the actual ones but were not. Its routines had parallels with actual heavenly transactions but were not those transactions. In the realm of God, blood sacrifice carried out by a high priest atoned for the sins of humanity. But it was not the blood of animals presented by Levites. Though that was an accurate representation, it was only a copy of actions carried out by Christ. The Levitical routines were a shadow that outlined what he would do for humanity.

This statement substantially shrinks the present value of all that went with the Old Covenant. Though that was absolutely the need of the hour, it would have certainly been alarming to the Jews. The language and tone of the Pentateuch, its solemn warnings and consequences, to this day makes its readers shudder at the prospect of altering its instructions and practices. Assurance needed to be provided from within Moses' and the prophet's words that would give permission to set the Old Covenant's practices aside. In the remainder of this chapter the author will show from the Old Testament writings themselves where such permission is granted.

The writer sets out to prove that there is implicit consent in the Old Testament writings to, at an appointed time, set aside the practices of the Mosaic Law. His first citation comes from the writings of Moses himself. He cites an incident recorded in Exodus 25:40. That verse happens to be the words of Yahweh himself See that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain." Those words clearly reveal that Moses' work was a copy of what he had been shown. It is virtually certain that Moses saw the heavenly tabernacle and copied it, though a mind

conditioned by modern methods might argue for a set of drawings! There are other places in Scripture where God shows actual heavenly realities and reveals the measurements of them (see Ezekiel 40-42; Revelation 21:9-21). However God facilitated Moses' understanding of the look and dimensions of the tabernacle, what Moses built was clearly a copy. That is clear in Yahweh's words.

There are multiple other places in the writings of Moses that the writer could have cited that conveyed the fact that something different and better than the Old Covenant was coming. There were plain statements to the effect that Israel could not keep the Old Covenant (Deuteronomy 4:25-31; 5:28-33; 31:14-31). There were projections of a new heart that they needed that Yahweh would provide for them at the appointed time (Deuteronomy 29:4; 30:6). There were also many veiled projections of a coming King who would be the central figure in Israel's eventual greatness (Genesis 49:10; Numbers 23:23-24; Numbers 24:8-9; 24:17). But this present citation by the author of Hebrews is beautiful in its conciseness. It demanded no lengthy explanation of symbols and types. It is directly from the mouth of Yahweh. There is a classic Old Covenant sternness to Yahweh's words See to it…." But the plain message of Yahweh couched in that sternness is that Moses' tabernacle is only a copy. The author has provided proof from within a solemn statement of the God of the covenant himself that the holiest place associated with the Old Covenant was only a copy of the real holy place.

**8:6 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.**

The Levitical priests served in a tabernacle that was on earth. Jesus serves in heaven. The tabernacle they served in was a copy. Jesus serves in the real one. The sacrifices they offered were symbolic. The sacrifice Jesus offered was the actual one those only symbolized. In every way Jesus obtained a better ministry than the Levites did. The word rendered better is a compound word formed by joining the words "to bear" and "through." The idea it conveys is that of carrying something further than what has been done before. The word for ministry λειτουργιασ focuses on the formal service provided and carried out for worshippers. We might express the author's thought something like this: Jesus bore the burden of our redemption far beyond what the Levites could do and so renders us as greater worshippers of Yahweh.

The worship Jesus has brought about is higher and better because of two important things. First, Jesus' ministry mediates a better covenant. The author describes the covenant Jesus established between the two estranged parties, as κρειττοσιν, a word that expresses superior strength. The weakness of the old covenant and the strength of the new one is a subject the author will go into in some detail next.

Second, the new covenant is founded on stronger promises. This idea too will be developed more fully in the ensuing verses. The strength of the promise will be seen to

be in the fact that the laws of God are now inscribed in the hearts of his people, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. They are no longer words merely inscribed on stone, external to the people of the covenant community (2 Corinthians 3: 4-18). Through the indwelling Spirit they are words that accompany us always to inspire us from within.

None of this is to say that there was something ungodly or unholy about the old covenant. As Paul wrote, the problem with the old covenant was not the Law, but the fallenness of humanity. The Law was a legitimate standard of holiness, but it was too high for us to attain given our fallen nature (Romans 7:723). The new covenant is better in that it is appropriate to our sinfulness. Its mediator, Jesus, has compensated for our moral weakness through his own moral excellence. God then, by Christ's righteousness, can meet us on and so lift us from the low plane of morality we occupy. This excellence of the new covenant will be the subject of the author's discourse in the remainder of chapter 8, through chapter 9 and into chapter 10.

**8:7 For if the first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion for a second.**

The old covenant was an agreement between humanity and Yahweh regarding the blessing of Yahweh. By agreement, the covenant community would collectively be blessed if they obeyed the commands and laws of God. That agreement would have worked had it not been for their moral incapability. They were sinful. Despite their best intentions they could not rise to the standard of the Law of the covenant (Deuteronomy 5:28-29; 31:16-21, 27). This basic arrangement, whereby the people were blessed based on conformity to God's moral standard was weak, according to the previous verse.

On the other hand, the new covenant is "stronger" than the old one. This was because the old covenant did nothing to strengthen the moral weakness of humanity, it only provided a test of their morality. It was complete as a standard, brilliant in capturing concisely the essence of righteousness and sinfulness. So it served well as a standard by which one could come to understand their moral inability. The new covenant addressed that moral inability that the old covenant only highlighted.

The author uses a word rendered faultless. It is used only three other times in the New Testament. In all those cases it refers to the character of someone of good reputation (Luke 1:6; Philippians 2:15; 3:6).

So it is a word that expresses maturity and completeness, not perfection. By using this word the author is not suggesting that the old covenant was fraudulent. Rather that it incompletely addressed the issue of humanity's sin. It revealed it, but it did not atone for it. It was ineffective in bringing the blessing of Yahweh, because no human could rise to its terms.

We could say that the old covenant was weak because of its moral strength. Its standard is perfect, which means humanity cannot abide by it, and so cannot by it recover the lost blessing of Yahweh. It is from this pragmatic point of view that it had fault, though from a moral point of view it was a perfect. In terms of the ultimate purpose of Yahweh, to restore his blessing to humanity, the old covenant served an intermediate purpose, but not the ultimate one. For this reason it was temporary by the design and plan of God, until the time for a more complete covenant arrived.

**8:8 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;'"**

With this verse the author begins a lengthy quote from the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-34). As we examine the statements of the author of Hebrews, we are reminded repeatedly that the inadequacy of the old covenant was being spoken of even as it was being established (Deuteronomy 5:28:29; 29:4, 2228; 30:6; 31:14-29). Implicit in those words was the promise that Yahweh would bring a new covenant.

When Jeremiah wrote these words then, Yahweh was not introducing a new idea. Yahweh was drawing Israel back to the instruction Moses had given them before they entered the promised land. On that occasion, the song Yahweh had introduced to Israel through Moses and the words of Moses in introducing that song provide the basis for this statement of Yahweh through Jeremiah (Deuteronomy 31:14-32:47). By that time the experience of the very ones who crossed the Red Sea on dry land had proved the inability of humanity to live by the terms of the old covenant. Humanity could not recover the blessing lost by Adam by any kind of merit system.

Again, the "fault" the author speaks of in the old covenant was not an inherent weakness in the Law. In the very words of Moses as he projects the failure of the old covenant, he assures Israel that the words of the Law are not idle words. There is in them life-giving capacity (Deuteronomy 32:46-47). There was never any doubt that blessing could be obtained through obedience. The problem was that obedience escapes fallen humanity, and this renders the old covenant ineffective.

The objects of the new covenant are the houses of Israel and Judah. This is significant because their division had come as the result of God's judgment on Solomon for his sins (1 Kings 11:9-40). By the time of Jeremiah's words (627 BC to 580 BC), the northern tribes that made up Israel, had been taken from their land (722 BC). From the inception of that kingdom, there had been nothing but successive evil regimes that were repeatedly warned and wooed by Yahweh, but in vain (2 Kings 17:1-24). Despite their detestable record of immorality, God includes them in his future of blessing that the new covenant would bring about. To explicitly state the northern kingdom's inclusion was a very distinct projection of mercy and grace. It expresses the essence of the new covenant and its strength to redeem that which justice has condemned.

**8:9 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.**

Jeremiah's words echo the projections of the Pentateuch that something distinctly different from the covenant of Sinai would be provided by Yahweh. It would not be a new attempt at the old covenant, hoping that lessons had been learned. By the time of the projections made by Moses, the idea that a different generation could build from the experience of the previous one and rise higher morally could already be dismissed as delusional. The new covenant would be fundamentally different.

The differences were necessary due to the problem of continuance. The word used by the Septuagint version of Jeremiah's words comes from the same word Jesus used when he challenged the disciples to "abide" in him (John 15). The human problem is not to begin in a righteous way. It is to continue a course of righteousness and to increase in it. The Pentateuch clearly identifies follow-through as the crux of the human problem. It would lead to the failure of Yahweh's people to inherit the blessings of the Old Covenant (Deuteronomy 5:28-29).

More importantly, the differences were necessary due to the constraints of God's own character operating within him. Due to his freedom, sovereignty, and absolute independence, God's inner constraints are ultimately the only thing that shape his actions. They are the hope of his creation. We see these inner constraints alluded to in Jeremiah's words.

The response of Yahweh to Israel's failure is stated in our English version as him not caring for them. This is not referring to a loss of whatever his experience of emotion Isaiah Even in all his words of condemnation of their deeds, we see that strong affirmations of his enduring love for them are always present (Jeremiah 31:3; Hosea 11:1-11). The care referenced here refers to the experience of the blessing he longed to give them that would make them stand out as distinct from all other peoples (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). This special care he had to justly withhold from them due to the terms of the old covenant. So his loving care could not justly find its full expression were the old covenant to remain in force. This conflict is brought out by the picture Jeremiah's words paint. Yahweh moves from a position of leading Israel by the hand, a clear figure of a caring father, to not providing care for them, a clear figure of the experience of a wayward child. There had to be a new covenant not just for humanity's benefit. There had to be a new one because God's essential nature demanded it. Without a new covenant he would be conflicted, something that is itself an impossible condition

The goal of the author of Hebrews is to bring his readers to an understanding of these fundamental differences between the old and the new covenants. He has already developed several of them and will proceed in that pursuit. The differences center on the person and work of Christ. Accurate understanding of them is critical to our spiritual fitness.

**8:10 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 upon their hearts. And I will be their God and they shall be my people.**

Through the words of Jeremiah, the writer of Hebrews makes one of the great New Testament statements on the new covenant. Jeremiah had spoken to the outstanding feature of the coming new covenant. The author in a sense hitchhike on the authority of the Old Testament and the reader's respect for Jeremiah to enhance and prove his own previous statements that the new covenant is stronger than the old. Jeremiah projected that the laws of Yahweh would be placed in the minds of his people and be written on their hearts. This feature clearly contrasts with the words of the old covenant, carried in the ark of the covenant, written on tablets of stone. This idea did not originate with Jeremiah. Yahweh clearly stated, even as the old covenant was enacted, that this important feature was missing in it. He even stated that this would lead to the eventual demise of Israel (Deuteronomy 4:25-31 5::28-29; 29:4, 22-28; 30:1-8; 31:14-29). So this feature of Yahweh writing his laws on the hearts of his people was alluded to early and was an important part of the hope projected for Israel by Moses in the Pentateuch.

This feature was noted in the writings of Paul, and attention is clearly called by him to the fact that the old covenant was written on tablets of stone, while the new covenant was written on "tablets of human hearts" (2 Corinthians 3:3-11). This writing on the hearts of God's people was made possible by the payment rendered by Jesus for our sin. That enabled God to send his Spirit to indwell all who believed.

Thus the voice of God spoke to them from within. His righteousness becomes an inward voice and influence as opposed to written words.

We should understand this "writing on the hearts" as both an event and a process. The Holy Spirit is joined to our spirits now of our belief. That is a fundamental change in our constitution. Since the Law of God is innate to him, and since his essence is united with ours through the Spirit, his laws are imprinted deep within us. However there is a process that we must involve ourselves in that can best be described as one of communication. It is learning to listen for and discern those promptings of the Holy Spirit. In terms of what we cognitively know and can live by, the writing on our hearts is an ongoing process. It involves learning of many different sorts. Its progress depends on our cooperation and diligence. The fact remains however, that in the very core of our beings we have been joined to God. So from deep within our being we can be influenced by his very essence.

The words of Jeremiah also declare a result of this new covenant. It was this result that proved the covenant stronger. It was this result that eluded the practitioners of the Old Covenant. They never arrived at the point where Yahweh was their God, and they were Yahweh's people. Though the old covenant held that prospect out to them and painted a picture of the wonder of that position (Leviticus 26:1-12), it could not deliver on that

point due to their moral inability. If blessing was conditional, humanity would not experience its fullness, though they did experience blessing due to the mercy of God. The old covenant affirmed our fallenness. The new covenant addresses the void left by that fallenness.

The witness of Jeremiah is cited by the author of Hebrews to support his assertion that the new covenant is stronger. That is the main point at stake in the text of Hebrews in which this quote occurs. The message of Jeremiah as it originally occurred in its own context in his writings is itself a matter of some interest. The delineation by Jeremiah in that context of so many blessings that would occur in Israel at the time of the institution of the new covenant can't help but raise questions in the minds of students of Scripture. And so there are questions about the projections made in the prophetic books of the Old Testament of great blessings that were to come to Israel in the promised land because of the new covenant. Clearly the New Testament writers viewed the new covenant as having been inaugurated. That much is certain. However many projected events and blessings have not occurred which are clearly associated with the new covenant by Old Testament writers.

Important questions are raised that are not the immediate concern of the author of Hebrews but are a matter of concern to us in the broader context of understanding Scripture. How was the writer to the Hebrews reading and understanding this discourse by Jeremiah to use it as proof in his own argument that the time had arrived for the setting aside of the old covenant? For that matter, how had Jesus read the prophets and how had he taught the apostles to read them so that with one voice they proclaimed the age of the new covenant? How did they understand a new covenant made with "the house of Israel" as applicable to gentiles? So much was missing by way of events that had been projected to occur in Israel through the new covenant.

It is easy to demonstrate how solidly the Old Testament prophets had connected the new covenant with revival in Israel and their restoration to prominence. So definitive had the linkage between these two things become that the disciples themselves asked the risen Jesus if the restoration of the kingdom to Israel was now to happen (Acts 1:6). Jesus does not deny the legitimacy of the association they had made. He does, however, infer that this is for a future time, and so defers to the Father and focuses the apostles on the present work of being his witnesses (Acts 1:7-8). So the question remained, since the new covenant has arrived, when will Israel be restored to their promised place of prominence? Implicit in that question is another one that was on the minds of many Jews; since we do not see Israel blessed as they have been promised, has the new covenant really arrived?

We see in Jesus' teaching an answer to this latter question. He clearly states that the new covenant would be commenced through his death (Luke 22:19-20). Peter's announcement at Pentecost reflects this teaching and regards the outpouring of the Spirit as the visible sign of its commencement (Acts 2:14-21).

Paul saw the new covenant as having been enacted at the death of Christ, and the Spirit's indwelling presence as proof of that (Galatians 4:1-7). The author of Hebrews had no problem stating the arrival of the new covenant and the need to let go of the old even though the projected blessings to Israel had not arrived. So clearly there was no question in the minds of the early church leaders that they were in the era of the new covenant.

We can see in the record of Acts the apostles' struggle with the idea of gentiles being equal participants in a covenant made with Israel. It was not an easy issue to resolve. It took a special revelation to Peter (Acts 10), and a considerable amount of animated discussion (Acts 15). They concluded from Scripture that it was indeed the plan of God to include gentiles in the household of Israel (Acts 15:16-17). The position they arrived at is summarized well by Paul (Romans 11:16-21). It is important to see their perspective, that gentiles were grafted in among the "natural branches," Israelites. The Israelites are pictured by New Testament writers as the beginning, the gentiles as being joined to them (Ephesians 2:19-21). And so we see gentile believers referred to as Israelites (Romans 9:6). We also see the new covenant pictured as belonging to the "household of Israel," though gentiles were entering into its experience. This is not to make the entire outreach by Yahweh to the gentiles an afterthought. It was clearly in his heart to bless all nations through Israel (Genesis 12:1-3). That certainly was the result he aimed his plan towards and that he has brought about thus far through the Messiah and the new covenant he instituted. It is this plan that there are additional installments to.

That the new covenant had been inaugurated, that gentiles were participating in it with Israelites, was grasped relatively quickly by the early Church. The question that remains is this: what are we to make of the surplus of unfulfilled promises made to Israel in connection with the new covenant? To be certain great spiritual blessings have been bestowed, such as the indwelling of the Spirit and the propitiation of sin. One might even say that the most important blessings of the new covenant have been bestowed, particularly from a gentile perspective! But how are we to understand the 100's of verses that describe with certainty the physical, material things that Yahweh says will occur on earth and in Israel with the establishment of the new covenant (See Jeremiah 32:31-33:26)?

The Christian Church has classically answered these difficulties by saying that these promises are being fulfilled on earth spiritually in the age since Christ. Our teaching has been that the kingdom projected by Yahweh in Israel was that of Jesus Christ ruling over a spiritual family composed of all the elect, the community of believers. The promises will materialize fully in his eternal kingdom which will be established in its final form on the new earth. So for much of the Christian era, the church has regarded the spiritual descendants of Abraham, the church, as those to whom promises like these found in Jeremiah were made. The physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob they do not regard as a nation with any significant inheritance left with Yahweh.

This has been the classic position of the Christian Church from about the third century, through the dark ages, and through the reformation period. The examination of this position from a Biblical perspective has not been widespread until the late 19th and 20th century. Yet it is a position that clearly should be open to question (Jeremiah 33:23-26). It is a position that is slowly being examined, even as those of the reformation questioned the doctrine of salvation that had evolved in the Christian Church during the same era. The solution to this dilemma of Biblical interpretation will be similar. It will become clearer as the thought of many is invested and cross-examined.

The quote in Hebrews from Jeremiah 31 is part of a discourse that begins in Jeremiah 30. In the text of that discourse itself there is a key piece of information provided that, when tied to other Scripture, shows how Israel's experience of the new covenant will unfold. The discourse commences with a promise of restoration to ethnic Israel. However, this initial projection of restoration is quickly followed by a dismal look forward to a "time of Jacob's distress" that would precede the great restoration (Jer. 30:7). This time of distress is referred to as a great day like no other. So there is a clear statement of a coming great distress in Israel that would precede their restoration to Yahweh. Jeremiah's words quickly swung to the time that would follow that time of distress with the simple words "But he will be saved from it" (Jeremiah 30:7). That promise rightfully inspired great hope—Israel would be saved and restored!

From then on, the address delineates the great blessings that would come to the nation of Israel after their time of distress. There was a clear projection of them being ruled by an offspring of David (Jeremiah 30:9). It was clear that this ruler would be the Christ, the Messiah (30:21). They would return and dwell in the promised land unafraid and at ease (30:10). Their life there would be filled with great blessing (31:1012). The return would include all the families of Israel, not just those of the southern kingdom (31:1).

Their return to the land would be characterized by a return to Yahweh in a spirit of repentance (31:9). There was projected the destruction of all the nations in which they were scattered (30:11). It is said that they would be his people, and he their God (30:22; 31:1). A permanence was projected to this spiritual position (31:12-14). The entire picture leading up to the statement of the establishing of the new covenant with Israel depicts a great work of spiritual renewal that God would do in the hearts of their survivors (31:23-28). Most of these conditions have not come about with respect to the nation of Israel.

Mingled in with all these projections of blessing are little expressions of time such as "on that day" (30:8), "At that time" (31:1), "Behold, days are coming" (31:27, 31:32). The actual statement of the new covenant being made with Israel is said to occur "after those days" (31:33). It can be observed that all these expressions of time are strung together by Jeremiah after his statement, "Alas! For that day is great, there is none like

it; And it is the time of Jacob's distress, but he will be saved from it" (30:7). Jeremiah has created a reference point in time by which we can speak to the matter of Israel's experience of the new covenant and its material blessings. It is this time of trouble. We cannot predict the dates of this time of trouble. We can, however, locate its time frame relative to the life of Jesus. By doing that we can understand how Jesus was reading the prophecies regarding ethnic Israel and their experience of the new covenant and how he taught the apostles to read and understand these projections.

Jesus spoke of such a time of trouble that would come as lying beyond his time on earth (Matthew 24:21). The book of Revelation uses similar terms of such a time, and places it in the future (Revelation 3:10). So it appears that this great distress comes at the end of the spiritual wanderings that have characterized Israel since the judgments of the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, and which continue because of their ongoing rejection of Christ. From Jeremiah's perspective, the new covenant would be enjoyed by Israel after an event that Revelation depicted as a future one.

This much seems clear at this point. We are living in an era that is the new covenant era. We should likely understand the era since Christ as the lead edge of a larger new covenant era. During this period the form of the Kingdom of God is primarily spiritual, and the blessings of the new covenant are primarily spiritual. The experience of it is occurring almost exclusively among gentiles. For the most part, the experience of the new covenant has not taken root in ethnic Israel. In the writings of Paul we see the anticipation of some pivotal events that will result in widespread conversion among the physical descendants of Abraham (Romans 9-11). This harmonizes with the prophecies of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah (Zechariah 12-14). In the words of Jesus and in the writing of John in Revelation we can see harmony with the prophecies of Daniel (Matthew 24:15-31; Daniel 7, 9:24-27; Revelation 6,13,17, 18). This allows for the prospect of a future age and the physical reign of Christ on the present earth. Just as there has been a re-rooting of our belief in salvation by faith alone, so there is among many today in the Christian Church an embrace of the earlier belief in a literal kingdom of Christ on the present earth.

In a nutshell then, Jeremiah and most of the written prophecies of the Old Testament, describe Israel's experience of the new covenant. Their words however do not preclude an experience of the new covenant's spiritual blessings by gentiles first. As time unfolded, the reality was that the gentiles experience came first, through a remnant of the Jews. Ethnic Israel will enter their experience of the new covenant later, after a period of tribulation from which they will be miraculously saved and brought to believe in Jesus as their Christ (Zechariah 12:6-13:2).

We now have the answer to how Jesus, the apostles, and the writer of Hebrews were reading the Old Testament prophecies of the new covenant. Their teaching was that Jesus' death instituted the new covenant. It is the rule by which all who believe may now relate to Yahweh. Their understanding was that this present experience of the new

covenant was occurring primarily among gentiles and that the experience of Israel about the new covenant will be miraculously brought about by Yahweh in his time (Romans 11:25-32).

**8:11 And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, 'know the Lord,' for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest of them.**

Under the old covenant there was a constant prodding that had to go on, a kind of "watchdogging" that at times even became violent (Exodus 32:25-29). This was to maintain adherence to the Laws that the covenant community was obligated to keep for their mutual welfare and blessing. The consequences were simply too great to allow persons to willfully break the covenant. So we see in the record the ongoing urging that the author of Hebrews references here. This was what Paul called "the ministry of condemnation" (2 Corinthians 3:7-11). So dependent was the safety and welfare of the community on obedience that accountability had to be stringent. And so we see things like the stoning of offenders, and strict standards of capital punishment accompanying the old covenant. This became a way of life. God allowed the era to combat the great illusion among humanity that they can earn back their lost blessing through a merit system. That is one of the great false ideas that shapes every human religious system. It is the absolute enemy of the truth, and the great barrier that blocks humanity's way back to fellowship with their Creator.

The new covenant would change the behavior of the members of the covenant community toward each other. Spiritual health would still come about through relationships. But the emphasis of Jeremiah's words is on the big change the Spirit of God indwelling each member. He would be choreographing spiritual growth from within them. The Spirit within would convict them regarding righteousness and sin so that they were being drawn along in the footsteps of Yahweh himself. The motivating force for spiritual maturity would no longer be just external. It would come from within, and it would be present always.

The implication of this indwelling of the Spirit of God was developed further in the writings of the New Testament. Paul would explain that the Holy Spirit energized ministry between believers that inspired and equipped them for righteous living (1 Corinthians 12-14). Where there had been a ministry of death, there was now a ministry of the Spirit. Where there had been the ministry of condemnation, there was now a ministry of righteousness (2 Corinthians 3:4-11). All fleshly distinctions of capacity and worth had been neutralized (Colossians 3:11). The entire tone of the covenant community had been transformed by this dramatic change in the Holy Spirit's ministry.

**8:12 For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."**

The blessing originally extended to humanity was lost through sin. In this verse we have stated the actual reason why a new covenant could be enacted and why the old one could not have the strength to bring the lost blessing to humanity. Sin had to be finally and completely atoned for so that forgiveness could be extended by the standard of Yahweh's justice. Once forgiven based on their faith in the sacrifice of Christ, any human could be rejoined to Yahweh.

The key event then that enabled the establishment of the new covenant was the sacrifice of Christ (Isaiah 53:7-12). The old covenant was instituted with the blood of animals. Even before it was instituted, events like the Passover provided clear linkage between sacrifice and salvation from judgment. When Christ celebrated his last Passover with his disciples on the night Judas betrayed him, he said of that event that the cup of wine drank together by the participants represented his blood, the blood of the new covenant, "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28; Luke 22:20).

In the teaching of the Old Testament this idea was always present. Descriptions of a new covenant and the glory of God's blessing were accompanied by inferences that there would be payment for sin (Isaiah 59:1-20; Jeremiah 5:24-25; Micah 7:18-20). The method of payment was even stated clearly by Isaiah (Isaiah 53:7-12). Though this connection between God's forgiveness being extend and his glory being experienced was clear, its presence in the understanding of the minds of the people by Jesus' day was not evident. The community thought seemed to be that Israel had atoned for their own sin through various captivities and experiences of foreign exploitation, and that their hearts were now pure and readied. This line of thinking was nothing more than classic human religious thought where the favor of God is curried by good behavior. It was the very kind of thinking the experience of the old covenant was to undo and educate against. So they were thinking and operating under the rule of the old covenant. The result was that Israel would continue having an old covenant experience of God.

This willful mindset is against all the lessons carefully revealed through the story of Abraham and his descendants. Several millenniums of lessons learned must be ignored to believe that forgiveness for sins and lawless deeds can be gained through some kind of merit system. Yet the idea persists that blessing from the Creator can be recovered by human moral effort and achievement. The clear testimony of the Creator, Yahweh, through words like these of Jeremiah is that blessing comes to humanity through something Yahweh himself does with respect to our persistent moral shortfall. When he acts upon our injustices to remember them no more, the blessing is restored.

**8:13 When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.**

When we read Jeremiah's prophecy about the new covenant, its detail can take us in many directions and down many side trails. There is so much in them to ponder. Here however, the author of Hebrews shows that he wants the readers to focus on one very simple idea implicit in this lengthy quotation. He calls attention to just two words in his quote. They are the words "a new" (the word covenant being an addition by the editors of the NASB). That's it! Jeremiah said that the covenant is "a new" one.

The function then of this lengthy quote in this context was to affirm to the original readers that the covenant initiated by Christ was new. The author points out that two ideas are implicit in newness: the idea of replacement and the idea of obsolescence. The testimony of that newness, by no less an authority than Jeremiah, granted permission to lay aside the old covenant. And so the author has returned to the theme of his treatise. It was time for the readers to lay aside the old covenant, both its mindset and its practices.

The word rendered obsolete in the NASB is rarely seen in the New Testament (Luke 12:13; Hebrews 1:11 only). It is used twice in this verse. In the first occurrence it is a verb in the perfect tense. As such it is defining completed action that results in an ongoing state. In this case, God declared the old covenant obsolete, and it remains so. In the second use of this word we find a participle, a verbal adjective in the present tense. The old covenant is becoming obsolete. What God has declared he is bringing about in the practice of humanity. The old covenant is no longer his will.

From a pragmatic point of view, the new covenant is what is working effectively in real life practice. The old covenant is a museum piece. There are lessons to be learned from it, since it marks a former way of life. That is its present value. But it is obsolete—a relic of the past. Moreover, it is a story of something that did not work. That is important! It is a monument to the failure of a way of doing things. It is a stark testimony of human incapability to curry the favor of God. It is not a testimony of a step in a journey of progress, as we might find in a present day museum. It testifies of a way of thought that is futile and should not be entertained again.

The author utilizes another word rendered "growing old" to give emphasis to this obsolescence. It is used only one other time in the New Testament (John 21:18). It describes the dysfunction that accompanies old age, including things like senility. It invokes a very negative image and projects it onto any further practice of the things associated with the old covenant. The word is in the present tense and so conveys an ongoing decline that comes with any current practice of the old covenant. Whereas God mercifully blessed its practice previously, though that practice always fell pathetically short, he no longer does. God is no longer present in the practice of the old covenant. It is that simple.

# HEBREWS 9

**9:1 Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary.**

The author has presented the covenant initiated by Christ as "new," emphasizing the implication—that the old is obsolete. These ideas of newness and obsolescence were part of his development of the idea that the new covenant is "stronger" than the old (8:6-7). The first 14 verses of chapter 9 contrast the forms and practices of the covenant community under the two covenants. The purpose of this contrast will be to articulate and demonstrate the superior strength of the new covenant.

A good way of understanding this verse would be this: "Now on the one hand the first covenant had a set standard of worship form, and the earthly sacred place." This is the beginning of the first half of a contrast. The second half of the contrast will not appear until verse 11. In this opening statement of the contrast between the old covenant and Christ, the author is calling attention to two things about the old covenant.

First, the old covenant had a specific set of regulations that governed how humanity related to God. One cannot read the account of Moses and not be impressed with the meticulously prescribed order that Yahweh imposed on the worship of Israel. A typical section of Moses account that seems to be crafted by him to emphasize this is found in Leviticus 8-10. That section begins with the consecration of the priests. The special procedure is reported and seven times in the account of the details a phrase such as "just as Yahweh had commanded Moses" occurs. Then we see the account of the glory of Yahweh coming to rest on the tabernacle, an event that Moses links solidly to their conformity to the instructions Yahweh had given (Leviticus 9:6). Immediately following this we see the death of Aaron's sons who were punished because they did not follow the prescribed order of Yahweh in the offering of incense to him (Leviticus 10). One cannot help feeling the fear of further violating Yahweh's regulations in Moses' account of how that incident was dealt with. The author's statement that the old covenant had its ordinances is a great understatement.

The second thing the author of Hebrews points out about the old covenant is that it had a sacred place. He will devote attention in the following verses to the physical nature of that place. Initially this place was the tent, or the tabernacle. It was designated as the "tent of meeting." As such, wherever it was erected, it was the designated spot on earth where Yahweh met with his people. That spot was designated as a holy place on this earth—not inherently holy but designated as holy for purposes relating to Yahweh's redemption of this present creation.

This holy place underwent a metamorphosis under the old covenant. It started out as a simple tent erected by Moses to which he retreated when he and others sought Yahweh (Exodus 33:7-11). The glory of Yahweh rested on that tent in a special way. That

simple tent gave way to a formal tent of meeting, which was constructed in a special way according to a specific pattern revealed by Yahweh to Moses (Exodus 25-27). These instructions were followed in an exhaustive way by Moses from the construction of the pieces and furnishings of the Tabernacle to its erection and consecration (Exodus 40:16). It is after this obedience to this detailed instruction that this tabernacle becomes the official "tent of meeting." With the background story of the initial tent of meeting, one cannot help but notice in the account of Exodus 40 that a transition is occurring. The tabernacle is called "the tent of meeting" seven times in just 14 verses (Exodus 40:22-35). The account of the glory of Yahweh coming to rest on that tabernacle gives final emphasizes to the importance of Moses' obedience in its construction and the holiness of that place (Leviticus 9). Moses understood that this metamorphosis would continue. His account projected that in the Promised Land Yahweh would designate a place in which he would place his presence in a more permanent way (Deuteronomy 12:11). That was a projection of the Temple that Solomon would construct in Jerusalem.

The important thing in this Hebrews treatise is simply that the author will now contrast specifics of the old covenant with the new. So he is beginning his delineation of the old covenant to complete the first half of his contrast. The second half of the contrast will begin in verse 11.

**9:2 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.**

Within the tabernacle prepared by Moses in Sinai there were two distinct rooms. The first of those is described here. It was the room entered into first when one went into the tabernacle through the curtain that served as its door. The layman could not enter even this portion of the tabernacle. It could be entered into only by the Levites and only after they had observed a certain ceremony (Numbers 8:5-26). It appears that even in their case this privilege may have been narrowed and restricted in the aftermath of the arrogance of Korah (Numbers 18:3).

The furnishings in this first room were simple and are enumerated here. Each had its function and its symbolism, all of which is conspicuously passed over in this account. One can't help but notice the brevity of the description provided by the author. This has a way of alerting the reader to a single point the author wants to call attention to. It is that this first room in this tent of meeting was called the holy place. Even this point is itself incidental. The real focus of the tabernacle was the second room.

**9:3 And behind the second veil, there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies,**

The second room of the tabernacle had the greater significance. Within the holy place that the entire tabernacle was, this was itself the holy place. In this designation Holy of Holies there is the idea that the rest of the tabernacle derived its holiness from the holiness of this room within it. It was the point in space where Yahweh's presence met humanity. Two veils separated the covenant people, other than the high priest, from this most holy of places, the one which served as the door for the tabernacle, and then this inner curtain that divided the rectangular tent into two rooms. An additional veil, the one in the wall around the courtyard separated those outside the covenant from this place. The readers then are beginning to be reminded of the exclusiveness of this inner room of the tabernacle.

**9:4 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.**

With this statement the author reminds the readers of the items that were in this inner room. His purpose is clearly to provide enough detail to allow the reader's imagination to help them feel the force of the superior strength of the new covenant when he begins to delineate it later. Clearly, he is not interested in dealing with the symbolisms attached to these articles placed in this inner room, a fact he will plainly state in the next verse.

From our point of view it is important to remind ourselves that these each played a role in the great story of the covenant people, and they represent its significant lessons. The altar of incense was confronted by the high priest first as he entered the room. This was yet another altar after the one on which sin offerings had already been offered outside the outer veil or door of the tabernacle. The altar of incense was another reminder of the holiness of God, the fallenness and imperfection of humanity, and the need for some act that would bridge this credibility gap on behalf of humankind.

The ark of the covenant, as its name indicated, was a furnishing that stored the basic agreement between Yahweh and Israel. The ark was a thing of beauty, overlaid with gold that testified of the importance of what was inside it. Inside was the contract both agreed to. Written on stone, it testified to the terms by which Israel would experience God's blessing, by which he would be their God and they, his people. The tablets were called "the testimony," and so the ark was also called the ark of the testimony. It carried that which bore official witness to the terms of the relationship (Exodus 34:27-28).

The chronology of the appearance of these items in Moses' account is interesting. The experience of manna is reported first and does appear to have happened before the

building of the ark (Exodus 16:121). At that point in Moses' account he reports Yahweh's command to keep a sample of the manna "before" the testimony, or in its presence. This is interesting because "the testimony" itself was not in their possession yet. "The Testimony" itself appears in Moses' account when he comes down the mountain in anger to deal with the golden calf (Exodus 32:15). He promptly breaks this first copy (Exodus 32:19). This was replaced by Yahweh later (Exodus 34:27-28). It is after this giving of "the testimony" that the report of the ark's construction appears (Exodus 37:1-9), though the instructions regarding the building of the "ark of the Testimony" appear in between the command regarding the manna and before "the Testimony" itself is given (Exodus 25:16). Moses says in Deuteronomy that he made the ark before he went up the mountain the second time, after he had smashed the first tablets (Deuteronomy 10:1-5). So the ark was built before the second tablets were written on. But in terms of the appearance of these items in Moses' account, the manna appears first, the testimony second, and finally the ark. The manna and the tablets appear to have been in the ark from its beginning. Aaron's rod was added later.

The manna was in a jar that was gold, like the ark, and showed that it contained something of great importance. On the one hand the manna bore witness to the power and care of Yahweh exercised in Israel's behalf. But it also bore witness to their grumblings along the way. So it was a testimony to his goodness and their imperfection, distrust, and need of him. It was a precursor to the eventual testimony of the Law itself, that Yahweh was good and Holy, and that humanity was fallen and needful. Even in the wake of Yahweh's salvation and blessing, they were unbelieving.

The rod of Aaron served as a similar witness or testimony. It was placed in the ark later. It was a symbol of the authority bestowed on the few for the guidance of the many. It was certainly a symbol of his care and goodness, but it was also a reminder of Yahweh's judgment, their rebellion and arrogance (Numbers 17:10).

The ark with its contents was a formal and concrete testimony of humanity's shortfall, their rebellion and arrogance against God even when blessed with knowledge and experience of Yahweh's goodness. The cherub and the mercy seat, mentioned in passing by the author in the next verse, also made it a witness to God's mercy, grace, and provision for humanity's restoration. With the various items in it, the ark was a testimony to Yahweh the Creator's desire to reconcile humanity to himself, to shepherd them despite their rebellion.

None of this background information, however, makes its way into the author's account. But given this background as to the significance of each of these items, his hurried account serves another purpose. This hurrying on has the effect of adding further strength to the idea of moving forward in the new thing that God is doing. There was a symbolism in it all the material things related to the old covenant that outweighed any of that mentioned so far. That symbolism will be delineated in verse 8.

**9:5 And above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak I detail.**

This verse adds to the hurried tone of the account that has the effect of strengthening the author's summons to serving the new covenant. While in our study of Hebrews we might divert and linger over the meaning of past symbols, we must remember that the author does not. He states things related to the past concisely but wants the readers to move through it quickly.

This verse begins with the mention of the cherubim. These were sculptures of angelic beings attached to the top of the ark of the testimony. There was a deep symbolism in the presence of these hovering over the written statement of the terms of the covenant. There was also deep symbolism in the area on top of the ark that they overshadowed being called the mercy seat, the place where blood was placed once per year on the day of atonement to render the entire worship system of Israel pleasing in Yahweh's sight for another year.

None of the meaning of this symbolism is mentioned here. The passing over of these significant ideas could be attributed to the presence of a clear understanding of it all in the minds of the readers. But it could be argued that if such a clear understanding of the symbols was present, why was the entire treatise we have in Hebrews necessary? Implicit in the author's brief mention of these things is his primary message, that there was a new focus their understanding needed to shift to. Given the urgency of the understanding of Christ, there was no time to linger over what had great significance in a former time. Those symbols spoke something of Christ, so that there is consistency in the testimony of God. But now there is clearer revelation of his work to turn attention to, the testimony of Christ. Yahweh had spoken "in Son." That revelation needed to be scrutinized rather than the shadows of the old covenant.

**9:6 Now when these things have been thus prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle, performing the divine worship,**

The old covenant was strict about the placement of items used in worship and the procedures that regulated how the priests went about the performance of their duties. There is much that the author leaves out that he could have said about the ceremonial purification processes that the priests had to go through in carrying out their service. This passing over stands out to the informed reader even of today. The things had to be prepared, but the priest had to be prepared as well. These continued omissions contribute to the objective of main concern to the author—to get his readers to cease lingering over the old covenant. They are details skipped over, and that leaves the impression that they are no longer important.

There are two words in this verse that are key to the author's line of reasoning in this section. They are the words "continually entering." They express the idea of a continual primary routine. The place the priests were continually entering was the outer

tabernacle. It was not the most holy place. So the primary routine and habit of the central figures of the entire old covenant worship system had to do with that which was intentionally isolated from the most intimate presence of Yahweh. This then is a very concise expression of the comparatively fringe experience of Yahweh even the priests had. And if this was true of the priests, how much more of the people? Verse 8 will show that this was itself an intentional shape Yahweh gave to the entire old covenant system to make it symbolic of a very important reality.

**9:7 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.**

The author's choice of words in this verse emphasizes the limiting and restrictive nature of the experience of Yahweh delivered by the old covenant. The author certainly could have presented this routine on the Day of Atonement as a wonderful event an opportunity that the high priest was privileged to enjoy once each year. Instead the phrase "only the high priest" focuses the readers on all who did not participate. The phrase "once a year" calls attention to the 359 other days on the Jewish calendar. The phrase "not without blood," along with the mention of the sins and ignorance of the high priest and the people, imply a ceiling to the entire experience of Yahweh.

Again, much detail that could have been included is missing. But enough is provided to bring out the shortfall in the old covenant experience of Yahweh. The experience of his intimate presence was limited to one individual among the hundreds of thousands of Israelites. It was a once per year experience for that person, and that for a very short period. Even then it was an experience that was couched in symbolism that made it as much a fearful event as a blessed one.

**9:8 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;**

This is a very important statement regarding understanding the era of the old covenant. Working under the inspiration of the Spirit, the author delivers an explanation of what these two rooms in the tabernacle along with all the regulations having to do with entering them signified. So we have here a statement from Yahweh about the symbolism He himself had established in the tabernacle and its worship system.

The author says that the Holy Spirit was making something plain through all this symbolism. That is the meaning of the word rendered "signifying" by the NASB. The symbolism of the tabernacle with its coverings and curtains, and the ceremony of the day of atonement were designed to convey a simple truth. It all plainly illustrated that the way into the holy place was not yet made manifest. There could hardly have been a better symbol of this truth. The tabernacle enclosed and enveloped the holy place so

that no one could see it. It was as a barrier so that no one would even accidentally go near it. The tabernacle and its ceremony implied that something more was needed if humanity was to be restored to intimacy with Yahweh. The Pentateuch, composed by Moses, could be understood as the handbook that went with the tabernacle. It provided the teaching that these things were indeed all temporary. So what the people heard from Moses' book, combined with what their eyes saw in the tabernacle and its ceremony, plainly showed them that the way by which humanity could stand in the presence of Yahweh was not yet provided.

None of this was meant to suggest that the practices relating to the old covenant were devoid of any real value. They were all a legitimate though temporary provision so that the people could at least have some means of relating to Yahweh. The old covenant was temporary, and it failed to address some very important issues. But it was a very important stage in Yahweh's plan of redemption. The Holy Spirit was speaking to Israel very plainly through the old covenant.

**9:9 which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience,**

The author says that the tabernacle was a parable that taught concerning a great coming truth. The parable it told related to the present time—the great truth of the sacrifice of Christ. In other words, the way into the holy of holies that it foreshadowed, had now actually arrived. Since the tabernacle was a parable that spoke of the future blessing of humanity entering the very presence of God, it makes perfect sense that the same is true of the sacrifices connected to it. The tabernacle is a story about a future experience with Yahweh. Its sacrifices are a story about a future sacrifice that will make that experience possible.

A critical word in this verse is the word conscience. The author is confronting the reader with genuine and real judicial forgiveness as opposed to what he will call fleshly, or ceremonial purity. The old covenant provided appeasement of Yahweh. The sacrifices kept the high priest from getting killed when he entered the presence of God. The blood of animals he presented appeased Yahweh so that he withheld his judgment from the Israelites and continued to accept their worship. But the expiation of guilt could not actually occur until Yahweh provided the appropriate sacrifice of human life for human sin. So the old covenant system was good. Rightly understood it provided hope and a basis for faith. But the reality it spoke of was off in the future. In the meantime sins of the people stood between them and Yahweh like the veils and curtains of the tabernacle.

In confronting the readers with this idea that the sacrifices could not make the worshipers perfect in conscience, the author is bringing to their ears the heart of a sensitive matter. Jews living in the first century had this enormous adjustment to make. They had been accustomed to the ordinances and practices related to the old

covenant. While the focal point of worship had evolved from the tabernacle to the temple in Jerusalem, its routines were essentially the same. Their collective conscience was shaped by those practices. More importantly, it was shaped by errant teaching related to those practices. It had become the firm belief and teaching of the Jews that those sacrifices and ceremonies did in fact bring forgiveness for sin and purity of life and conscience. It was not easy to let go of this ingrained thinking. The recognition that the value of all the sacrifices that had occurred over the past 1500 years was that they spoke of Christ would have been tough to embrace. It amounted to a letting go of what had become the heart and soul of Judaism.

This release was what the author of Hebrews was seeking to facilitate. His task was to grant permission through the Scriptures for this enormous break with tradition. The statement of this verse and the next marks a critical tipping point in the minds of the readers. The groundwork had been laid. Now came the essence of the matter, that the blood of animals could not pay the penalty for sin. If the readers could buy into this idea, that those sacrifices pointed the worshipers to faith in the greater sacrifice of Christ, they could be weaned from their slavery to the old covenant. This critical idea will be strengthened in the verses that follow.

**9:10 since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.**

The entire body of written ordinances in the old covenant related to outward material things. They were things our outer, physical beings participated in. They could not expiate guilt, nor could they transform the seat of evil inside every human being. This is not to say they were without value. They had value if they were reflected on and engaged in faith, in that they could lead the mind to the thoughts of all they symbolized. But they could easily be engaged in a mindless way and become outward routine. The fact was that whether engaged in faith, or done in a mindless way, these routines could not cleanse the participants from evil. They could only heighten the awareness of it and inform them of how they would be cleansed.

This era, as empty as it may seem to us, was of God. He ordained it for purposes that we do not know. Those purposes relate to his intention to fill the earth with the knowledge of his glory (Habakkuk 2:14). But why exactly Yahweh reasoned that era to be of importance will remain a mystery to us. Because it was of Yahweh the era was not unjust, or unrighteous, and it cannot be regarded as a kind of stepchild to the real work of God. It had its glory (2 Corinthians 3:7-11). The language chosen by the author here is that these regulations were “righteous things imposed upon” humanity. There is the message in those words of two things. First, these things were right. Second, they were required, being ordered by God for a specific period.

These ordinances had application to a specific era that would end with a time of “reformation.” The author employs the word διοθωσεωσ, which means to rectify or

thoroughly straighten. It refers to an administering of an order that produces recovery, and prosperity (Acts 24:2). Here it is looking forward to the work of Christ and the order that would emerge from it.

So the author has affirmed the legitimacy, the value and the function of what has been. He has also spoken to the unfinished business of the era, and the need which it heightened for forgiveness, that remained only partially addressed. It is now the perfect time for him to launch into God's solution.

**9:11 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;**

Verses 11 and 12 are linked together grammatically. The subject of the entire sentence, Christ, is stated in verse 11. The main verb does not occur until verse 12. It is the word εισνλθεν, rendered "entered" in the NASB. All that occurs in between this subject and main verb serves to provide additional information about what, why, and how Christ entered. For ease of reading the NASB has placed the word "entered" in verse 11. But in the Greek text "entered" does not occur until verse 12. Observing this original ordering of the words and phrases makes for a very awkward reading. But it helps us see that the author is attempting to focus the reader's attention on the good things that have arrived with Christ. That serves his purpose well, that of inspiring the readers to let go of the old covenant for the superior strength of the new one. So much of verse 11 and 12 consists of words and phrases that develop the idea of "the good things to come."

As mentioned earlier, the first word in the Greek text of verse 11 introduces the subject of the sentence that spans verses 11 and 12. That subject is Christ. The second word is key. It is the word "but." It is the normal grammar of the Greek language for this word δε, rendered "but" to appear as the second word in the sentence, unlike the practice of English grammar, where it would occur first. What is important about that word is that it alerts us to the fact that the contrast the grammar of the first verse of the chapter indicated was being formed is now finally to be stated. So we know immediately that Christ is being contrasted with what we have just read about, the ordinances and practices of the old covenant.

The next word is a verbal adjective that describes action that occurred prior to that of the main verb. So before the action of entering the holy place that will be spoken of in verse 12 this action occurred. The action was that he appeared. The word by etymology means to become near or alongside. It came to be used of becoming physically present arriving on site.

Next, we have a series of phrases that describe that appearance. He appeared as a high priest. That describes his role when he arrived. It was one of spiritual authority

and leadership. He came on the scene as the authority in matters pertaining to God, Yahweh's designated spiritual leader.

The text says Christ was the leader of good things that had come about. So he was the designated leader of something different, and we are told first that the different things are good. That is an important designation—he brought good news. Immediately following the word good we find the preposition διᾳ, with a phrase that describes how the new things can be determined good. The things that have come are good news by they relate to a greater and complete tabernacle. It is greater and more complete because it is not "hand-made". The author further explains that the tabernacle Christ presides over is not of this creation. It is of another realm, not like the hand-made, material one of the Old Covenant. So the things Christ initiated and administered as a high priest are good because of the tabernacle they relate to that is not of this world. The idea will be developed in the ensuing verses so that we know Christ administered the things that relate to the real dwelling of God, the one of which Moses' tabernacle was just a copy.

**9:12 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.**

The primary action of Christ is stated here, that of entering the holy place. The holy place in view here has already been clarified in the previous verse. It is not the one associated with the tabernacle of the old covenant. It is the one associated with the new covenant, the actual tabernacle in heaven, the one that the former tent only modeled.

The entry of Christ into the true holy place was strategic in the plan of Yahweh because it concerned the actual formal payment to him, set according to his great standard of justice, for the sin of humanity. The author states that Christ was not entering with the blood of goats and calves in hand, as the high priests had done on the Day of Atonement in the holy place of the earthly tabernacle.

With this the subject of blood comes into the discussion. Blood was an ever-present element in the laws and practices of the old covenant. The blood of animals was assigned significant value. The Israelites were instructed not to eat any blood ever (Leviticus 7:26-27). The instruction of the Law was that the blood of animals was designated sacred by Yahweh, representing the very life of the creature and dedicated as the legitimate substitute for the blood of the Israelites for the atonement of their souls (Leviticus 17:10-16).

Moses' account does not delineate explicitly that these sacrifices pre-figured the sacrifice of Christ. Rather, this idea remained implicit in the various figures, symbols, and shadows of old covenant ceremony.

When the time came, Christ brought his own blood. The significance of this idea will be developed in the next two verses. But the crux of the matter is that Christ's was human blood, that of a sinless human, that of Yahweh's appointed sin-bearer. It was blood of a like kind to those whose sin was to be atoned for. It was the blood of one loved by Yahweh, his very own Son. So it was of greater value than the blood of goats and calves in every sense.

This blood of Christ obtained eternal redemption. Because it was not just that of goats and calves, but that of the One who was God in human flesh, it could do what no other blood could do. The word redemption can be traced back to the word which means "to loosen." It involves supplying that which frees someone or something from the obligation of a legal claim. By payment of ransom the person or thing is freed and is obligated only to the one who paid for their release. In the case of humanity, by the law of God they had an outstanding legal obligation of payment to God. His justice demanded their lifeblood. Christ obtained our redemption by his own blood, through his submission to crucifixion at the hands of fallen humanity. In that act he died a sacrificial death for humanity's sin. He was the lamb of God, the one specifically provided by God to make this payment for us (John 1:29, 36; 1 Peter 1:18-21; Revelation 13:8; Hebrews 9:26). The payment was applied to all those who believe.

The redemption Christ obtained for believers is described in two ways. Implicit in the idea that he entered the holy place once is the idea that it is final, accomplished once and for all. There was no need to repeat the action as in the yearly ceremony on the Day of Atonement. It was the actual payment, formally made in the designated holy place and so stood as complete and final. Similarly, the redemption he obtained is said to be eternal. The payment stood as adequate and legitimate for all time and beyond. Its infinite value could not be eroded by time and could not be offset by some amount or classification of sin committed against Yahweh.

**9:13 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,**

A primary focal point of the ordinances of the earthly tabernacle was the uncleanness of both the worshipers and priests. Comparatively little is said about their actual innate moral uncleanness, though that is the implicit message of the body of symbolic acts and laws. The uncleanness addressed by the bulk of the ceremonies was an external, or fleshly one. A person could be deemed unclean for a few reasons ranging from what they had touched to a bodily illness. These ordinances no doubt was intended to raise the awareness of the human problem of spiritual death—our fallen inner beings. But the reality was that they did not deal with real or actual uncleanness. Rather, certain things were declared unclean for the greater purpose of illustrating the moral gap between Yahweh and fallen humanity.

This uncleanness was addressed through various ceremonies. Uncleanness was incurred through various human experiences and was dealt with in ceremonies involving animal sacrifice (Leviticus 12-14), or special washings such as with the ashes of the red heifer (Leviticus 19:1-10). It is these ceremonial acts that the writer is referring to here. Since such ceremonies allowed a person to re-engage in worship and fellowship, then certainly the work of Christ carried out on earth and in the tabernacle of heaven had even greater impact.

**9:14 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?**

The verse begins with "how much more the blood of Christ." So the author is presenting the clear superiority of Jesus Christ's blood presented in the heavenly tabernacle over the ceremonial cleansings of the old covenant. The clear contrast he makes is between what he has called the cleansing of "the flesh" (13), and what he calls here the cleansing of "your conscience." The former dealt with outward things, the sacrifice of Christ with the things of the inner being. The former dealt with a kind of ceremonial guilt, the sacrifice of Christ with actual guilt.

Three things are stated here about the sacrifice of Christ that are important. It is said that he offered himself, and this is strongly affirmed in the words of Christ himself (John 10:15-18). His death did not occur because he was overpowered. It occurred because he laid his life down "for his friends" (John 15:13). He went willingly to the cross in submission to the will of God the Father (Mark 14:36).

It is said that he did this "through the eternal Spirit." This is a significant statement, mentioned first, likely to affirm how Christ lived as he did while on earth. He lived as we must live, by faith, strengthened by the Holy Spirit for all that Yahweh calls us to do. Technically speaking we must understand that Jesus was able to do what he did not because he was God, though that is true. He was enabled as he was because he perfectly submitted himself in each moment to the Holy Spirit. The life that he lived is the life that he gives, though we cannot live it to perfection due to our fallen state.

It is also said that he was without blemish. his sinlessness was essential if he was to serve as humanity's substitute. There was a mountain of evidence of this demand of God for an unblemished sacrifice in the worship system prescribed by the old covenant. This entire system was itself a prophecy of the "lamb" alluded to very early in the story of Israel, that God himself would provide (Genesis 22:8; John 1:29, 36; 1 Peter 1:18-19). So in this verse we have this idea: Christ was enabled by the Holy Spirit to live a sinless life and to offer himself up for sacrificial death as the atoning sacrifice for the sin of all who would believe.

On the heels of this great truth we have another important statement about the transformation in our lives this work of Christ enabled. There is a cleansing of our conscience from dead works that enables service to the living God. The conscience is how God enabled human beings to function as moral beings rather than merely as creatures of instinct. Due to the fall, our conscience is not infallible. It can be shaped by things that are not true, or that are not completely true. It is shaped for example by our upbringing, by our culture, and by the sum of what we have been taught about morality. It is a voice in us that can be ignored, so that we do not live up to our capacity to function as moral beings. Through Christ's sacrifice, we are joined at the deepest level of our being to the Spirit of God. He becomes a tremendous resource from within us by which our conscience can become both vibrant and accurate.

The potential of this awakened conscience is expressed well by the author in his statement that our conscience is cleansed "from dead works to serve the living God." Before the change in the makeup of our inner being, our errant conscience, even if we chose to listen to it, led us in faulty directions. Since our moral convictions were wrong, our view of God was wrong, which means that for practical purposes we had relegated him to the position of a god. Through the presence of the Holy Spirit we are enabled for a renewal of our conscience that then leads us accurately, in a way that harmonizes with the truth about God. So we are enabled to serve the living God. We are no longer trapped in the spiral of works that produce spiritual death.

**9:15 And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, in order 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.**

The contrast of the author is becoming clearer, and the superior strength of the new covenant is now apparent. The old covenant dealt with our external behavior. At best it produced an outward conformity in us. Our moral compass remained broken (Deuteronomy 32:5). The sacrificial death of Christ brought provision for the repair of that moral compass. We are enabled through his work in our behalf to serve God in the deepest part of our beings. This is the reason why the new covenant is stronger.

The first statement of this verse is that Christ is a mediator of a new covenant. The word mediator refers to a go-between, by implication a reconciler. Yahweh's plan had himself becoming a man—Jesus. The task of Jesus, the Godman was not negotiation, as might be true of one who mediates in earthly matters. Rather, he was one vested with authority and capacity to meet the demands of Yahweh's justice on behalf of humanity. His task was to live a sinless life, and then to die. His death, as the author states here, provided redemption and was that through which he brought about a new covenant from a very willing God.

The writer identifies two things Jesus' death accomplished. First, it provided payment for the transgressions of those who lived under the old covenant. This was essential, because the blood of animals could not do that without compromising the justice of God. So the sacrifices of the old covenant were meant to be demonstrations of faith by those who brought them, faith in the goodness and mercy of God. They demonstrated faith also in the idea of substitution, that another's blood could take the place of one's own where there was sin that needed to be atoned for. But strictly speaking they could not and did not atone for that sin. They were prescribed by God as a show of good faith between him and the worshipers. The real payment for those transgressions would be provided by Yahweh and was in the person and work of Jesus the Christ.

The second thing the writer identifies is that the death of Christ if those summoned by Yahweh would receive "the promise of the eternal inheritance." This is an important statement in several respects. It indicates that Yahweh would not compromise his justice and simply declare righteous those whom he wished. However one might come to view the idea of Yahweh calling people and peoples, that summons does not save. Christ had to die. Yahweh did not set aside what was real, the guilt of those he loved. He did not set aside what was just, his law, to just be nice! To have done so would have endangered his new creation. Jesus died resulting in the eternal benefit of those whom Yahweh had summoned.

This statement also indicates that it is the new covenant that delivers the eternal inheritance. The old covenant dealt with an earthly inheritance, the temporal blessings that went with life in the promised land. That was the most we see that covenant promising, and it is clearly connected with that blessing and nothing more. In fact, little is said or implied in the whole matter of life after death in the entire body of Moses' writing. So the idea of the eternal inheritance is noticeably absent in the words surrounding the establishment of the old covenant. That is appropriate in that it was not given to address that matter. It was a covenant of experience, the day-to-day experience of Yahweh as one's God, saving them from the dilemmas and predicaments of day-to-day life—things like enemies, diseases, and poverty. So it was a covenant of fellowship. Salvation in eternal matters always related to one's faith in Yahweh and seemed to be understood as something that would be provided off in the future (Daniel 12:1-4, 13). This statement of the writer of Hebrews solidly connects the new covenant with eternal blessing. The contrast is clear. The old covenant dealt with temporal blessing. The new covenant delivers eternal blessing.

In a matter on the periphery of this text, the question of the experience of death under the old covenant as opposed to the new covenant has been a subject of considerable speculation among Christians for centuries. Both from a logical point of view and the limited statements of various texts within Scripture, it seems that the experience was different before Christ. Old covenant believers are spoken of as entering rest (Daniel 12:13; Samuel. 28:15). They spoke of going to "Sheol" in death (Genesis 37:5; Psalm 6:5). Paul, under the new covenant, says that to be absent from the body is to be present

with the Lord (Philippians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 5:8). Though one might attempt to explain such differences as literary, it seems logical that until actual payment was rendered for sin, the experience of forgiveness could not be fully entered. Hence the mainline teaching of Protestant Christianity has been that Sheol had two regions, the place of the spirits of the righteous dead, and the place of the spirits of the wicked dead (Luke 16:19-30). The former was a place of paradise, the latter a place of torment. Once Christ died, he released the spirits of the righteous dead from Sheol to a place in the presence of Yahweh (Ephesians 4:7-10). This new place became the destination of all who would die in Christ under the new covenant. This is not explicitly taught in any text of Scripture, but it does seem to harmonize several different texts that touch on this subject. The statement by the author of Hebrews in this verse can be viewed as shedding light on this change in the experience of death.

The primary point of this verse is that through his death Jesus Christ brought about a new covenant that conveyed the experience of the eternal inheritance to all who have responded to Yahweh's summons. The experience of the eternal inheritance is the focal point of the verse.

**9:16 For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it.**

There have been many approaches to the interpretation of verse 16 and 17 over the years. They follow along two main lines with some variation. There are those who believe that these two verses are speaking of a will. They base this on the thought and language of the verses themselves and on the mention in verse 15 of the eternal inheritance that is passed on to believers through Christ's death. There are English translations that follow this interpretation. There are others who believe that the subject under discussion is still the covenants, but that the death being spoke of here is the normal symbolic death of designated animals that generally accompanied those formalized agreements.

There is language in the context that supports either of these interpretations. The subject of an inheritance has been introduced in verse 15. So though the transition from the idea of the new covenant to a will is abrupt, it is not entirely unreasonable, given this reference to an inheritance. This interpretation allows for a very plain, straight-forward reading of the words of verses 16 and 17. The problem with it comes in verse 18, where a conclusion is drawn about the first, or Sinai covenant, based on what has been said in verses 16 and 17 supposedly about a will. That seems to make the thought of this entire section disjointed.

The Greek word in question in verses 16 and 17 is διαθηκη. The NASB renders it "covenant" because it is the same word used in verse 15, where it is obviously referring to the new covenant. This word is the word used throughout the Septuagint for the Hebrew word berit—universally understood as "covenant." The author of Hebrews has

consistently quoted from that version of the Old Testament. It makes sense that he would use the Septuagint's vocabulary. This is not to say that this word cannot express the idea of a will or testament. In fact, its meaning is that of a disposition—an order or arrangement of things. It is not the Greek word that expresses best the idea of an order or an arrangement in a relationship—a covenant (συντιθνμι). Still, it is the word chosen by the first translators of the Old Testament into the Greek language. The argument for understanding the idea of the author here as covenant is not built on the strict meaning of the word, nor entirely on the fact that this word meant covenant in the Septuagint. It is based on its usage by the author within the context. That was viewed as compelling by the translators of the NASB and seems to be a strong argument in the interpretation of the passage.

In addition to this argument of the author's usage of the word διαθηκη, there is another argument from the context itself that is strong. It comes from verse 18. Verse 18 clearly is the conclusion of whatever is being expressed in verses 16 and 17. It is clearly talking about the Sinai covenant, though the word covenant does not occur there. Why would the author begin speaking about the new covenant in verse 15, switch to making statements about a will, then draw a conclusion about the old covenant from the discussion of wills? To understand verses 16 and 17 as references to a will, though allowable from a pure etymological point of view, has several contextual issues that rule against it.

This discussion is made more complex by the fact that both covenants behave like wills to some degree. The old covenant looked forward in time to the conveyance of certain realities. These achieved a level of reality upon the death of Christ. The new covenant behaves like a will in that it conveys an experience of our inheritance that was significantly heightened upon the death of Christ. It assures a greater experience of those things upon our own deaths. The fact is however, that Christ is alive, and the inheritance remains under his control. We are co-heirs with him of God, not his heirs. God remains alive. So though there is similarity between the covenants and a will, there is also a substantial difference.

What then are we to make of what is said in verses 16 and 17? They would seem to be saying in English versions that a covenant does not take on meaning or force until the one making it dies. The resolution of this is admittedly complex, but there is a legitimate way of understanding the words themselves so that the thought of the author as he speaks of the covenants makes sense.

The actual words in the Greek text of verse 16 are few. The first part of the verse says, "For where a covenant is "(even the verb "is" must be supplied). That phrase establishes that the author is speaking about what was normal in covenant-making. The next phrase in the verse is often rendered as it is in the NASB; "there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it." However, because of the verb selected by the author in this phrase, it can legitimately be understood as saying "death of

necessity of the covenant-maker must be born." The verb used by the author is not a common choice where a simple state of being is described. It is the word φερεσθαι, from the root φερω, which means to bear or carry. In words consistent with the covenant ceremony, the author is not saying the covenant maker must die. He is saying that his death must be born symbolically in the covenant ceremony by a selected victim. The interpretation of verse 17 is based on this understanding.

**9: 17 For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives.**

This verse is a difficult one to interpret if one views verses 16 and 17 as speaking of a covenant. This is what has led many to believe that the verses are speaking about a will. We have already spoken to this issue in interpreting verse 16. So we take this verse to be saying that a covenant is valid only when the designated animals have been killed, thus representing the individuals making the covenant. From the perspective of the interpretation of this verse alone, this is not as attractive as making the subject that of a will. But in the overall context it fits much better. The death being spoken of here is the same as that being spoken of in verse 16—the symbolic death of the testators.

The verse is affirming that without such a ceremony and the death of designated sacrificial victims, there was no covenant.

The difficulty of our interpretation comes in understanding the term rendered "men are dead" as meaning anything other than the corpses of dead humans. The term in Greek is νεκροισ, which is never used of dead animals, only of humans. The only way we can resolve this is to say, as we have, that the symbolism of covenant making portrays the reality of the potential, actual death of the ones entering a covenant. Therefore while not viewing the language here in the plain-literal sense, we are interpreting in a way that is consistent with the figurative-literal implications of the covenant ceremony. Since the covenant ceremony is itself symbolic, we might expect a description like this one of its effects to be true to its symbols.

It is good to stop at this point and remind ourselves of the main point the author is developing here. It was introduced in verse 15. It is that based on Christ's death, a new covenant was instituted. Because of his death as the appointed sin-bearer, humanity could enter the experience of the eternal inheritance. His message will show that their experience was no longer just a symbolic one involving models of the holy place and ceremonies depicting forgiveness. It was a real personal experience of union with God, organic in nature involving a substantive change in one's own spirit.

**9: 18 Therefore even the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood.**

This verse confirms that we are to understand the previous two verses as speaking of a covenant not a will. It states the expectation we should have looking back at the old covenant based on the observations made in verse 16 and 17 about covenant making practice. It would not be reasonable to think that the author would speak about the arrangement classically found in a will and draw a conclusion from that about the old covenant. We are to understand the deaths in verses 16 and 17 as those symbolic deaths, animal sacrifices, that characterized the covenant ceremonies.

It is because in covenant making, we find the death of the covenant parties represented in symbolic form through the sacrifice of a designated victim, that we would expect to find such a thing in the institution of the old covenant. And we do. The presence of blood in a legitimate covenant between God and man is a primary concern that the author wishes to affirm and establish in the minds of his audience. This is an essential element in understanding the superior strength of the new covenant. It is stronger because it is based on a more precious sacrifice, the death and blood of the sinless Christ, a point the author has made (14) and will soon reiterate (23-24).

**9:19 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,**

This verse refers to what is recorded by Moses of the ceremony in which Israel entered covenant with Yahweh (Exodus 24:1-8). The details of the scarlet wool and hyssop are added legitimately, since the hyssop was commonly available and used in the sprinkling of the Passover blood on the doorposts in Egypt (Exodus 12:22). We see the scarlet string and hyssop prescribed in various purifying ceremonies under the law (Leviticus 14:4,6, 49; Numbers 19:6,18).

The primary point being made here is that the old covenant came with the sacrificial death of animals and the sprinkling of the blood of those victims on the people. By that act on a few things were signified. A primary one was that these were issues of life and death that were being entered into between the people and Yahweh. Moses' last words to the Israelites would remind them of the weightiness of the words of the Law they had accepted that day (Deuteronomy 32:46-47).

**9:20 saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you."**

The author cites these words of Moses, from Moses' own account of the incident (Exodus 24:8). Jesus, speaking of his own blood, would utter similar words at the last Passover he celebrated with his disciples (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25). The phrase itself affirms the author's point—that a covenant only exists where it has been solemnized by death and blood. Such blood was as essential

to the validity of a covenant as a signature is today to a contract. It was the affirmation that the parties had agreement on the terms of their arrangement.

The phrase "the blood of the covenant," met an expectation in the mind of Moses' audience. A true covenant had a blood element. The blood of the sacrificial animals sprinkled on them affirmed that a covenant had really and truly been entered.

**9:21 And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood.**

These words are spoken by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and so we believe that they are accurate. This action by Moses is not specifically recorded in his own personal account of the incident. In the account being quoted here (Exodus 24:1-8), the tabernacle did not yet exist. So this has reference to a later incident when the tabernacle was first set up (Exodus 40). On that occasion it is said that Moses anointed the tabernacle and its furnishings with the special anointing oil which was a symbol of its consecration and holiness. It does not specifically mention blood being sprinkled on the vessels of the ministry. It may be that both oil and blood were sprinkled on all these things. We know that this was the view of the Jews at the time of the apostles because it is attested to by Josephus the Jewish historian. We know that Aaron and his garments, his sons, and the altar were anointed with oil and with blood (Leviticus 8:10, 15, 30). So it may be that both things were used in the consecration of the tabernacle and its furnishings as well.

The blood of the old covenant was present everywhere in the worship system of the Israelites. The sprinkling of it did not stop with the initial dedication of the tabernacle. It continued to be present in the ensuing practice of that place of meeting with Yahweh. And so we find blood often sprinkled on the altar (Leviticus 1:5), on the priests (Leviticus 8:30), on those offering sin offerings (Leviticus 14:25), on unclean things (Leviticus 14:52), on and before the mercy seat (Leviticus 16:14). The sprinkling of blood was an ever-present element in the worship system of the old covenant.

**9:22 And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.**

The author's tone of uncertainty reflects his precise interpretation of the Old Testament. The principle that without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness is not explicitly stated in the Law. It is implicit in that the prescription for dealing with sin always involves blood. So he states this as one would a principle extracted from repeated statements of truth and practice. One cannot look at the instruction of Yahweh through Moses and not reach this conclusion. It is a very important one.

The cleansing of things is the major theme of the entire book of Leviticus. It is true that much of the uncleanness was assigned, that is, not inherent in the situations or

conditions themselves. This was made clear in later revelation (Mark 7:17-23; Acts 10:9-15; Romans 14:14). Why Yahweh chose to make such declarations and then later undo them is mysterious. Our best deduction is that it was to plant the thought of our moral uncleanness in our minds for our contemplation and meditation. The entire system was deliberately shallow, as was the solution of animal sacrifice, so that humanity might anticipate and depend solely on Yahweh's plan of salvation. This was not to say it was all artificial. The old covenant was God's will and plan for Israel and humanity at that time.

The word rendered forgiveness in the NASB is αφεσισ. Its etymological meaning is to send away, or to release. It is used this way only twice in the New Testament. Both uses are in Luke 4:18. The rest of the time it becomes the word used to express the payment of our moral debt to God because of our sins. Consciousness of this moral debt was a large part of the purpose of the Law (Romans 7:7; Galatians 3:24). The Law's message was constant and clear. Sin was ever-present in us, payment an ongoing routine. It was intended that in humanity's reflection and meditation they be informed of an important reality. The reality is that remission of our moral debt is far beyond our capacity. The constant necessity and presence of blood was meant to accomplish this. The author's point is that blood was the means of remitting moral debt. It was the ever-present element anywhere uncleanness of any sort was addressed. The testimony of the Law was consistent on this subject.

**9:23 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.**

The old covenant was God's will for an era. Therefore its laws had to be obeyed. So the sacrifice of animals and their blood were continually present in the routines of Israel. The old covenant also pictured certain things that were realities in God's kingdom and would be realities in coming eras that Yahweh had planned for humanity. And so it was revelatory in nature. So the tabernacle, along with its altar, its ark and mercy seat, and its priesthood were all ceremonially cleansed from ceremonial uncleanness with the blood of animals which had been assigned ceremonial value. Because all these things were revelatory in nature, all the routines had to be properly ordered so that the message of it all remained intact. So the blood of animals symbolically cleansed the things which were themselves symbols. The author is expressing that idea here.

The real things, of which all these symbols spoke, are cleansed by what the writer here calls "better sacrifices than these." By its etymology the word rendered "better" implies superior strength. This word is used 19 times in the New Testament, 13 of which are in Hebrews. So it is common in Hebrews. It is the expression of the author's theme in a word. And so in this treatise Christ is presented first as "better" (1:4). The Hebrews are called to "better" things (6:9). Melchizedek is presented as "better" than Abraham (7:7). The hope we have is "better" (7:19). The covenant we have is "better" (7:22; 8:6).

Now we are told that the sacrifice of Christ is "better." The author makes it clear here that it is better because it relates to the realities, not just the symbols. It relates to things as they are in heaven, in the presence of Yahweh where humanity must stand. The sacrifice of Christ provides cleansing for humanity with reference to that heavenly place, the place in which we must all one day stand to give an accounting to our Creator. Christ's sacrifice then is not symbolic but real.

Now, what does the author mean by stating that the sacrifice of Christ cleansed heavenly things? Two things can be said about his choice of words here. The obvious is that there is no uncleanness resident in God. So there is no inherent uncleanness in his dwelling place. Second, humanity was made for dwelling with God. When uncleanness entered humanity, it meant that a heavenly thing had been contaminated. So the heavenly thing here can be understood as humanity. They cannot be cleansed with the blood of animals. They could be justly forgiven through the substitutionary death of the heavenly one, Christ.

**9:24 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;**

The author continues his statement of why Christ's sacrifice was better than those offered under the old covenant. The imagery of this verse and the next one is based on the yearly ceremony we call the Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur. The instructions for that day were given by Yahweh to Moses and recorded by him for us (Leviticus 16). Its central event was the High Priest entering the most holy place, the innermost room of the tabernacle, to make atonement for the Israelites. It was the only time in which anyone entered that room. The ceremony was a yearly reminder and renewal of the covenant, a ceremony through which the entire worship system was renewed for another year. It spoke symbolically of that which ultimately allowed humanity to fellowship with Yahweh, the sacrifice of Christ.

Christ did not merely enter earthly holy places. The author uses the plural here to include the various holy places that had existed in Israel's history or any that might be imagined by the readers. His actions were not with reference to earthly shrines. Christ entered the real holy place, the very dwelling of God, the place of Yahweh's eternal presence. The author captures the superiority of this with the words "true one…heaven itself."

The author also makes a definitive statement of time. Christ has entered "now." By this he is pointing out that Christ remains there. He has not emerged from that place, though he will, a point the author will make in verse 28. For now Christ remains in the presence of God and the wording is very clear as to why. He does so in our behalf or for our benefit.

**9:25 nor was it that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood not his own.**

The old covenant imagery delivered the definitive message that atonement was never really accomplished. It was observed as a ceremony each year so that an individual would participate in it on scores of occasions over the course of their lives. It was never done, which is what made the words of Christ on the cross so profound, "It is finished!" Those words were proof in themselves that his sacrifice was better and the covenant he enabled better. He was able to make the pronouncement that no high priest had ever been able to utter.

But the point is made also by the author that it was not just the place Christ did his work in that made his work better. The sacrifice itself was better. The blood the high priests presented was not their own, as was the case in Christ's presentation. In a sense they were just making a delivery of that which appeased God, what he desired and prescribed as a show of good faith for an interim period until payment was made. Christ's work on the other hand, was a deeply personal one that he did out of love for humanity and for God the Father. It was the work of Yahweh himself in human form. His blood was precious in that it was the life blood of the only human that had ever lived a perfect life. His was a life lived in a way that it would have never ended had he not chosen to willingly lay it down. So the sacrifice he presented was one that no high priest could have possibly done even if they had been willing. Their own works were incomplete, their own morality blemished. His sacrifice was better.

**9:26 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.**

Had Christ's blood not been the satisfactory payment for sin, the entire incarnation event with its sacrificial ending would have had to been repeated often. The mere fact that nothing like it has ever happened since the world was made speaks to the value and sufficiency of his blood. What we see in the event is its entire uniqueness.

This great event existed in the mind of God before creation (1 Peter 1:19-21). It was anticipated by him in his words to Adam and Eve and to Satan after the fall (Genesis 3:15). It was projected in the symbols of the old covenant and in the words of the prophets of that era (Deuteronomy 32:43; Isaiah 53). Then at the precise moment God had planned and choreographed, the event came about. The event happened in the "fullness of time" (Galatians 4:4-5), that is, when all prerequisite conditions and events God wished to bring about first had occurred.

Christ's death was, according to the words of the writer of Hebrews in this verse, a summit event—the logical and desired outcome of everything God has planned. A way of understanding the expressions chosen is that Christ's work has been superimposed on time itself. In it the purposes of the ages are fully enabled and so made complete.

The result is an indelible impression on human history. So there is a centrality to the cross that cannot be over-stated in terms of its importance to humanity in the plan of God.

The author says that because of the cross there is a putting away, a dislodging of sin. The word he chooses to express this putting away is αθετησιν. It was formed by the privative prefixed to the word that expresses the placement or establishment of something. So there is the idea of destroying the foundation of something, undoing that which gives it existence and presence. That is the impact of the sacrifice of Christ in the spiritual realm, where critical realities began to be justly undone by Yahweh. These alterations, only partly understood by us, form the basis of his Kingdom which will eventually fill this earth, and result in a new heaven and earth.

The word order chosen by the author in this verse is such that the last word to appear in the Greek text is the word "manifested." By placing it last the author draws attention to it and gives the idea it conveys of enlightening a matter emphasis he uses the word φανεροω in the perfect tense. So the idea he is emphasizing the idea expressed in verse 24. Christ came into the great, unapproachable light of the actual holy place of the dwelling of God and remains there to the present time. The results of his ongoing presence in that place reach into the present and beyond.

**9:27 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment,**

Christ shared in our humanity. His experience of it had many things in common with our experience. But his experience of it was different than ours due to two facts his sinlessness and his appointed role as our Priest King. In this verse and the next, similarities are noted as well as important contrasts.

The thought of this verse and the next are logically connected and this is reflected by the conjunctive ideas that begin both. This verse begins with the unusual expression και καθ οσον, "and according as," or as the NASB has rendered, "and in as much as." It will report a condition that exists among humanity. The next verse will begin with an adverbial expression that shows that the action it describes logically flows from the condition described in this verse.

The primary idea in the previous context has been the sufficiency of the one-time sacrifice of Christ. The word "once" is a key word. The word "once" will persist, yet the message will take on a rather unexpected element in verse 28. The message will be this: as certain as the one-time nature of life and death, and as certain as the one-time nature of the atonement of Christ, is his future one-time appearance in our behalf for our salvation.

In this verse a very critical statement is made about the universal experience of humanity. It is a statement of what has been "laid down" or established by the decree

of Yahweh. His decree is this; due to sin, it is the lot of each individual person to die physically. The life experiences of each human will vary, but death at some point is a certainty. It is one of the things that we all share as human beings.

The term "once" is important in this statement. Each person dies and they do so once. The word rendered once is the Greek word απαξ. It is used four times in this chapter (verses 7, 26,27,28). One of those uses is in the previous verse, one in this verse, and one in the verse that follows. So it is a word that ties the three verses together. In the previous verse it describes the appearance of Christ on earth. He was incarnated in human flesh one time and died a sacrificial death one time. The use of "once" in that case emphasizes the idea of the effectiveness and sufficiency of his work. It did not have to be repeated as did the ceremony conducted by the high priest who had to offer atonement "once" each year (7). The use of "once" in the present verse emphasizes the finality of the experience of life. There is no second chance to do it differently or to prepare for one's judgment.

Besides death, there is a second universal experience of all humans. It is personal judgment by their Creator. The author's manner in this statement is noticeably concise. It is so abrupt, even curt, that it draws attention. Judgment is presented here as if it occurs immediately after one dies. We know from other revelation that the resurrection and judgment of the both the righteous and unrighteous occurs millenniums after physical death in many cases. This has given rise to all kinds of speculation involving some intermediate, probationary state. But we must ask in considering these ideas why the author of Hebrews would be so concise and definitive if there were indeed second chances to live differently, to undo mistakes, sins, and faulty decisions? This discussion is not the primary message of this verse in its context. But the verse is an important one to understand in terms of addressing the issue of life, death, and judgment.

The concept of "once" is critical to the author's theology of the atonement. He wants to strengthen the reader's trust in this one-time atonement of Christ. It is hard to imagine him introducing as a basis of comparison any experience that did not fit into this "once" category. His use of the human experience of physical death as a basis of comparison for the one-time nature of the atonement, and the one-time appearance of Christ on our behalf for our salvation, has been a strong voice against any idea of an intermediate probationary state of being after death. It seems that at the very least there is a strong argument implicit in this text against any idea of a probationary state. It would be hard to imagine what stronger words the author could have chosen to explicitly state the finality of belief or unbelief once physical death occurs.

Any idea of a probationary intermediate state must be compared to several other statements in Scripture besides this one. There is no statement in Scripture that affirms the existence of an intermediate state where a second chance to live by truth is granted. In one of the few passages that deals with that intermediate state, we find the

opposite idea taught—that there is no opportunity to alter one's eternal state (Luke 16:19-31).

It seems the following statements best describe the message of this and other passages in the Bible on the subject. The moment of death confirms us in a state of belief or unbelief. We begin now of death the appropriate and just experience commensurate with either our belief or unbelief. We either begin enjoying the presence of God, or the experience of being isolated from it. Our formal judgment and sentencing happen once our resurrection occurs. Then either the full joy of fellowship with God or the full horror of isolation away from him will be our eternal experience. That seems to best explain why the author of Hebrews has chosen to make this statement as he has here regarding death and judgment. It is both concise and precise.

**9:28 so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.**

This verse's function in the context is governed by the conjunctive ideas that begin it and the previous verse. Verse 27 began with the unusual expression και καθ οσον, "and according as," or as the NASB has rendered, "and in as much as." It went on to state a condition that existed because of the decree of God. This verse begins with an adverbial expression that tells the reader that something will follow that logically relates to the condition established in verse 27. We could understand it simply as "thus," or "thusly," or "due to this." Taken together then, verse 27 states a condition that exists by the decree of God—physical death and judgment. Verse 28 states an action God takes because of that condition. We have represented in these two verses two decrees of God: God's decree of death and judgment in verse 27, and in verse 28 his decree of salvation.

The direction the author takes the text in through this verse is somewhat surprising. With the continual re-occurrence of the word "once" in the previous two verses, a reference to "a second time" is unexpected. The reader might expect just a re-statement of Christ having appeared once to bear the sins of many. But the author chooses to mention this only in passing. He leaps past that one-time event to speak of a second appearing of Christ. In mentioning the second coming of Christ, he could have spoken of him appearing as a judge of sinners, since that is the idea, the previous verse left us with. Instead he speaks of what his coming will mean for those who have trusted in his work and embraced its efficacy for themselves.

The effect of this maneuver by the author draws special attention to Christ's second coming. We are made to suddenly and abruptly feel the hope of Christ's coming, even as the event itself will be sudden and abrupt. Jesus is presented as bringing about the consummation of Yahweh's plan and promise. Because of Christ's sinlessness and sacrificial death, our rescue is justly provided for. The love of God, having compelled him to offer his only Son, then compels him to intervene on earth to bring about our

complete salvation from evil. His Son will appear on earth a second time. That appearance will result in the safety, soundness, and health of all who have placed faith in his appearing.

Because it is appointed or decreed by God for every human to die, and to experience judgment after that, Christ will appear a second time. One's belief in Christ has not kept them from dying physically. So to a large degree we have not experienced physically the results of Yahweh's salvation. But in the appearance of Christ the second time on earth we who have believed will be raised physically from the dead (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) and given new bodies (1 Corinthians 15:50-58. Our "judgment" will consist of being rewarded for our response of faith in and to the message of the gospel (Isaiah 62:11; Revelation 11:17-18; 22:11-15). So this second appearance of Christ, in the case of believers will not have to do with our sin, since Christ's first appearance dealt with that. It will have to do with our entering into the experience of the benefit of Christ's sacrifice—eternal physical and spiritual life with him (2 Thessalonians 2:13-15).

# HEBREWS 10

**10:1 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.**

Though a new chapter begins here, there is no break in thought occurring. The word "for" signals us that additional thought about what has preceded is being provided. This verse reaches back to the idea that Christ has offered a "better" sacrifice than could be offered by previous high priests (9:23). The entire chapter will reach back to add detail to the idea that Christ has instituted a "better" covenant (7:22; 8:6).

The primary idea of this verse is this: the Law can never make perfect those who draw near. At issue in the mind of the author is what the NASB renders "make perfect." That term is the word normally used in the Scripture of completeness, maturity, or wholeness. It is not usual for the word to refer to sinlessness, but rather of being appropriately seasoned and mature. The author is speaking of the inability of the old covenant sacrifices to bring about character change and transformation. Those sacrifices could accomplish nothing in terms of lifting us from our fallen condition. From our present perspective under the new covenant we know why. Those sacrifices did not atone for sin and so did not allow the Holy Spirit to indwell the worshippers. They remained the same in terms of their moral makeup. The foundation for this idea has already been implicitly laid down by the author in describing Christ as a better high priest (4:145:10), who offered better sacrifices (9:11-14), and brought about a better covenant (8:6-7). All these ideas infer something better is needed. Now the author explicitly states the Law's inability to effect spiritual transformation.

Within this simple statement about the Law's inadequacy we find two other statements about that shortfall. The first provides us with the reason for the Law's inadequacy. It is that the Law "has only a shadow of the good things to come." So when we examine the Law, we find that which provides us with some understanding of good things that God has in the future for us. The idea conveyed by using the figure of a shadow is that we do not have the things themselves, and that is confirmed by the words to that effect. In the Law we do not even have an exact representation of the real things. We have nothing of substance in the Law when it comes to our spiritual need. Therefore it is unable to accomplish anything of substance in the matter of our spiritual shortfall. We do have in the Law information that allows us to make some observations regarding spiritual realities. Paul makes a similar statement about the Law when he states that the things connected with the old covenant "are a shadow of what is to come" (Colossians 2:17). So the Law has value, but it has no innate ability to alter us spiritually.

A second statement made on the way to the message of the Law's inadequacy speaks of the high level of activity the Law generated. Now we usually associate greater

activity with greater effectiveness. There was no shortage of activity under the Law. The author uses three expressions that emphasize the reoccurring nature of sacrifices under the old covenant. They are spoken of as plural "sacrifices." They are said to be offered "year by year," again emphasizing their plurality. This plurality is emphasized further by the statement that they are "offered continually." So under the Law we find continual and repeated sacrifice. The author has provided the reader with a sharp contrast at this point with the message of the previous three verses. In those verses the one-time nature of Christ's sacrifice has been emphasized, the word "once" occurring three times in three verses. Despite the frequency and multitude of the Law's sacrifices, they could not bring substantive change in the hearts of the worshippers. That is the sullen reality of the life and routine of the Law.

**10:2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?**

The writer has made a very straightforward declaration that the sacrifices of the old covenant were not able to bring completeness to those who brought them in obedience to Yahweh. He supports that statement through this rhetorical question. If they would have brought completeness before God, the worshippers would certainly have had that witness in their conscience and would have ceased to offer them.

This statement fits perfectly with what has just been highlighted by the author, the repetitive nature of old covenant sacrifice. The Law certainly produced a high level of activity. There had certainly been an enormous number of such sacrifices made. There were occasions when the number of sacrifices made went far beyond all requirement of the Law, soaring to a staggering number (2 Samuel 6:13; 1 Kings 3:4; 8:5, 63). The witness in the heart of the worshippers was persistent, that more was needed to be done to atone for their sin. Yet even when the sacrifices went beyond the Law's demand, they did not produce transformation. So it is true that the volume of sacrifices bore witness to their inability to address the heart of the issues between Yahweh and humanity.

**10:3 But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year.**

The more consistent the Israelites faithfully practiced the routine of the sacrifice, the more persistent was the witness of its ineffectiveness. The sacrifices did not leave the worshipers sensing forgiveness, when they were thinking accurately and being taught accurately by the Levites—and that was a key element of Yahweh's design of it all (Deuteronomy 33:8-10; 2 Chronicles 35:3; Ezekiel 44:23). Equipped with right understanding, they were reminded by the entire routine of their own inherent moral inability. The system spoke well of their uncleanness with respect to entering the presence of Yahweh.

This is not to say that the average Israelite in every era felt and thought rightly about the sacrifices. There is abundant witness that an accurate view and understanding of the entire system was lost, and that this led to the demise of the nation (Isaiah 5:13; Jeremiah 3:15; Hosea 4:1-10; 6:6; Malachi 2:1-9). And of course when the Christ arrived on the scene, he found only a remnant of those who understood their need for cleansing. Among the influential ones in Israel he found in general self-righteousness, not an awareness of a need for forgiveness (Luke 11:52; John 3:1-21).

The sacrifices of the old covenant, when properly understood and carried out, were to remind the worshippers of their utter dependence on Yahweh for salvation. The hope of a future cleansing was engrained in the book of the Law Moses had delivered to them (Deuteronomy 30:6). The entire system of worship was to be practiced in this spirit of hope.

**10:4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.**

The word rendered impossible by the NASB is αδυνατον. It describes a condition where there is absence of ability, capacity, or power to accomplish a designated purpose. It is used four times in the book of Hebrews. In each of the uses the author expresses a powerful theological idea. There is no power or capacity for an enlightened one who has fallen away, to be renewed and so become vibrant in their faith (6:4). Yahweh has no capacity to lie (6:18). Without faith humanity has no capacity to please Yahweh (11:6).

The idea expressed here is likewise profound. It is a plain, straight-forward statement of the truth about the old covenant sacrifices. The truth is that taking away sin through animal sacrifice is an impossibility. There is in such sacrifice an inherent lack of power and value. The shortfall is such that no volume of such sacrifices can make them adequate. This truth is what makes the work of Christ so essential, the centerpiece of Yahweh's salvation plan.

The need of humanity is to have their sin taken away. The verb used here is αφαιρειν, formed from the preposition meaning away from, and a word meaning to select or choose. It is used in the literal sense of severing, as when Peter severed the ear from the servant of the high priest (Matthew 26:51). It is used of removing one from their job or responsibility or privilege (Luke 10:42; 16:3). It is used as it is by the author of Hebrews in one other place in the writing of Paul to capture the thought of the prophets as they projected the restoration of Israel and their miraculous severance from sin (Romans 11:27). God's salvation plan aims at the severing of sin from humanity. We should not consider ourselves "saved" in the full sense of the plan of God until we stand before him in new bodies, severed from the entire experience of evil. The sacrifices of the old covenant did not sever humanity from sin. The fact is that they tied them in a deeper way to them (Romans 7:7-11).

An understanding of this idea, that the blood of animals cannot sever sin from humanity, can be strengthened through several lines of thought that are clear in the Law of Moses. The first of these ideas is that humanity was clearly given the right to rule over animal creation (Genesis 1:26). Later in Moses' account we find the value of animal and human life expressed, when God makes a covenant with both humanity and animals (Genesis 1:9-17). But in that account, we see his acknowledgement of the greater value of human life in two ways. First, animals are given to humanity as food (Genesis 9:1-4). Second, strict punishment is assigned to any person or animal that takes a human life. We also see in that account the hint of substitutionary sacrifice of animals in the command that their blood is not to be eaten (Genesis 9:4). This reasoning behind this command is explained later in Moses' account as being that blood serves a holy purpose in the plan of God, dedicated to the atonement of humanity's sin and their redemption (Leviticus 17:10-13). So the blood of animals was assigned a substitutionary value.

This greater value of human life is seen clearly in the laws related to the first-born. By that law the firstborn offspring of all animals were sacrificed to Yahweh, but the first-born of humans was ransomed through the substitutionary sacrifice of a lamb (Exodus 13:11-16). We see both the principle of the greater value of human life, and the idea of the substitutionary sacrifice of animals embedded in that law.

Given these two principles—the greater value of human life and the redemptive value of animal sacrifice—the thinking person comes up against a contradiction. If animal life can redeem human life, then it must be of equal value. Yet it is clearly not if it is legal for a man to eat an animal, but not for an animal to eat a man (Genesis 9:1-7). How can something of lesser value redeem something of greater value without an outstanding balance of payment due? The way this contradiction is resolved is to understand that God saw the presentation of an animal sacrifice as a show of good faith in the real payment that would be made later. He himself would render that payment, a promise alluded to in Moses' book and affirmed in later writings (Deuteronomy 32:43; Psalm 130:7-8). That payment would be made in like kind. The life of a sinless human, his own Son, would be sacrificed to atone for the sin of humanity (Isaiah 53:4-5).

Animal sacrifice affirmed the principle of substitutionary atonement. But it was revealed that the true substitute was to be human, yet uniquely so without blemish (Psalm 49:7; Isaiah 53:4-11). So it is as the writer of Hebrews says here it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." We conclude that animal sacrifice had the pragmatic value of affirming sin, affirming its offensive nature to God, affirming the just sentence of death, but also delaying judgment against sinful humans. However, the remission of sin could happen only through the sacrifice of a sin-bearer who was fully human and unblemished by sin. This was why the incarnation was essential to Yahweh's plan of salvation.

**10:5 Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, "Sacrifice and offering Thou hast not desired, But a body Thou hast prepared for Me;"**

Because the blood of animals could not take away sin, Jesus, incarnated in human flesh, came into the world. This earthly experience as a human, with a normal body was essential to God's plan. Jesus would live life without sin, in perfect harmony with God. His life would be unblemished by moral failure. He would then give up that body as a sacrifice for the sins of humanity. This entire experience in a human body was prepared for him in the plan of Yahweh to provide salvation for humanity.

This verse starts a quote from Psalm 40:6-8 that will extend over three verses. Psalm 40 is attributed to David. As in many of his writings, David speaks of himself as Israel's anointed one, and his words are found to be fully fulfilled by one of his offspring, the Messiah, Christ, the Anointed One. David had developed the understanding that the sacrifices and offerings associated with the old covenant were not the end that Yahweh desired. They were an intermediate institution that David participated fully in. His understanding, likely from meditation on the book written by Moses, was that God desired a deeper worship than these outward routines of animal sacrifices. These words of David express that understanding, that Yahweh was ultimately blest through obedient acts carried out by us through our bodies (Micah 6:8). He understood the very thing that Paul would call the presentation of our bodies as "a living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1). This concept was carried out in the deepest possible way by Jesus, the Christ, whose body became the sin offering Yahweh wished to provide for his people (Deuteronomy 32:43). Whether David knew fully that some of his songs like this one were prophecies of the coming Messiah may be open to question. This much is certain; they were fulfilled to the ultimate degree by Jesus Christ.

The writer of Hebrews uses these words as those that ordered Christ's life and reflected his thought. They are presented to the readers as the words embraced and uttered by Christ as he entered the world. That is a fascinating moment to imagine, a time just before the third person of the trinity let go of his glorious existence to embrace a lowlier one, to be born as a baby in a human body. This was his, "Well, here goes!" moment and this was his mindset. He did not live a bodily existence to offer animal sacrifices and confirm the practice of them. He came to bring them to an end by the sacrifice of his own body that Yahweh was giving him.

**10:6 In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast taken no pleasure."**

This is a continuation of the author's quote from Psalm 40:6-8. It shows that though Yahweh had himself commanded burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin, he affirmed through the Psalmist that he took no pleasure in them in terms of removing sin. Again, this was because their purpose did not include this objective. Their purpose was two-fold. First, to project to worshippers his future sacrifice for sin. Second, to provide opportunity for them to display faith in that future sacrifice to Yahweh. Faith always

ministers to him and allows him to extend grace. So the sacrifices were expressions of faith, and symbolic expression of innocent life given for guilty life, the principle by which Yahweh would redeem humanity. Yahweh took pleasure in them in terms of that purpose, or he would not have instituted them. But beyond that purpose, specifically as how a human could be severed from sin, he took no pleasure in them. This was because they did not meet his just standard whereby sin could be forgiven.

Whenever the mentality that sacrifices accomplished severance from sin developed in Israel, the message from Yahweh was that the only means humans had of severing sin from themselves was to abstain from sinful behavior (1 Samuel 15:22; Isaiah 1:11-13; Jeremiah 6:20; Micah 6:6-8). It was clear that even this did not separate them from sin (Psalm 51:5-9). The only hope for such severance, was Yahweh himself and action taken by him in accordance with his mercy and grace.

We should understand these sacrifices as having delayed God's demand for justice, but not as having satisfied it. Participation in them, when it reflected the faith of the offeror, had value. But in that case the value was in the faith of the offeror and the future provision the sacrifice of Christ would make for those of the community of faith.

**10:7 "Then I said, 'Behold, I have come (In the roll of the book it is written of Me) To do Thy will, O God.'"**

This verse completes the author's quotation from Psalm 40:6-8. To restate, the author of Hebrews is presenting these as the mindset of Christ as he becomes a human and commences to carry out Yahweh's purposes in the incarnation.

The psalmist's words are given as those of his own dedicated heart. His purpose was to fulfill through his own life the exact plan of Yahweh, as it was written in the archives of heaven, and as it had been projected in the Scriptures. This mentality of course, could only be lived out marginally by the psalmist. It was lived out perfectly by Jesus Christ. His life fulfilled the plan of God formulated before the foundation of the world. It conformed perfectly to every word spoken in Scripture and to every symbol established in Scripture. It was a life lived in perfect harmony with the will of Yahweh in every detail. It was this perfection in carrying out Yahweh's desire and plan that gave Jesus' sacrifice of his body atoning value, so that the justice of God could be completely satisfied. That which the sacrifices of animals could only project and symbolize, the death of Christ brought about because of his sinlessness.

**10:8 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),**

We can and have made several observations about the words of Psalm 40:6-8. But the author of Hebrews will now begin to develop the point he wishes us to grasp in these words. There are two things we should note about this verse.

The first thing that is noteworthy in this verse is that it shows that the author wishes us to notice a specific section of the text in Psalm 40. He will zero us in on the words of verse 8. He has given verses 6 and 7 because of their value to his previous idea—that old covenant sacrifices cannot remove sin (4). But he wants to transition us from that idea to the primary idea that chapter 10 is presenting of the setting aside of the previous covenant in favor of a better one.

The second thing that is noteworthy in this verse is the parenthetical statement which are offered according to the Law." There is a sacrifice and an offering that Yahweh has specifically desired, planned, and executed to his own prescribed detail. He has taken great, unparalleled pleasure in it. It is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This far outweighed the myriads of animal sacrifices offered under the old covenant, so much so that by comparison they are viewed as not pleasurable to him.

The phraseology then of Psalm 40:6-8, in particular the idea expressed in the phrases "not desired," and "no pleasure" turns out to be a remarkable statement of comparative value between the value of animal sacrifice versus that of the sacrifice of Christ. So great is the value of the new, that the old loses its desirability. This is remarkable given the fact that the sacrifices of the old covenant were carried out as per his desire and command, the precise point of the parenthetical note the author injects here. He is moving us toward letting go of the old in favor of the new.

**10:9 then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Thy will." He takes away the first to establish the second.**

With this the author moves us to the statement made by the psalmist in verse 8 of Psalm 40. The author of Hebrews was speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God. By this divine empowerment and authority, he has taught that this text was the precise expression of the mentality of Christ who was sinless, as he entered the human stream. So Christ, who cannot be wrong about what God wants, says this to God, "I have come to do Thy will." So we have in that statement assurance that the Son's incarnation was purposeful, to bring about the will and direction of God for his people on the earth. This is stated after the Son has clearly stated that the sacrifices and offerings of the old covenant were not the will of the Father.

The author of Hebrews, from these words of the text of Psalm 40, brings to the surface an underlying idea in the entire passage. Since the old covenant sacrifices were no longer God's pleasure, and since Christ was the perfect expression of what was now Yahweh's will, the inescapable conclusion is that the time had arrived in Yahweh's plan for a new beginning. This was not new information, sprung on God's people without notice. It was the beginning of the new thing he had spoken of through Moses and the prophets (Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah 32:39; Isaiah 53:4-12). It involved nothing less than the entire removal of the old covenant for the purpose of establishing the new

one. It was one step closer to the result God was moving toward, the new heaven and earth in which redeemed humanity would rule over a new earth.

**10:10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**

In the era of the old covenant language like this was used, but the net result during that era was different. The result then was that the Israelites knew things about Yahweh which no other people knew (Deuteronomy 4:32-39). They experienced his loving acts as no other people had (Deuteronomy 1:30-31). They experienced his being present with them (Deuteronomy 8:2-4). But at the same time they were clearly told that they were stubborn and rebellious (Deuteronomy 9:4-7) and that this condition in them was not yet addressed (Deuteronomy 29:4; 30:6). This uncleanness in them would bring about the deterioration and eventual loss of this wonderful experience of his presence (Deuteronomy 31:16-22; 2529; 2 Kings 17; 23:26-27). They were set apart for special revelation, but they were like the rest of humanity in terms of their moral uncleanness. The act of God that would allow holiness to take root in their hearts had not yet happened.

The will of Yahweh, that which brought about the Son's incarnation and sacrificial death, has brought a new state of being to Yahweh's people. It is stated here by the author rather emphatically. We are sanctified—set apart and holy to him. That language is fully appreciated against the backdrop of the old covenant, which constantly reminded God's people of their inherent uncleanness and their need to consecrate themselves to enjoy Yahweh's presence. The offering of the body of Jesus Christ sanctified us and did so "once for all."

The main verb used in this definitive declaration is εσμεν, a first person plural of the Greek verb that expresses state of being. It is in the present tense conveying present reality. What we presently are is clearly stated through the term ηγιασμενοι. That word is from the Greek word αγιαζω, which means to make holy or to purify. As a perfect passive participle it is describing an accomplished action that results in an ongoing state of being. We were made to be holy, and that result continues into the present. To this is added the term "once for all." That is the rendering of the single Greek word εφαπαξ. The word απαξ occurred three times in the three closing verses of the previous chapter. This word is carried over from that discussion and the preposition επι is prefixed to it. That has the effect of intensifying its idea. These grammatical choices are the deliberate effort of the author to emphasize the arrival of the new covenant era in Christ. It would be hard to imagine a more intentional or emphatic statement of an event that marked both an ending and a beginning.

Sanctification is spoken of in two ways in the New Testament. It is spoken of in the way it is here, as something that is true of us by virtue of our faith in Christ plus nothing. Used in this way it captures the idea of how God sees us (1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians

5:26; Jude 1). It is a statement of ownership and purpose. We are his—chosen and set apart for his eternal glory. The New Testament writers also view sanctification as not complete. It is something we are called to and are to journey toward. It is the practical holiness that is to be characteristic of our actions and attitudes—something which we are to pursue (Romans 6:19; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7). The author of Hebrews uses the word in this way later in his writing (Hebrews 12:14).

**10:11 And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins;**

In verses 11 and 12 we have a contrast in what a priest under the old covenant did as daily routine and what Christ is doing. The priest of the old covenant's actions is presented as unchanging by the words "stands daily ministering." They are presented as repetitious by the phrase "offering time after time the same sacrifices." They are presented as ineffective in terms of the primary need of the worshiper in that they "can never take away sins."

The author seems to have deliberately chosen words that project a kind of monotonous rhythm to life before Christ. The description here is that of a ministry treadmill that the priests of the old covenant were on. It is likely that this rather monotonous, endless routine made the failure of that covenant even more dismal and pathetic. The leaders did not stay motivated and during extended eras of time their diligence in instruction of the people was apparently non-existent. While the actual cause of the failure of the old covenant was the fallenness of humanity, that certainly was demonstrated in the priests by their own laxness in the correction of the nation (2 Kings 22:8-13; Malachi 1:6-10).

The word rendered taken away is different from the one used in the similar statement in verse four, though the effect with relationship to sin is the same. In verse four the word was αφαιρειν, here it is περιελιν. Both utilize the same Greek word αιρεομαι, with different prepositions prefixed. The word used in this verse means to lift or lift away (Acts 27:20, 40). The word used in verse 4 conveys severance, the word here conveys the lifting away of a burden that impedes progress.

**10:12 but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God,**

In contrast to the monotonous rhythm described in the previous verse of the ministry of the priests of the old covenant, we have this caricature of the ministry of Christ. The description is of a precise work accomplished, complete, and effective with rest in the aftermath. It is a work that addressed the root of the issue—sins. It is one that is completed "for all time." Each phrase stands in contrast to some corresponding phrase in the previous verse.

The main idea is that Christ sat down at the right hand of God. This sharply contrasts with the continuous "standing daily" of the priests. We have in this a picture One of an entirely different rank and privilege. His being seated at the right hand of God is a statement of the perfection of the deed itself done by Christ on our behalf. It is proof that he bore the sin of humanity in the way prescribed by God, since he subsequently was allowed to occupy such a privileged position in the presence of God. His exaltation came about as it was projected in the Old Testament, as his reward for being faithful to that mission of being Yahweh's sin bearer (Isaiah 52:13-15; 53:12).

**10:13 waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet.**

The picture given by the author here of Christ is of one who now is waiting. His work of offering sacrifice is finished. Besides the function of our high priest, Jesus plays another great role in the plan of God. He is the designated King. That great role is the primary one depicted here. It is not presently as visible and tangible as was his being nailed to a cross physically on earth. But it is just as real. This statement relates to us its truth and affirms that the day will come when his kingship becomes as visible a reality on earth as was his crucifixion.

It is not that Christ is just waiting, doing nothing at the present time. Earlier the author had described Christ as continually interceding in our behalf in his role as our high priest (7:25). So his role as our high priest continues. This statement adds to that. It is a picture of his Kingly authority, which is now. From his position at the right hand of God he is actively involved in carrying out the will of God, though he is invisible to us.

So this entire statement pictures Jesus' priestly work of sacrificing as completed and accomplished. That is the primary point of the author in making it. At the same time we understand that Jesus is very much at work in other priestly matters. And the author affirms that as king Christ is very much at work in universal matters all that is Yahweh's will to accomplish in every place.

**10:14 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.**

This statement affirms the sufficiency of the one-time offering of Christ. It affirms that it happened only once in time because it was effective and sufficient. In theological terms, we describe this as efficacious. Efficacious, when applied to the sacrifice of Christ, means that Jesus' sacrificial death provides for each human legal basis to which they can justly appeal to be forgiven by God for their sins. A related word is effective, from the same Latin root. The sacrifice of Christ is effective in the case of all who place trust in it. It is effective because it is efficacious, and it is efficacious by the decree of Yahweh.

The single efficacious sacrifice of Christ is effective on behalf of those who are sanctified. That is an important statement. The author's words seem to indicate that it is not effective in bringing salvation to all humanity. Those are perfected who are sanctified. Now what does the author mean here by describing certain ones as sanctified?

To repeat an earlier observation, sanctification is spoken of in two ways in the New Testament (10:10). First, it is spoken of as an expression of what happens in us now of belief, when we are separated from the guilt of our sin. Used in this way, it is true of us by virtue of our faith in Christ plus nothing. It expresses how God sees us (1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 5:26; Jude 1). It is a statement of ownership and purpose. We are his—chosen and set apart for his eternal glory. The writer has already used the term in this way (Hebrews 9:13; 10:10). The New Testament writers also view sanctification in a second more practical way. It describes conduct that is holy as opposed to profane. They persistently summon their readers to journey toward this goal that they call sanctification. It is the practical holiness that is to be characteristic of our actions and attitudes—something which we are to pursue (Romans 6:19; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7). Used in this way, being sanctified is something which we play a role in and pursue by faith during our years on earth. It is a process. The author of Hebrews uses the word in this way later in his writing (Hebrews 12:14). Which of these two viewpoints is being expressed in a particular usage must be determined by context.

In the immediate context we can observe that the author has used the term sanctified in the first sense stated above, in the sense of those who have been separated from the guilt of their sin (see verse 10). He is discussing what the work of Christ accomplishes by judicial decree. Later in his letter he will move toward more practical changes this new standing with God should bring about in our lives. In keeping with the second usage of the word, he will call these practical changes sanctification (Hebrews 12:14). But that transition to our deeds post-faith has not fully occurred yet in his writing.

There is only one legitimate way to regard the usage of sanctification in this verse. By legitimate, we mean avoiding contradiction with the rest of the statements in Scripture. The legitimate interpretation is to view the term sanctification as referring in this case to the effect of God's judicial declaration of us as forgiven and righteous. Clearly our righteousness is a declaration that is made by God now of our belief in the sacrifice of Christ in our behalf (Romans 3:21-25). It has nothing to do with the reality of our behavior. This declaration is called justification in the Scripture, and it means we are no longer viewed by God as guilty enemies (Romans 5:1-2). Instead we are set apart from his enemies and viewed by him as cleansed. In that sense we are sanctified.

To view sanctification here as speaking of practical changes that the Holy Spirit brings about later as we respond to the truth would have the effect of making salvation as much of us as it is of God. To view it this way would twist the message of this verse

into a statement that Christ's death pays only for the sins of those who effectively eliminate sins in their everyday lives, an impossible dream in the absolute sense. It makes salvation something we merit by our holiness, not something we are given through Christ's obedience and holiness.

The author speaks here of the offering of Christ "perfecting for all time" those who have been set apart based on their faith. That is the main verbal idea in the sentence perfecting. The verb is placed in the perfect tense to express completed action with an abiding result. The author has used a similar phrase earlier of Christ (Hebrews 7:28), expressing the moral perfection of Christ that was the result of Yahweh's oath given in connection with the incarnation. In the case of Christ, scholars ponder his sinlessness, specifically if he could not sin, or able not to sin. Those are two different ideas. Whatever the case the result was decreed by God—Christ was sinless and remains so for all eternity. Christ's sacrifice conveys his moral completeness to us (2 Corinthians 5:21). This completeness, righteous standing in the judgment of God, is one that is forever.

In an earlier expression regarding Christ the author has used the classic term for eternal—αιωνα (Hebrews 7:28). Here, when speaking of believers he uses a different expression, εισ το διηνεκεσ. It can be roughly rendered "unto the bearing through." It expresses that which endures, which does not lose momentum or value with time. Perpetuity is its main idea. The term occurs only in Hebrews but is used four times by the author. The first usage described Melchizedek's perpetual status as a priest (7:3). The other three uses of this term are all in the tenth chapter. The first of these three is in verse one. There the term refers to a hypothetical practice of the Day of Atonement, one conceived as perpetual, a continuous once-a-year tradition. Again we find the idea of perpetuity. The second of the three occurrences in this chapter refers to the one-time sacrifice of Christ that stands "forever" (12). There the term describes the perpetual nature of the value Christ's sacrifice has in the eyes of Yahweh. In the present verse we have the third occurrence of this expression εισ το διηνεκεσ. It is used by the author this third time to express the perpetual, unchanging impact of the sacrifice of Christ on believers. That perpetual, unchanging impact is our moral completeness in the sight of God. The progression in this chapter of the usages of this expression is worth noting. First, animal sacrifices, even if practiced perpetually, were not of sufficient value to render us complete. Second, the value of Christ's sacrifice was sufficient, and was so perpetually (12). The result is that due to the perpetual value of Christ's sacrifice we are regarded as perpetually complete by Yahweh (14).

**10:15 And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,**

The author is about to call the words of the Old Testament as a witness to the validity of what he has asserted about the sacrifice of Christ bringing about a whole new era in terms of believer's relationship to God.

In attributing the words of this passage in the Old Testament from the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:33-34), to the Holy Spirit the author does two things implicitly. First, he equates the voice and leading of the Holy Spirit with voice of Yahweh, who is reported by Jeremiah to have spoken those words. The citation is taken from a section that began in chapter 30 at verse one. The thought is continuous through two rather lengthy chapters. It is marked quite frequently with phrases like “Thus says Yahweh.” So Jeremiah is presenting to his readers words that Yahweh spoke to him and proclaiming them as such. The author of Hebrews now, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, claims these to have been the voice of the Holy Spirit. So we have attestation to the oneness of the Holy Spirit with Yahweh implicit in this. Second, we have an example of New Testament affirmation of the divine inspiration of an Old Testament passage. It gives us insight into how the early church leaders were reading and understanding the Old Testament. This entire attestation is made in passing. This tone indicates that this was assumed, known, and agreed on by the readers. It was a presupposition the entire faith community was operating under.

We should note that the author’s words here indicate that he is aiming at the thing the Holy Spirit says that comes after what he is about to quote. So the heart of what the author wishes the reader to grasp will be found in verse 17. Verse 16 will speak to the central idea of the author’s earlier point that there was a new covenant inaugurated with Christ. Verse 17 will provide evidence that the new covenant brings complete forgiveness of sins and release from Divine judgment.

**10:16 "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 upon their mind I will write them," He then says,**

This then, is a preliminary quote from Jeremiah 31:33. This is the second time he has quoted from this verse in Jeremiah (8:10). It is cited as proof of the fact that Christ was the author of a new and better covenant, a primary point of the author (8:6, 13; 9:15).

The quotation here is repeated as if the author wants to remind the readers of this important and foundational idea. He is at the point where he will soon begin to speak to the practical implications of these ideas (19). Reinforcing their foundation is critical.

This was a promise made by Yahweh to Israel of restoration, and more specifically in Jeremiah 31:33 of spiritual enablement. It would come about “after those days,” that is, after the season of judgment and discipline that Jeremiah had prophesied earlier in his writings, and which began in his lifetime. This season of discipline that Israel would go through would be one in which they would cease to function as the family of God. Yahweh had projected this season from the early days of the old covenant (Deuteronomy 4:25-30; 31:14-29). Israel’s discipline was the subject of a special song that Yahweh ordered into their liturgy (Deuteronomy 32). That song ends with the hope of restoration (Deuteronomy 32:36-42), and of Yahweh making atonement for

their sin (Deuteronomy 32:43). So in what the Jews regarded as the text of the old covenant there was a hope that was eschatological, that is, a looking ahead to the latter days when Yahweh's salvation would come in a fuller form. There was this very hope extended in the old covenant of a future work in their hearts to enable obedience to Yahweh's laws (Deuteronomy 29:4; 30:6).

We can conclude that Jeremiah's words did not proclaim a new notion or hope to Israel. They reaffirmed what was the message of the old covenant itself. That message was not just reflected in its various symbols. It was documented in the text of the old covenant.

Jeremiah's writings clearly indicate that we were to understand the new covenant as having application to the physical nation of Israel. That is not to say that the new covenant is not for gentiles. Nor is it to say that it does not have a spiritual era or fulfillment, as is clearly taught by the author of Hebrews and other New Testament writers (Acts 2:17-21, 39). It is not to relegate Israel's spiritual descendants to a lesser role in the plan of Yahweh than the physical ones. It is simply to say that God has a future for Israel as a nation, an idea that could not be more forcefully stated than in the words given by the Holy Spirit to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:35-37; 33:14-26). The New Testament writers affirm this idea of a season of discipline for the physical descendants of Abraham, and a future restoration among them to faith, as well (Romans 9-11). We have this great eschatological hope of salvation in both the old and new covenant eras, extended to both Jews and gentiles.

We understand that the new covenant era is here, now. This is the entire point of the author of Hebrews.

The new covenant era arrived at the point of time of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to indwell believers. Through that event the kingdom of Yahweh became mystically present in a new way on the planet, a point illustrated by Jesus through numerous parables (Matthew 13). He will be physically revealed once again as earth's rightful ruler (2 Thessalonians 1:5-10). At that point what had been mystical, and spiritual will become visible and plain to all (Philippians 2:9-11). The new covenant will reach full bloom when the present earth, along with all evil, will be destroyed and a new one created in which God and man live together (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1-7).

**10:17—He then says, "And their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."**

This is the primary point the author wants to bring us to with this quotation from Jeremiah. In this verse he jumps from Jeremiah 31:33 to the end of verse 34 to pick up this phrase. Jeremiah's words look to the day beyond the terms of the old covenant, when the conditions clearly stated that God would punish their disobedience with a curse (Deuteronomy 27-28). It was promised that a lack of diligence in obeying the laws of the old covenant would bring misery without and within (Deuteronomy 28:58-

68). That meant that given the fallenness of humanity, they were destined to be cursed, a lesson that would serve all of humanity well who were attentive to it.

The hope of Yahweh atoning for their sins through blood was clear in Israel's liturgy, both in symbol (Leviticus 17:10-11), and in a written message of hope (Deuteronomy 32:43). An offering that was legitimate by the standards of Yahweh's justice had to be made so that he could rejoin himself to humanity. This was done as promised by Yahweh, not by any other (Isaiah 59:16). He accomplished it through Christ, through whose blood our sins and lawless deeds are satisfactorily dealt with (1 Peter 1:1821). This was the essential first step that had to be taken to set aside the realities of the old covenant's demonstration of humanity's depravity. Our sin had to be dealt with before we could be indwelt by Yahweh's Spirit (Ephesians 2:13-22).

The one whom we have offended and who knows all things will remember our sin no more. This is a remarkable statement of the thorough cleansing the blood of Christ brings us. It is also a remarkable statement of the perfections of God. Once the requirement of his justice is met there is no residual feeling of bitterness or distrust toward us as would be common in human relationships. He is thoroughly satisfied in every sense with the sacrifice of Christ so that there is no need for further merit on our part.

**10:18 Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.**

This verse states the inescapable conclusion that we must arrive at in our consideration of Christ's work on the cross. Since God orchestrated it for the purpose of the salvation of humanity, it must be complete and thorough. Yahweh is capable of nothing less. Since his purpose was to provide that by which our sins and lawlessness would be remembered no more, and since his purposes cannot be thwarted, then the work of Christ ended our guilt. There is no need for any offering for our sin. Our guilt before Yahweh has been removed.

**10:19 Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,**

In this verse we find a transition. The author is moving into a statement of a very practical series of real life changes in religious practice that the readers should implement. These are logical steps considering the truths he has led them to understand. The statement of these practices will begin in verse 22 after he has restated two central truths presented in his writing thus far.

The first of these truths is that due to the blood of Jesus, we can enter the holy places. The term is plural. It envisions all the places the holiness of God might ever rest on and

in, of which the most holy place within the tent of meeting, the holiest place on the earth, was a dim figure.

Earlier the author reminded us that under the old covenant only the high priest was allowed to enter this place, and then only once each year (Hebrews 9:25). When Christ died, the veil in the temple that kept everyone away from this holiest of places on earth was torn in two, from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). That event signified a change had occurred in the relationship between God and the covenant community. Due to the all-sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ, believers can now always have the experience of living in the presence of God in all his glory and power.

There is no need for barriers or distance now. There is no need for us to deal only with models and replicas of the actual reality. The old tabernacle and temple have become obsolete. We have the privilege of his presence in us, his Spirit united with us so that we are a holy temple. We have become his presence on earth and frankly, to describe this escapes words.

It is not only that believers can enter and participate in this holy life. It is the posture they can enter with that is highlighted by the writer. The author characterizes it as one of confidence. That word in its usage in the New Testament speaks of public and straight-forward dealings, as opposed to that which might be done fearfully, apologetically, or not done at all.

None of this precludes appropriate gratitude and reverence. But it introduces to the worship of Yahweh a fearlessness and a freedom that clearly had not existed under the old covenant (1 Chronicles 13:9-12; 21:30). We enter his presence with no fear of expulsion or death. We are welcomed there because of the sacrifice of Christ.

**10:20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh,**

The way into the presence of Yahweh is not one of procedure and ceremony as under the old covenant. It is a new way. That is the first thing the author tells us. Now the old way is still the natural response of humanity to this whole matter of approaching God. The natural and instinctive way is to do so through actions perceived by us to merit his recognition and attention or that might appease his supposed predisposition to anger. Typically this involves strict adherence to some code or some display of moral and material austerity. This instinctive approach was typified under the old covenant. That covenant seems to have been a rather deliberate demonstration sponsored by Yahweh to prove once and for all the fundamental inadequacy of its entire premise. The conditions brought about by Jesus Christ's work forever ends that approach for all who are enlightened by the gospel. There is a new way through the veil, that is, through the moral barrier that separates humanity from the Creator.

The second thing the author says about the way into the presence of God is that it is a living way. This word emphasizes the fact that it is not a codified set of procedures. It centers on the actions of a person. The person, Jesus, is of sufficient character, influence, and merit to have taken credible action that establishes grounds for our personal union with God. So the way to Yahweh is living, established by action in real life taken by Christ, that allows us to live a way of life.

The author names the new and living way as "his flesh," that is, the body of Jesus Christ. He himself gave his body as the sacrifice for our sin. His body was given as a substitute for our beings. Because of his identity as God's own Son, and because of his sinlessness, the sacrifice of his body was entirely sufficient by the strict and high standard of God's justice. Our access to God is explained very simply. It happens through the body of Jesus Christ given as the sacrifice for our sin. Without that sacrifice, there would be no access.

**10:21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God,**

The previous verses centered on the past position and work of Christ as the sin-bearer. They were built on the logic of chapters 8-10. Through the sacrifice of his physical body as our substitute, Jesus paid the penalty for our sin. By God's standard of justice then, we who believe are pardoned. There is no longer a just and moral barrier between us and Yahweh. We can enter his presence confidently because of his past work on our account.

This verse centers on the present position and work of Christ as our great high priest. Many have been high priest. But there is an unsurpassed greatness to this position as he occupies it. This was established in the thoughts of chapters 2-7. As our high priest he has empathy, because he has lived as we must live—by faith in an evil world and a weak body (Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:14-15). But he also has great power and authority with Yahweh, being of him and having lived a sinless life as one of us (Hebrews 5:1-10). He is not simply selected from among men to be typical of them (Hebrews 5:1-3). He is the Son of God, forever seated at God's right hand as the king of all creation yet has been appointed by God for this express purpose to be our high priest. Jesus is functioning by Yahweh's appointment doing the very thing Yahweh appointed him to do—unthwartable in his every intention. No more exalted a position is obtainable, no greater effectiveness in our behalf imaginable than that found in Jesus, the Christ. And this is the one who is our high priest.

**10:22 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.**

Based on the statements of the previous three verses the author now moves on to the point he began to touch earlier in his letter (4:16). The thought is that we must take advantage of all this that has been accomplished by Jesus in our behalf and draw near.

Two other exhortations will be given in the next two verses. These set a decidedly practical tone for this entire section of the letter that runs through the end of chapter 10.

The three "let us" statements of verses 22-25 are what is called in Greek grammar and syntax hortatory subjunctives. The construction is a friendly, enthusiastic way of giving a command. It is a leader extending an invitation to a follower to join alongside him in a mutually beneficial course of action. So it is an exhortation with the force of a command. These three "let us" statements capture the heart of the author of Hebrews. They embody the grand theme of the book and express the action he wishes to inspire in his followers through this great treatise.

To this central concept of drawing near, several short phrases are added that describe an accompanying mentality that we are to embrace. It is a mentality that grows out of pondering and understanding the very great work of Christ the author has been delineating. It is a new way of viewing ourselves, legitimate because of the "standing" that has been accorded to us through the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-2). There are four of these short phrases that summarize the effect of the work of Christ on our standing with Yahweh.

First, we are to draw near with a true heart. In a sense the remaining phrases all develop this idea and define what is involved in having a "true heart." The heart was the thing Yahweh pinpointed as unaddressed by the old covenant (Deuteronomy 5:29; 29:4; 30:6; Isaiah 29:13; Jeremiah 31:33). It is also the thing he promised to change with the new covenant. It would be made true, without pretense, without the contamination of sinful motives.

Interestingly the Greek word for true, αληθηα, is formed from the word meaning to cover, with the α privative prefixed to it. Though it is going too far to say the word means "not covered," it is true that in the case of the old covenant, obedience by rote covered a bad heart (Isaiah 29:13-14). It is also true that the promise of God stated early on was to circumcise the hearts of the Israelites (Deuteronomy 30:6). Circumcision is essentially a removal and an uncovering. All this language refers to the joining of Yahweh's Spirit to ours, made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf. A true heart is one that is being directed by the Holy Spirit, inspired by him to draw near to Yahweh. So the Holy Spirit impresses on our minds our need to draw near. We are to do so at his bidding, whenever and wherever we happen to be.

Second, we are to follow the Spirit's bidding in "full assurance of faith." Failure to believe in the goodness of Yahweh, and failure to believe in his special care for them was the essence of the failure of the Israelites under the old covenant. They were never fully assured of his intent to bond with them and to extend his goodness to them. We must not fail at this point. We must be confident of God's goodness, as proven through the favor he extended to us in Christ. Because of the work of Christ we have no need

to be concerned in life's moments with our right to draw near, or with our cleanness/uncleanness. The basic right and privilege is always ours. It is our standing.

The bidding of the Holy Spirit is itself assurance that Yahweh desires to be good to us. There may indeed be first things that we need to address with Yahweh as we converse with him. But there is no doubt that drawing near to him is what the moment holds for us. We too can fail easily at this point, finding ourselves incapable of trusting his goodness and his intent to bless us. We too can feel cursed. We are to allow the truth about God's mindset toward us, as it was embodied in Christ, to assure our hearts in those moments. We are to be people fully assured by our trust in what he has demonstrated of his goodness, grace, and love toward us, so that we are eager for his company.

This urging to "draw near in full assurance of faith" stands out in sharp contrast to the testimony of the Pentateuch regarding the wilderness generation. They failed to trust Moses' testimony regarding God's display on the Mountain and requested distance between themselves and Yahweh (Deuteronomy 5:22-27). They went on to test him ten times, each testing being a specific distrust of Yahweh's intentions in leading them out of Egypt (Numbers 14:1-4, 11, 22). The author has referred often to this wilderness generation so that their actions form the backdrop for this exhortation in the mind of the attentive reader. Faith and trust are of deep importance to Yahweh!

There is a third short phrase in this verse that helps us understand what it is to "draw near with a true heart." It is the phrase "having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience." This phrase and the following one are intentionally placed in language of the old covenant. The blood of an animal sacrificed was sprinkled on the worshiper or on the object for which it was offered. This sprinkling visibly demonstrated that the objects or person's evil or uncleanness had been compensated for according to the terms of the Law. The term "sprinkle" became one that Yahweh used to describe the cleansing work he himself would do through Christ both on Israel (Ezekiel 36:25), and on other nations (Isaiah 52:15). The term is used by the author here in an important way. The work God was doing in the wake of Jesus' death was solidly linked earlier in this chapter to the Old Testament promises of the new covenant (10:1-18). Through the word "sprinkle" that linkage is subtly reinforced here.

The real power of Christ's sacrifice is presented in such terms so that the symbolic actions of the old covenant could resume their intended role of being a visible demonstration of Yahweh's salvation. The sprinkling done under the old covenant only related to external appearance. The sprinkling done through the sacrifice of Christ relates to the cleansing of the inner being. The death of Christ produced the bonding of God's Spirit to the spirits of believers. The Holy Spirit renews their consciences. These had atrophied through a lack of use and had become unreliable through a lack of truth. Through his presence and the truth he energizes, the conscience is enabled to give a reliable witness from within regarding the will of God in real life matters.

The conscience, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, becomes an important factor in our drawing near to God. It will convict us of any growing distance that begins to develop. It will also guide us to the specific reasons that distance is developing areas of neglect and sinfulness. The sprinkling of the heart is an accomplished work of Christ that enables an ongoing process of cleansing. We are to give attention to the voice of our conscience in the process of drawing near to God. Our confidence in drawing near is enabled first and foremost by our faith in the work of Christ. On a practical level our confidence is strengthened by a clear conscience that leads us to confess sin to him and resolve the inevitable messes that develop through the weakness of our flesh.

There is a fourth and final phrase in this verse that describes action that accompanies drawing near with a true heart. It is the phrase "and our bodies washed with pure water." This phrase follows the pattern of the previous one in that it uses old covenant language and imagery to project a new covenant reality. Under the old covenant there was a basin located between the altar and the tent of meeting. Whenever the priests ministered with respect to the altar or in the tent of meeting, they were to wash their hands and feet with water from that basin, or they would die (Exodus 30:17-21). The priest who entered the holy place once a year, could do so only attired in special clothing and that only after a special washing (Leviticus 16:4).

The book of Leviticus records many laws with respect to washings that were to be observed by worshipers to be ceremonially pure. All these washings were intended to raise the awareness of the inherent moral shortfall of humanity next to the perfection of Yahweh, and of the corrupting effect of life in an evil world. In the work of Christ we are cleansed from all the guilt brought about by the thoughts and actions we carry out in our bodies because of our own fallen nature and our fallen world. Our outward behavior does matter to God. The first three phrases relate to inner changes the work of Christ has brought about in our beings. This phrase relates to those deeds we do in real life that grow out of sin within us and that were atoned for by the death of Christ.

In contemplating these four phrases and the truths they speak of; we are always aware of the "already not-yet" aspect of the great truths of Christ. By that we mean that we are cleansed in Christ in terms of our guilt, but not entire cleansed of our inherent evil that lurks in our flesh. That cleansing awaits us. Because of that there is a sense in which as we draw near, we need to do the work of purifying ourselves through repentance and confession of those things the Holy Spirit convicts us of. That is the ongoing nature of our relationship with Yahweh under the present form of the new covenant. Fallen people in a fallen world are experiencing the new covenant. It will be experienced by believers in a completely renewed state on a new earth, at which time this "already-not-yet" era will be history.

**10:23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;**

This is the second of three hortative subjunctives, exhortations we are given by the author of Hebrews in this pivotal section of his treatise. It directs us to the lifestyle that should be pursued considering the work accomplished by Christ in our behalf. Since Christ has provided for us eternal access to Yahweh, we are to hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering.

A confession is system of conclusions and convictions regarding what is true, that are held in common with others. The word used is a compound word, ομολογιαν. It was formed by joining the word "same" with the word for "speech" or "message." So by etymology it carries the idea of a common message. It occurs only 6 times in the New Testament. Three of those uses are found in Hebrews (3:1; 4:14; 10:23). In each usage it is referring to a profession of a particular version of truth held in common with others (2 Corinthians 9:13; 1 Timothy 6:12-13). So this is a command to not waiver from the truth as it has been passed on to us. It is an exhortation to keep believing in concert with the Christian community of the ages.

Our profession is one of hope. That is a distinguishing feature of the truth of Christianity. It conveys great hope. The Christian message is not one of how one might achieve right standing with God. It is a message of how God has freely granted such standing to all who will believe in Christ. It is not a message primarily of this life—how to seize a few of its joys as it speeds past. It is a message of eternal life—a quality of life that extends beyond the grave. It is not a message about how one might lay hold of eternal life. It is a message of how God has freely given it to all who believe. It is not a message about how one might rise from the dead. It is a message about One who has already risen and will raise all who believe to a new creation.

Ours then, is a message of hope because of its subject matter. It gives hope in areas that normal human thought leaves unsettled. It is also a message of hope due to its simplicity. It does not lay down a series of directives we are incapable of. It is a message that describes our inability, God's willingness and ability to address that inability, and the simplicity of what is required of us—faith.

Our hope is in the fact that we have been declared heirs of righteousness. That hope centers on a particular day. It is a season that begins at a particular moment known only to God. So we hope in a particular moment when God will bring about a new season on this earth, which season transitions to life on a new earth (Daniel 2:44-45; 7:21-22; 12:1-4; Isaiah 66:22-24; Revelation 20:11-21:8). The writer will refer to this day momentarily. It is the hope of that coming season, a never-ending one, that is the focus of Yahweh's salvation plan, and therefore the Christian confession. It is that season that he is saving us for and transporting us into (2 Peter 3:13). This has been the hope of God's people for millenniums, this age of righteousness established and ensured by Yahweh.

The vibrancy and health of the Christian movement have always been governed by the degree to which this hope was focused on. In seasons where the Bible becomes a guide to getting the most out of this life, the faith tends to be less relevant, because a strong sense of hope is not built. When the Christian community embraces the great eschatological hope presented by Yahweh in Scripture, health returns. This hope is critical to hang onto. And so the writer says appropriately, "He who promised is faithful."

This is the second great exhortation given by the author based on what Christ has supplied through his work on the cross. The first was draw near. The second was hold fast the confession of hope! The death of Christ in our behalf signals Yahweh's intention to bring all who believe into the great season when his promised crushing of Satan's head will have occurred.

**10:24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,**

This is the third great exhortation inspired by contemplation on the work accomplished by Christ in our behalf. It is a command to motivate and inspire our fellow believers. The next verse will speak to a key element in the carrying out of this ministry that we have with each other.

The thought of this verse centers on two important words the word rendered "consider" and the word rendered "stimulate." The word for consider refers to thoughtful consideration of something or someone. It is the word used by Jesus of careful self-evaluation in spiritual matters (Matthew 7:3). It is the word used twice by Stephen to describe Moses' examination of the burning bush (Acts 7:31-32). We are to give thought to HOW to simulate one another to carry it out precisely. Some factors to consider would be our own giftedness—How does God use us to affect the faith of others? It would also be profitable to consider how the other person is motivated. The fact is that people are motivated in diverse ways. Timing is also an important factor in stimulating someone as is proper relationship. So we are to be sufficiently invested relationally with other to understand how best to strengthen them to rise in their faith.

The second word is the word stimulate, a word that can be traced back to a word meaning a point, as in a sharp point. Its other use in the New Testament is a negative one, describing the contention that arose between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark (Acts 15:39). Another English word that could be used to express the thought of the author of Hebrews is "incite." Some English translations have used the phrase "spur one another on." The idea is one of moving one another along toward a higher standard of attitude and action. We are not to encourage status quo, and certainly not to encourage backward movement away from Christ's example. Our own high road is to assume the role of those who inspire advance, growth, and increase in the things of Yahweh's kingdom. This activity of stimulation is what we should envision when we

think of the word fellowship. Fellowship is a relational activity that strengthens the resolve and ability of people to accomplish what has been set out for them to do.

That which we stimulate relates to both attitude and action. We do not separate deeds and motivations— both are our sphere of concern. Love and good deeds summarize an important balance that the Holy Spirit's presence brings about through our fellowship with each other. When either is missing the other is hollow. Motivation and action—love and good deeds should be forever linked together in our understanding, our strategy and our evaluation.

**10:25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.**

Having spoken to the goal and purpose of fellowship in the Church, to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, the author now points the readers to a specific element of God's design that facilitates this. It is the regular and consistent assembling together of Christians for this activity of fellowship mutual stimulation in motivation and in deed. In other words, to stimulate each other's faith, we must spend time with each other. It is that simple. The need to faithfully invest time with each other is inescapable.

However, despite the air-tight logic of this command, it has always been a habit within the Christian community to do the opposite—to neglect meeting together. This neglect is noted by the author as a habit or custom that some had adopted already—in the first century. His words concerning this are clear. It is a practice or custom that should never be accepted as right. Because of this instruction, it can be assumed that embracing this practice will result in a marginal Christian experience.

We are to encourage one another about gathering frequently, and we are also to be occupied in our meeting together with the ministry of encouragement. Both things come out in this passage. But the author is concerned in this verse primarily with encouraging one another to meet faithfully.

He adds to this already strong statement the phrase "and all the more, as you see the day drawing near."

It is interesting that the word used for assembling is used only one other time in the New Testament. In that occurrence it is the word used by Paul for the great gathering together of his family that Christ will accomplish in connection with his return (2 Thessalonians 2:1). It is that gathering that we can see approaching, through the teachings of Christ and the other prophets. And it is the approach of that gathering that is to increase the urgency of our faithfulness to our own Church gatherings. That is an important idea because it harmonizes with the words of Jesus, "Blessed are those slaves whom the master shall find on the alert when he comes;" (Luke 12:37). The

desire to be found occupied with his business is a strong motivation for being faithful to meet.

**10:26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,**

This verse, beginning with the conjunction for (γαρ), supplies added explanation that supports the three commands just given; to draw near with a sincere heart (22), to hold fast the confession of our hope (23), and to consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds (24). These are the actions that believers in Christ should take and would be expected to take. These actions are the reasonable ones, given the truth of the first ten chapters of this letter. They would also be the reasonable ones, given the consequences of the alternative course of action. To not do these three things would be to willfully ignore the great truth about Christ and the very way of life he taught. It would be to willfully sin. So the author launches into a treatment of what happens in the case of those who willfully sin.

This is not a discussion that was irrelevant to the readers, who obviously have the capacity to draw near, and hold fast, and to stimulate the faith of each other. It is being presented as their alternate course of action. It is a description of the reality that will unfold should they not take these actions and simply allow themselves to drift along. It is the choice of lethargy, of doing nothing. It is the choice of willful sin.

There is clear teaching early in Scripture regarding willful sin and its consequences. In the Pentateuch there are several passages that speak of dealing with unintentional sin. Fourteen times the word “unintentional” or an English equivalent, occurs in conjunction with sin. Most notably it occurs in the sentence that stands at the head of the laws for the sin-offerings (Leviticus 4:2). However, there was no sin-offering for those expiated sins committed intentionally, in defiance of the Law (Numbers 15:27-31). Such sins resulted in being “cut off” from the congregation. Being “cut off” generally meant physical, judgmental death (Numbers 15:32-36). But perhaps being cast out, excluded, or excommunicated in some way also was practiced (Genesis 17:14). The significant idea is that there was no prescription given for expiating willful sin in the myriads of laws related to offerings.

Did this mean that the person found to have committed willful sin was forever lost? Were they eternally unforgiven and unforgivable? That is an important question, since all people, beginning with Adam, intentionally sin. It appears that the answer to this question is no willful sin does not render one unforgivable. The rationale for a “no” answer is clearly demonstrated in Moses account of God’s judgment of Israel at Kadesh Barnea in the wake of the report of the spies.

The text of Numbers 14 reports this entire incident as the tipping point regarding the privilege of the wilderness generation. God calls their sin of unbelief a despising of him

(11). It was full-blown rebellion. It had manifested itself for the tenth time (22). This was willful sin, not unintentional sin. Yahweh states that the just penalty for such sin was pestilence and disinheritance or expulsion (12). Significantly, Moses takes this to mean impending physical death for them and intercedes in their behalf (15). He asks that Yahweh pardon/forgive their iniquity, just as he had been doing all along (19). Yahweh pronounces that he has granted Moses' request and has pardoned and forgiven them (20). However, he also pronounces his discipline on them—that they would not enter the promised land (23). It is important to note that their penalty was not eternal separation from him, or even physical death. It was to remain in the wilderness. This they would do until natural death, as opposed to death by judgment, would come to them (28-35). His presence remained with them, and they experienced the cloud and the manna (Nehemiah 9:18-21), but they also experienced his discipline the loss of the rest of the promised land.

It appears then that they were pardoned and forgiven. It is in fact, clearly stated in the text that they were forgiven. That is the word both Moses uses in his appeal and Yahweh uses in his pronouncement (19-20). And this forgiveness was extended before any repentance or confession on their part. It was purely a result of Yahweh's covenant love for them, to which Moses appealed (18).

All of this serves as background to the explanation the author of Hebrews begins in this verse. He speaks to the readers in the first person. Just as he has spoken to them in the first person in the three previous exhortations to draw near, to hold fast, and to consider how to stimulate the faith of each other, so he addresses them now as a potential participant with them. That is important.

The author then clearly states the potential scenario he is concerned with. It is that they could "go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth." There is nothing in these words that would allow us to dismiss this intentional sin as practically impossible for the readers because they are born again. It is apparently possible to sin willfully and to do so repeatedly even after receiving "knowledge of the truth." The term used for "knowledge" (επιγνωσιν), could not be stronger in terms of describing real and actual perception, as opposed to mere awareness of propositions. The danger of sinning willfully is real, even to real believers. So it was possible for the readers to simply "drift," even as the wilderness generation had done three days after walking through the sea on dry land, and seeing the Egyptian army destroyed. The author does not suggest by the words he chooses that he himself is immune to this danger.

After stating precisely what the potential scenario is, the author says that in such circumstances "there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins." Several wrong turns can be taken when interpreting this statement. The only way to remove its tension entirely is to say that anyone who knowingly chooses to sin can never be forgiven for such a sin. That interpretation has the advantage of the statement meaning just what it says. But it obviously damns all of humanity. More importantly, it contradicts the Scripture,

which is full of examples of those who sinned willfully being forgiven and embraced by Yahweh, beginning with Adam and Eve.

Another wrong turn is to relate this statement to the sacrifice of Christ. Some suggest that if a Christian takes a course of willful sin, Christ did not die for such things. Depending on the theological strain their beliefs are shaped by, they would say that those who take such a course forfeit their salvation or prove that they never really had it. Again, if that be true, we would have to say that no human could be saved through Christ's death. It would remove only the guilt associated with unintentional sin.

It is best to take this statement as a description of the reality of the Law and of our relationship with an all-loving, all-knowing God. We have already seen that in the Law's regulation there was no provision for the expiation of willful sin. By the standard of the Law, willful sin brought about disciplinary action, pure and simple. This was not only the testimony of the Law, but also of the prophets and the wisdom literature. The author is speaking of this unavoidable disciplinary action from Yahweh that will intercept the course of those who choose to willfully sin. There is no sacrifice that mitigates the just consequences that come from such actions. That is the hard reality of how God has ordered the universe. Thankfully, the blood of Christ keeps believers from being eternally separated from Yahweh by such willfulness. Thankfully Yahweh's mercy and lovingkindness spare humanity from the full experience of his wrath. Ultimately, the blood of Christ explains why the Israelites were not destroyed at Kadesh Barnea (Deuteronomy 32:43). It explains our hope in his justice, where there could be such dread.

**10:27 but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.**

In the Old Testament, fire was closely linked to the presence of God. This was most notable in the pillar of fire that was with the Israelites as they journeyed from Egypt. This fire was a source of protection and illumination to his people, but of fear and destruction to those who aligned themselves against him. An imagery was strengthened through this occurrence that continued in the writings of Israel so that fire became a frequent symbol of Yahweh's justice and judgment (Psalm 11:4-7; 21:7-13; 97:1-6). Justice and judgment are part of who God is a fact the author of Hebrews will eventually state through the symbol of fire (Hebrews 12:29).

When choosing a course of action known to be sinful, a Christian should have a certain expectation. The expectation should be that they will experience the normal actions that Yahweh is taking against evil and evil deeds in his creation. Evil is being restrained by these judgments all the time by the plan of Yahweh, for the preservation of creation. God is no respecter of persons in this judgment, and Christians choose to get caught up in it when they chose to do what they know is against his will. Judgment follows and awaits all evil deeds, no matter who commits them. Now it is certain that

God's mercy is also at work alongside this natural judgment, so that humanity is not consumed (Numbers 14:18; 2 Samuel 12:22; 24:10-14; Psalm 130:1-4). Though final judgment of evil lies ahead, God's wrath against it is certainly being revealed in the present (Romans 1:18ff). Believers do not escape this when they choose to sin, though it appears that sorrowful repentance mitigates it (2 Samuel 24:15-17).

The author of Hebrews is warning his readers against this possibility. Grace does not allow us to manipulate God in this matter since he knows the intentions of our heart. We are to draw near, hold fast, and stimulate love and good deeds in each other, rather than grant ourselves permission to live in the squalor of sin. Continual transformation becomes our experience of Christ in this way.

This verse is marked by very expressive words. In the NASB we find words like "terrifying expectation…fury of a fire," and "consume the adversaries." The word rendered "terrifying" is from the word φοβια, the Greek word for fear. It is a wretched thing to have such a haunting expectation, a burden hanging over one's head. We are robbed of freedom when we are waiting for the consequences of actions we have taken. Willful sin amounts to a loss of the joy and freedom that come with a clear conscience for Christians.

The expression "fury of fire" is the rendering of two Greek words. The first word is πυροσ, meaning fire.

Following it is a noun ζηλοσ, meaning heat, and in a metaphorical sense a zealous or jealous act. By this expression we can experience not just obligatory punishment by God, regretfully carried out. But we can experience his angry, righteous and just response because of our offense. We are forgiven the eternal penalty for our rebellion, but we do not escape the present reality we bring on ourselves by our choice. The author's message is clear—why would anyone choose such a scenario?

The last expression is equally vivid. The word rendered "consume" renders the Greek word εσθιειν, which means "to eat." The word for adversary describes an opponent, in this case one that has chosen to oppose God in a matter. Now Christ has taken away the sentence of the Law that adjudicated and indebted us for eternity (Colossians 2:14). But his sacrifice does not save us in this life from the consequences of our choices in this life. This expression of the consuming nature of God's judgment in the here and now is an ominous warning to us.

The language is so strong in these statements and the implication so negative that it is tempting to say that the author must be talking here about unbelievers. One's mind says, "Surely he must be speaking about imposters that hang around the outskirts of the Christian community!" Yet the Old Testament is full of examples of individuals that started their journey well but drifted away and experienced these types of dire consequences (1 Kings 11:9-13; 2 Chronicles 16:7-14; 24:17-27; 26:16-21). This is a legitimate warning to believers.

**10:28 Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.**

The author of Hebrews declares here the prescribed punishment under the old covenant for those who willfully sinned. Various passages in the Pentateuch are reflected in this statement. A primary one is found in Deuteronomy 17:2-6. In that passage the person who pursues the worship of a god other than Yahweh is to be put to death based on thorough investigation and the testimony of two or three witnesses. A secondary passage is Numbers 15:30-31. There the prescription for dealing with intentional sin is given. The person was to be completely "cut off." In the immediate context that appears to be the punishment of physical death (32-36). There are a few passages where physical death is prescribed for those who willfully sin (Leviticus 24:13-16; Deuteronomy 13:1-11; 21:18-21).

The thought of this verse is meant to support the idea specifically stated in the next verse. Together the verses are supporting the three big ideas expressed by the author in verses 22-25. They are that we are to draw near to God with a sincere heart. We are to hold fast to the confession of hope without wavering. We are to consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.

**10:29 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?**

The author has reminded the readers that physical death was prescribed for those who intentionally acted in a way that violated the Law of Moses. He asks the logical question based on this fact. Since such willfulness in the previous era was punishable by death, how could you expect anything less in the present era of increased privilege, should you choose to disobey Christ rather than draw near to him? He gives three phrases that assign a sobering context to willful disobedience.

We must remember as we interpret these descriptive phrases that the potential scenario the author is dealing with in the readers is not necessarily a life of adultery, or moral abandon. It is what we would likely describe as lapsing into a state of spiritual mediocrity. It comes over us if we do not draw near to God with a sincere heart. It sneaks in if we do not hold fast to our confession. It shapes us if we separate ourselves from the community of Christ. These things, relatively excusable by the current standards of Christianity in the west, are manifestations of great evil in our hearts. The phrases the author uses here are intended to shock us into a right, proper, and true perspective on such willfulness. To accept such a situation within ourselves is nothing less than intentionally "flipping God off," and conducting our spiritual lives as we wish.

To not draw near with a sincere heart to God, to not hold fast to our confession of hope, to not consider how to stimulate each other to love and good deeds is equivalent to three of the most abhorrent, vile, and offensive deeds imaginable. The

first equivalent deed would be to trample underfoot the Son of God—Jesus Christ. To one familiar with the Old Testament, this stirs memories of the story of Jehu driving heartlessly over the body of the wicked and vile queen in Israel, Jezebel (2 Kings 9:30-37). It projects an image of us adding to the evil of those who crucified Christ. In deliberately refusing to do the thing he died to help us do, it is as if we are taking his dead body down from the cross and mutilating it further to make some dramatic personal statement of hatred for him. That throws our mediocrity into a new light.

A second equivalent deed would be to regard as unclean the blood of Christ, the very blood that makes us holy. The description of willful sin is cast here in the framework of the old covenant. Under the old covenant there were many laws relating to ceremonial uncleanness. Under that covenant, uncleanness kept people from drawing near to Yahweh in worship. Under the new covenant the blood of Christ atones for all uncleanness. Therefore, not to draw near to Yahweh, is to behave as one who is unclean, which in essence is to declare the blood of Christ unclean. This is a very dramatic statement to the original readers.

This is also an important statement for another reason. It clearly affirms the possibility of one who has been sanctified by the blood of Christ willfully engaging in behavior that blasphemes Christ. This in turn affirms that the danger of the readers themselves falling into willful sin is very real. The author is not warning them about something that cannot really happen, so that unbelievers that might be somewhere on the periphery will take the warning to heart. He is warning them about a danger that can unfold from within their very hearts.

The third equivalent deed would be to insult the Spirit of grace. There are two ways to take this statement. First, to take it as those who translated the NASB have taken it, as referring to the Holy Spirit. He is the One who inhabits us because of the grace demonstrated by Jesus Christ. From within us he is seeking to draw us nearer to Yahweh. To not do so is to treat him with contempt. Second, this could be taken as referring to the spirit in which grace has been imparted to us by Yahweh. The motivating spirit of grace is that we should be conformed to the holiness that is in Yahweh himself. So in this sense, we would be going against the spirit in which Yahweh gave all that he has given. Whether we take this statement as referring to the person of God, the Holy Spirit, or the spirit in which God extended grace and the spirit in which we are to accept it, it is an insult to Yahweh himself to not draw near with a sincere heart. When we chose the opposite thing, we choose to offend him.

These three statements successfully characterize the offensiveness of willful sin on the part of the believer. They cannot be read carefully without bringing grief to the one who is growing in their love for Yahweh. Our reality is that we cannot totally separate ourselves from this willfulness. But this very presence of it in us is the reason Christ died and sent us the Holy Spirit, so that we might apply diligence in the matter and by grace rise above it.

**10:30 For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge His people."**

These two short quotes are taken from Deuteronomy 32:35-36. They are statements made by Yahweh in the song he commanded Moses to teach to Israel. The purpose of that song was quite specific (Deuteronomy 32:16-22). Its words were to be a "witness against them." That means it was to rehearse their failures so that they would understand their plight as having been justly brought upon them by Yahweh for their willful rebellion. It was to bring them to repentance. In the exact location within that song where these words occur, they are directed at Israel's enemies. Yahweh is promising to intervene on behalf of his covenant people and take vengeance against their enemies. The song goes on to speak of the fact that he would atone for Israel's sins.

The author is adapting these words and aiming them at those among his readers who might engage in willful disobedience. This could be construed to be taking the verses out of their context, applying them to believers rather than to unbelievers. But on further examination, the author's point through citing this text and applying it to believers in the Church is appropriate. He is reinforcing the fact that when we align ourselves with God's enemies through willful sin, then we are in a sense with them, on location, when they experience Yahweh's judgment. An illustration would be when Lot incurred loss because he aligned himself with the citizens of Sodom and his presence in Sodom when Yahweh judged its citizens. Though Lot did not experience loss in the way that the ungodly did, he still suffered loss (2 Peter 2:7-8). The record indicates that he never really recovered, and his legacy was spoiled due to the choices he made in terms of his alignment (Genesis 19:30-38). The Pentateuch is full of examples where Israelites experienced the judgment of God against them due to their willfulness. Moses himself became a prime example of this fact and used himself as an example in his writings (Deuteronomy 1:36; 32:51). It is likely that Peter was reading the Pentateuch in this way and so was led to speak of God's judgment beginning first with the household of God (1 Peter 4:17). There is definitive loss that we experience when we willfully sin.

Yahweh is faithful in rendering justice. It will always be administered in his time. That truth is a source of great comfort to us. However when we willfully sin, it becomes a source of dread to us.

**10:31 It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.**

To those who know the Lord, his long-suffering and forgiving nature is something that brings great comfort (Exodus 34:7). Even to those who have willfully disobeyed, his goodness and mercy can be relied on (2 Samuel 24:10-14). But the fact remains that he is One of infinite power who expresses legitimate wrath, and whose justice is never compromised (Psalm 7:11-12). The potential of getting caught up in his acts of wrathful

judgment is a terrifying thing and steals from us some of the most precious moments in the faith.

Along with our knowledge of the outpouring of God's judgment, we also have the clear understanding that Yahweh disciplines those who belong to him so that they might learn not to continue to do those things that damage their relationship with him (Hebrews 12:4-11). While this is not to be something that "terrifies" us, it is a motivating just as it was with our earthly parents. It is an influence that should keep us from deliberately choosing to disobey.

It is not a cherished prospect to anticipate either of these experiences. This understanding should add to our motivation to guard ourselves from sin of any sort, whether intentional or not. It should specially minister in those times when we are contemplating engaging ourselves in sinful actions. It is a dreaded prospect that all the resource of heaven aims at helping us avoid.

**10:32 But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings,**

The author urges an alternate course of thinking, as opposed to contemplating sin and the abuse of grace. He is asking the readers to recall a former way of life that had characterized them in the days immediately following their enlightenment.

We get some insight in this section into the present spiritual state of the readers and the author's specific concern for them. He sees them standing at a fork in the road in terms of their conduct of their faith and he sees them experiencing some indecision. The entire book has been aimed at inspiring them to continue upward in their faith. Here at this moment he is calling them to remember the way they had started up. The immediate force of this is an inference that they should continue up that path. What is inferred here in bringing up their past record of faith will take on the force of a command within the space of a few lines.

He is going to help the readers recall the former days by reminding them of the level of commitment they had willingly embraced following their conversion. He refers to their conversion to faith in Jesus Christ as an enlightenment. That is an appropriate description of that work of the Holy Spirit within that enables us to see the truth about the incarnate Son of God.

There was a string of experiences that they apparently entered following this arrival at faith. Interestingly, the author is not trying to inspire them by speaking of pleasurable experiences that enlightenment led them into. Instead he will itemize their sufferings and sacrifices. He classifies them as constituting a "great conflict" in them. So they were apparently sufferings that went far beyond the normal sort that go with the faith. They were sufferings of an intense and high level. This is a seemingly backwards way of seeking to motivate anyone! In suffering however, Christians have always found a

unique companionship with Jesus that produced a unique experience of joy and an eagerness to delve deeper into their relationship to Christ (Philippians 3:7-11; Colossians 1:24). So to the Christian who has had this experience, recalling it would serve as a motivating factor. If thought through rightly, through the lens of faith, such memories would lead them off the plateau they were on, upward to the things that remained for them in Christ.

**10:33 partly, by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.**

The readers had embraced the faith at the expense of things like social status, prestige, and personal relationships. They were publicly ridiculed at the least and singled out for mistreatment. There was a persecution that broke out in Judea that drove early Christians away from Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-2; 9:1-2), and this may be a reference to that.

Persecution has always gone with being a Christian, and the strength to endure it is found in our sharing life with each other. We are to bear it together. Historically, this is how Christians have conducted themselves in such seasons. If the persecution is such that they are unable to band together physically, there is still the bearing of the burden together through prayer and the spiritual togetherness it provides (Acts 12:5).

The practice of such "mystical community" needs to be constantly rediscovered by the modern Church in the western world. There are verses in the New Testament that seem to allude to its mystery. One occurs in the writings of Paul, where he speaks of being able to act in the spiritual affairs of the Corinthian church when they are assembled, even though not physically present with them (1 Corinthians 5:3-5). Another possible citing of this "mystical community" is a rather curious occurrence reported by Luke (Acts 12:15). It happens when Peter is released from prison and comes to the home of Mary, where the believers were gathered praying (Acts 12:12-15). "His angel" is referenced as possibly being present at the gate leading to the house, and that is a mysterious thing to us. There is a bearing of one another's burdens and a sharing of each other's joys in such "mystical community" that apparently has great and real potentially. It seems to be a means of bringing real power to bear on matters that are normally lie beyond us. The two passages above are likely related, angels, those invisible spiritual ministers that bring into reality the will and desire of God (Hebrews 1:14), are the agents that produce the realities that come about in the physical realm through this "mystical community." Becoming what the author calls here "sharers," is an area of spiritual discipline and practice that we need to rediscover.

**10:34 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 an abiding one.**

This verse reflects the classic linkage between faith and practice that we see throughout the New Testament. Two specific mindsets or actions are mentioned that had been observable in the readers, then the belief that motivated and enabled them is identified.

The verse harks back to actions that had previously characterized the readers. Fittingly, it addresses what they believed about their better possession in the present tense. So the scenario presented is that they still believed something, but the actions that had once marked that belief are presented as in the past.

The two specific traits observed by the author in the past in the readers were first empathy and second joy. Empathy was shown to those who had been imprisoned, and the context indicates that this is a reference to those imprisoned for the gospel. How this was tangibly expressed is not specified, but their empathy was made visible to the author and was a matter of reality to him. The second trait that had been observed in them by the author was that of joy. That former expression of joy had defied normal human reason. Joy had been demonstrated by them when their property was seized. There was in that experience of loss something of great inward satisfaction to them.

The explanation for the presence of these qualities lay in a particular strong belief and conviction they had. It was a conviction of a reality that the author specifically describes with two words—better and eternal. The word used for possession is the same one used of earthly goods (Acts 2:45). This that they believed in and hoped for, was just as real and tangible as the material goods that had been taken as spoil from them. The word rendered "abiding" is related to μενω, the classic word used for permanence and a condition of rootedness (John 15). So they were convinced that a permanent material inheritance existed for them.

So in this verse we have a look back at a memory. It was of a highlight in the reader's faith that occurred during a season of suffering. Their faith did not wane in that season. In fact, it came through loud and clear. They unashamedly aligned with those who were imprisoned in the cause of the gospel, making themselves targets of persecution. When it came, they suffered it joyfully. They were not embittered. They had no regrets. This response was because they had their sights set on eternity.

**10:35 Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.**

The author is calling the readers to the assurance and accompanying focus that had marked their faith. His statement here aligns with the concern he expressed earlier, that they might "drift" (2:1), and that this danger was apparent in that they had already become "dull in hearing" (5:11). The words here indicate that the tossing aside of their

confidence had not occurred yet. But the presence of the exhortation shows that such a thing was a real and present danger.

Faith and trust in the good promises of God is the essence of the challenge for the covenant community. As we have seen, it was at this point that the wilderness generation failed (3:19). They believed in Yahweh and this belief seemed never to wane. However, their trust in his goodness and the refusal to entertain any idea except that he had their ultimate good as his goal kept eluding them. They perished in the desert not because they didn't believe in him, but because they did not abandon themselves to his goodness (Numbers 14:3; 14:35). Instead they took matters into their own hands, as if their welfare would be provided for only if they themselves brought it about. This was the point at which they tested him.

The exhortation here essentially is to have absolute confidence that Yahweh's salvation means that nothing can threaten our eternal good. Our confidence that our ultimate good is being abundantly provided for, need never waiver. When it does, we can be certain that we are being influenced by the lie rather than the truth. We are in those moments standing at the fork in the road where Adam and Eve stood, where the paths of good and evil separate.

**10:36 For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.**

In the previous verse, verse 35, the thing named which the readers were not to throw away was "confidence." The word used there speaks of boldness and is used often to express straightforwardness in speech. The commodity named here in this verse that was lacking in the readers is endurance. The word used to express this idea of endurance, υπομονησ, is formed by joining the word meaning to remain, with the word meaning under. This compound word conveys the idea of continuing to bear the load or staying at the task. It is a quality that goes against our instinct to do less instead of more, and to abandon what causes pain and discomfort.

Western civilization has been on a constant quest to produce more with less effort. While progress is generally good, it always comes with excess. And so we have developed a tendency to set aside a task or responsibility until there is an easier more convenient way of carrying it out. That tendency can be the enemy of coming to maturity in the faith. The ability to endure has always been the essential challenge of living as God wants us to live.

It should be noted however, that our challenge as addressed in this entire book by the author, is not to endure at tasks. It is to endure in trusting Yahweh's good character. It is to do so even when tangible signs seem to give evidence against it. Whatever tasks are associated with our faith are not the primary thing in view here. The exhortation is to doggedly cling to the belief that God is good, even in the face of pain, suffering,

inconvenience, and even death. It is such trust in Yahweh's goodness that leads unavoidably to works of faith.

The second and third phrases of this verse express a conditional participation in the promise of Yahweh. That is a curious thing in the Bible, a book that speaks so vividly to humanity's moral inability and unfaithfulness. The words the author clearly states that our receiving of the promise comes after we have done the will of God. The question raised in the interpretation of this verse is this: what exactly is this promise of God the author is referring to, that we receive through endurance?

Some have suggested that the promise is that of pardon for our sin and entrance into heaven. Now it is against a Biblical understanding of justification to understand our forgiveness and pardon from sin as being a wage—something awarded to compensate for deeds (Romans 4:4-5; 6:23). Any understanding of this verse that sees it as laying down a condition by which we are justified is unbiblical.

Others have suggested that the verse is implying that only those who endure prove that they have received the gift of God—forgiveness of sin. Their logic is that salvation is a gift. Yet we often see endurance attached as a condition to being saved (Matthew 10:22; 24:13; James 1:12). Therefore it must be that those truly justified receive the Holy Spirit and are enabled miraculously to endure in good deeds. It is impossible for them to stagger and fall in the faith. The endurance of these is predetermined by God and it comes about in real life events. So such an understanding sees it as totally appropriate to speak of faith and works interchangeably. According to this line of reasoning, the danger being addressed here with the readers is not really a danger to the elect. They cannot fail in these matters. It is only the imposter who will fail. This boils down to an understanding that not only believing faith is predestined, but a full-fledged experience of Christ is predestined as well to some unspecified degree. It would be a difficult task to prove that our obedience is predestined from the biblical data.

Both interpretations have their difficulties. There is a third way of interpreting this statement. Admittedly, it is not airtight. But it preserves some essential biblical ideas. We have already demonstrated that the background of this entire book is the wilderness generation and their experience of Yahweh. Their belief in Yahweh and their pardon for their ensuing unfaithfulness is affirmed in Moses' writing (Exodus 14:31; Numbers 14:20). They did not lose out on being considered part of Yahweh's covenant community. They lost out on the experience of the Promised Land. The Promised Land is not to be understood as metaphorically speaking of heaven, or we are forced to say that Moses himself will not be in heaven, since for his own disobedience he was not allowed to enter it. The Promised Land is to be understood as metaphorically representing the full experience of the rest that Yahweh's salvation provides.

The Promised Land and rest in it were never represented by Yahweh as a gift that the Israelites would inherit unconditionally. It was represented to them as something they

would be rewarded with as a blessing for faithfulness to the covenant—obedience to the Law (Deuteronomy 27-28). Their entry into the Promised Land, their conquering of it, their blessing in it, and their retention of it was entirely conditional.

The payment of wages spoken of here refers to the experience of Yahweh's salvation in this life. The promise is not heaven. It is the blessing that comes commensurate with our willingness to trust and obey Yahweh. So the promise encompasses our reward in his kingdom, whether on the present earth or the new earth that comes with faithfulness. When we read the word "saved" in the Scripture, it is speaking of rescue, health, and wholeness. Salvation is not just being saved from sin's penalty, from hell and into heaven. Salvation involves the totality of what Yahweh wishes to bring us into, in terms of our understanding and experience of him—today, tomorrow, and forever. It refers to our real-life escape from all the consequences that go with living life apart from God's will. Salvation from the penalty of sin is God's gift. We inherit heaven, where we will be freed from the presence of sin, only through faith. Salvation from the power of sin in this life comes through faith as well, but a strength of faith that leads to our obedience to God's will. He is greatly rewarding our actions of faith that grow out of those moments when we exercise trust in him.

**10:37 For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay.**

Some believe this verse is taken from the ideas expressed in Isaiah 26:20. The prospect of Yahweh being present on the earth to execute what is just and right was present throughout the writings of the Old Testament (Isaiah 40:10; 62:11; Zechariah 9:9). This expectation grew as revelation progressed. It started with the promise of a child being born (Genesis 3:15), to the expected child being a ruler (Genesis 50:10), to the expected child being Yahweh himself coming (Psalm 96:13; Isaiah 9:6). He would preside over a season when justice would be administered (Isaiah 2:12-22). The idea of it occurring in "a little while" was also present in the prophetic writings (Hag. 2:6; Ephesians 1:14) and affirmed by Jesus (Revelation 2:23; 22:12). And so in the New Testament we find that the expectation raised by Jesus was that he himself would come again (John 14:1-2). The later writings of the Apostles reflected their embrace of this belief.

This verse reflects this expectation, though the precise time of Jesus' return clearly remained a mystery even to Jesus himself (Matthew 24:36).

This thought of the immanent return of Jesus is given here to motivate the believers to endure in the faith. They are to maintain their confident belief that all sacrifice is worthwhile due to the surpassing value of the kingdom and the rest that lie ahead.

**10:38 But My righteous one shall live by faith; And if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him.**

The first phrase of this verse was a critical one to the theology of the New Testament writers. It is taken from Habakkuk 2:3-4. That Old Testament text is quoted two times in the writings of Paul (Romans 1:17; Galatians 5:11). Both justification by faith in Christ, and ongoing sanctification through daily faith in his promises are taught throughout the New Testament. So from it this picture emerges; faith in Christ introduces us into a faith life, and it is this faith life, the one his Spirit helps us to persist in, that delights God.

The last two phrases of this verse have in mind the lesson of the wilderness generation. Their failure was one of faith. It involved a shrinking back from earlier hopes and dreams of entering a land flowing with milk and honey. They relinquished hope in Yahweh's promise. The pleasure of Yahweh did not remain on them due to their failure to trust in his goodness that he had persistently proved to them. They lost the opportunity to experience his greater goodness in the Promised Land.

As Christians we are at risk at this same point. Our faith in his goodness can lead us to defer pleasures and make sacrifices. But the attraction of earthly experiences and things can lead us to set such patterns aside and indulge our earthly desires. We do so at the expense of that which he would lead us into. This shrinking back amounts to a repression of the truth we have embraced in favor of something that brings us immediate pleasure. Joining the preposition meaning under, with the word meaning to set fast, forms the word rendered "shrink back". So there is in its etymology the idea of the intentional subjection or repression, in this case of a belief.

**10:39 But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.**

There are several words in this verse that have gained a popular meaning in the evangelical vernacular of our day, and they impact the understanding we gain as we read our English versions of the verse. In the evangelical world of the past 100 years we have generally used the word destruction to mean eternal destruction in hell. We have generally understood the preserving of the soul to mean the opposite— obtaining citizenship in heaven. The reality is that the actual Greek words used in this verse, though understood by many to be speaking of eternal damnation or salvation, have a considerable range of meaning. They are rendered in a few ways in various passages in our English versions of the Bible.

The word used here for soul is ψυχησ. It is a word often used to speak of the immaterial part of our beings, what we call our souls (Matthew 10:28; Luke 1:46; Colossians 3:23; 1 Peter 2:11, 25). It is also used in the New Testament to speak of physical life (John 10:15; 13:37-38; Acts 20:10). It is also used to express the idea of the entire being, a living, breathing person (Acts 2:41; 27:37; Romans 13:1; 1 Peter 3:20). It is

used of both human and Divine feelings (Luke 2:35; Matthew 12:18; Hebrews 10:38). It is even used of the lives of sea creatures (Revelation 8:9; 16:3). So it is not a term with a single, exclusive meaning that must be understood as that eternal portion of our being that exists forever either in God's presence or away from it.

The word used here for destruction is απωλειαν. It is a word that describes spiritual destruction of either a temporal or eternal sort (Matthew 7:13; Rom 9:22; 1 Timothy 6:9; 2 Peter 3:16). We see in the words usage that there are things that bring about spiritual loss in the present life, such as heresy (2 Peter 2:1; 2 Peter 3:16). There are other things that bring spiritual destruction of the eternal sort—the final, Divine curse of condemnation (John 17:12; 2 Peter 2:3; Revelation 17:8, 11). The word is also used to describe material or physical destruction (Matthew 26:8; Acts 25:16).

The word used by the author here for the "saving" of the soul is not the classic word rendered salvation in the English Bible. That word is σωζω. The word used here is περιποιησιν. By etymology, it means to make around oneself. In usage it means to obtain or to purchase. It is used to describe those "purchased" by God through his specific action in Christ (Ephesians 1:14; 1 Peter 2:9). We are said to have "purchased" through him salvation (σωτηριασ—1 Thessalonians 5:9), and the glory of Jesus (2 Thessalonians 2:14). It is also used to describe our "purchasing" of life, through specific choices (Luke 17:33).

What does this all mean? The words used here could legitimately be used to exhort the readers to not shrink back because to do so is to risk one's eternal salvation. They could be warning of the danger of losing one's eternal standing as God's child. They could also be saying not to shrink back from the life of faith because to do so is to destroy God's process of salvation in them the process of transformation he has begun in their lives. It is to deprive themselves of blessings that God has for them in this life.

The latter of these two meanings fits best for two reasons. First, it matches the entire context of the book, which from the beginning has been concerned with the problem of the readers losing their spiritual moorings and drifting off course (Hebrews 2:1). Second, it matches the historic example the author has presented of the wilderness generation, who failed to persist in their trust of Yahweh, and so forfeited the blessing of the Promised Land. That danger has been the concern of the author throughout. It is a legitimate danger that Christians of all times need to guard against. That is the lesson of the entire Scripture whose great men served as examples in it. To ponder the lives of the Old Testaments key figures, men like Abraham, Moses, David, and Solomon, is to be provided with many examples of both lapse and endurance in matters of the faith.

The author concludes this section by emphatically using the first person plural pronoun, "we." He is embracing along with the readers his own exhortation not to shrink back. Now, in what sense is he making the statement, "We ourselves are not

among those who shrink back"? Some might be tempted to say that due to God's sovereign election of us, such a shrinking back is impossible. We are predestined not only to respond to the truth of the gospel, but to continually move forward in our experience of Christ. We are not capable of such choices as would lead to bad stewardship. But that thinking negates the entire idea of stewardship and any need for accountability, perhaps even for any need for teaching and instruction on faithfulness. If one embraces this radical a view of predestination, they should ponder why God, if he has predestined our sanctification, has predestined so few to rise to a level remotely resembling Christ? Why has he predestined such sordid shortfalls throughout the history of his dealings with humanity, if indeed our stewardship of truth is all predestined?

The next section of the author's treatise takes aim at that essential quality which underlies the entire experience of the life of Christ. That essential quality is faith. He will show the readers its centrality and seek to inspire them to rise to its practice.

This is a citing of examples of the varied usages of the word ψυχη and απωλειαν, in their various forms, in the New Testament text:

ψυχη —of physical life (Matthew 2:20, Matthew 20:28; John 10:15; John 13:37-38; Acts 20:10; Philippians 2:30; Revelation 8:9; 16:3), of life experiences (Matthew 6:25; Luke 12:23; John 12:25), of immaterial part of our beings (Matthew 10:28;22:37; Luke 1:46; 2:35; Acts 2:31; Acts 14:22; Ephesians 6:6; Colossians 3:23; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 1:9, 22; 2:11, 25), God's inner being (Matthew 12:18; Hebrews 10:38), one's entire being—a live person (Acts 2:41, 43; Acts 27:37; Romans 13:1; 1 Corinthians 15:45; 2 Corinthians 12:15; 1 Peter 3:20)

απωλειαν —Spiritual destruction in this life or the next (Matt 7:13; Romans 9:22; 1 Timothy 6:9; 2 Peter 2:1, 3; 2 Peter 3:16), physical destruction (Matthew 26:8; Acts 25:16), one under Divine curse/condemnation (John 17:12; Philippians 1:28; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 2 Peter 3:7; Revelation 17:8, 11).

# HEBREWS 11

**11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.**

At the risk of oversimplifying, every life is a product of three things besides the sovereign acts of God and his grace upon it. First, it is a product of what a person's hopes have been what they dared to aim at. Second, it is a product of practical decisions they've made based on what they believed to be true. Third, it is the degree of blessing and divine help all of this allows Yahweh to bestow. The verses that follow affirm that faith is the key-determining factor in all three of these.

As the Bible was written it became increasingly obvious that its recurring call to its readers was to have faith and trust in Yahweh the Creator. Its lesson is that we cannot rise above and undue the mess brought about by the original unbelief in Yahweh's goodness on the part of Adam and Eve. We are totally dependent on Yahweh's goodness to restore health and soundness (salvation), to his creation, which he has promised to do. And so we see a long line of characters whose stories reinforce this idea of faith and trust. Their own moral strength consistently waned. Their own honorable works lapsed. An entire system whereby they could gain Yahweh's blessing through pursuing him, only served to highlight their sin and rebellion. The lesson that emerged was that of Yahweh's goodness. He was good and so would provide the way of salvation to all who trusted in his goodness.

That salvation related both to the present life and to eternity. He would save them from sinful choices in this life, with all the harmful consequences. By his truth they would live long in the land he would give them. He would save them from sin's penalty so that in death they would not be separated to languish in Sheol from his blessing but would be united with him in his house forever.

In this chapter the author of Hebrews extracts this message of trust from the record of the Old Testament. He lays it out plainly and powerfully for all to read. The result is a single chapter that is very critical to the message of Scripture. The author summarizes this consistent story of trust by citing many examples of how Yahweh blessed those who believed and trusted him. Some of the examples are of individuals with strong moral fiber. Others are of individuals with a dubious moral record. All had this in common, they were people who knew moral failure. All, however, were those whom Yahweh embraced because of their faith. He affirmed them by his tangible blessing so that his way would be clearly marked for us. His heart is for us to believe him, and to practice our trust in his goodness as a way of life. This chapter then, highlights this great concept of faith, or trust, and presents it as the consummate message of Yahweh's revelation.

The author begins with a thought that is connected to the previous chapter. The specific thought expressed there was to continue in faith and trust in God. The readers

are told not to "throw away their confidence, which has a great reward" (10:35). They are told they have "need of endurance," to "receive what was promised" (10:36). So the previous chapter was a summons both back to faith, and forward in faith. The entire idea was to exercise trust in Yahweh. And so it is rather natural for the author to transition into this description of what faith is.

There are two descriptive statements of faith linked together that define the significance of faith. There is much overlap between the two, a typical occurrence in the Hebrew style of writing, where parallel thoughts are stated to bring emphasis and definition. The two phrases should be understood as one.

The first statement on faith is that it "is the assurance of things hoped for." The word assurance is a key one in this phrase. It is υποστασισ, a word that by etymology means "to stand under." This word is used only four other times in the New Testament. Paul used it as a word for confidence (2 Corinthians 9:4; 11:17). When someone is confident it is because they are certain of the truth of some underlying principle or idea. They trust in it and hold firm to it. The author of Hebrews used this word two other times before this verse. He used it in his description of Christ, saying that Christ is the exact representation of God's nature (1:3). So he used the word as one that expresses the essence of a thing, that which "stands under" it as its foundation to make it what it is. In this case, Christ's divine essence meant that he was an exact representation of God and that divine glory radiated from him. The author used the word another time to express the idea of confidence. In that usage his exact words are, "hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end" (Hebrews 3:14). Assurance is regarded in that statement as the essential element that brings firmness and stability.

We can say then that the author is presenting faith as the essential thing that gives birth to hope. That is a significant assertion by him. It means that we have hope because of something more germane that we have come to trust in. We can deduce two important things from this statement. First, when our hope erodes it is because we have lost confidence in some greater principle on which hope is based. Our hope is a barometer of our faith. Where believers have lost hope, they are not exercising faith. Second, faith or trust allows hope to materialize. This is the biblical point of view. The presence of trust in Yahweh allows the things hoped for to become a reality. He honors faith and intervenes where it is present. This idea, that faith allows things only previously hoped for to become actual and real, has already been alluded to in the closing verses of the previous chapter (10:36). Here it is plainly stated. Its truth will be exhibited plainly by the author as the chapter progresses.

The experience of the wilderness generation amply illustrates this idea, that faith is an inner confidence of a principle. The hope of the Promised Land would have materialized had they trusted Yahweh's goodness. It is not that faith itself has some mystical or metaphysical power. It is that Yahweh honors it and acts in response to it. He would have honored the Israelites' faith and brought them into the land. Instead,

the experience of this hope did not materialize for them, because this essential element of trust in Yahweh's goodness was missing. The author has already cited this as an example that the readers should learn from (4:2).

The second description of faith in this verse is that it is "the conviction of things not seen." As stated earlier, there is considerable overlap in these two statements, and likely the classic style of Hebrew writers is at work, an example of what is called synthetic parallelism. This second phrase builds upon the first idea. It states the effect that comes about in us through a belief embraced within. The effect is this, conviction regarding that which cannot be seen.

The word rendered "conviction" is the Greek word ελεγχοσ. It is the noun form of a word that means to confute or admonish (Matthew 18:15; 2 Timothy 3:16). The noun refers to a standard by which a thing is proved or tested, a proof (Philippians 1:15). In geometry we have certain "proofs" by which we can determine and affirm the nature of lines and shapes. This is a word that speaks of such proofs. The idea of this second line is this; faith is how we can accurately perceive the spiritual realm and so function in relationship to it. Through faith we can conceive of and deal with unseen spiritual realities, spiritual phenomena, and even spiritual beings. We can test and prove that which is of Yahweh, and that which is our own or another's perversion.

We find then that faith is essential for a right perception of reality. Apart from faith, we have no ability to perceive rightly a huge portion of reality, the spiritual, unseen portion. So it is not an exaggeration to say that it is impossible for a human to live rightly and healthily without faith. Our faith, what we believe to be true, serves as the grid by which we interpret the unseen. That is why it is terribly important to believe rightly. What is true must be what we believe, or we have nothing more than superstition. As Bacon said, "In all superstition, wise men follow fools." So we have in this second statement about faith not only a descriptive one, but one that alludes to its critical nature.

In this first verse then, we find that faith is presented as the essential element by which hope is birthed and then becomes reality. Faith also provides the set of proofs by which we perceive and interpret what we cannot see. So in this chapter faith is immediately presented as a powerful force operating within humanity.

**11:2 For by it the men of old gained approval.**

Of the things people hope for, there is no greater hope than that of gaining God's approval. This verse stands in parallel to the initial thought of the chapter that faith is the essence of things hoped for. In faith we find the essence of the realization of this great hope that has shaped so much of world history, the approval of the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

This short statement is the theme of Hebrews 11. The chapter will transition soon into a recitation of many characters in Yahweh's book cast by him as people of faith. It is an impressive assemblage of examples, so much so that because of it, one could easily say that the theme of Yahweh's entire revelation is salvation by faith. It is certainly one of its major themes.

This is important testimony about the ancients. It was of particular importance considering the important place Yahweh had assigned to his revelation. What was the written testimony of that revelation about who was accepted by Yahweh? Who gained his approval?

This thesis, if it can be proven true, answers important philosophical and theological questions. If such a creator-God as Yahweh exists, who will call all men to his presence to give account of their lives, how does one please him? And if this creator-God is so gracious, to offer himself in covenant relationship to humanity, how can we become part of that great blessing that was lost in the fall of Adam and Eve? And since humanity is so morally incapacitated by that fall, what is our hope for restoration and salvation? Considering questions like these, this assertion, that men are made right by their faith, is of enormous significance. It was through faith, the author says, these individuals were well spoken of.

**11:3 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.**

Before launching into the testimony of Biblical history about how men gained the approval of Yahweh, this statement is made that is even more fundamental. Faith is presented as how one apprehends that there is such a God who is the origin of all things.

Before the understanding of Yahweh was lost, there was universal knowledge of the origin of things. It is likely that such knowledge was lost rather quickly however, within a few generations from Adam. And it is also likely that it was not so much lost, as it was set aside, in favor of ideas that served the desires of humanity better. And so eventually, embracing the idea of one God, named Yahweh, who created all things, became a faith activity, rather than something all knew to be true. Furthermore, such faith required special revelation.

Special revelation tells us that what exists came about by the decree of God. We do not know the particulars of how he brought it about. But we know that it was caused by the command of Yahweh. We know that though they are not mentioned in the Genesis account of creation, forces we refer to as natural law were established by God. The universe functions according to the laws of physics and does so because of the word of God. So for example, light travels at a certain speed, which we have observed to be consistent no matter where that light is, whether in our solar system or far

beyond our own galaxy. This order, invisible per se and yet observable in its effects, lies at the heart of all we observe. We know that this fundamental order that causes things to continue as they are, exists by his command.

All of this we apprehend by faith. This phrase, "by faith," will be repeated many times in this chapter. It is the rendering of one word in the Greek text, πιστει. The word means to trust or have confidence in something. It is derived from the word that means to convince. Inherent in the concept of being persuaded or convinced of something is the idea of degree. In usage we often speak of having faith in a person, or a concept, or a procedure, or a system. In most cases we are not speaking of an absolute certainty. We are speaking of a high degree of it. So when Scripture speaks of having faith in God, we see varying degrees of it in ourselves and in others. Biblically we see faith presented as something that grows with experience. All the things normally encountered in the activity of exercising trust and confidence we see in the spiritual activity of relating to God. So when we see faith used in this chapter, we will see in the original account of the incidences cited, varying degrees of certainty. It is still faith.

A second important thing about the phrase "by faith" (πιστει), is how we understand the phrase grammatically. The grammar used supports the Biblical idea that faith does not work in and of itself. Faith works because Yahweh the Creator honors it. The technical grammatical designation of this term varies somewhat between interpreters. But there is agreement that faith is being presented as occupying a mediate role. That is, it is named as the thing by which a certain result comes about the extra-ordinary intervention of Yahweh in power. So the hero in each of the incidents cited is Yahweh. Faith is presented as the quality in humanity that he is seeking. When Yahweh sees faith, he is moved to respond.

To emphasize the point due to its importance we will repeat it. Faith is not presented to us as having power in and of itself. The power is attributable to Yahweh alone. We pursue faith, because we pursue Yahweh the Creator. Faith is the means to the treasure, not the treasure itself. That is the major distinction between Christianity and the various self-help schemes. The object of our faith is not a mystical power of faith itself. What we hope for does not happen because we believe it. It happens because God brings it about. Faith itself has never produced anything.

The words the author uses here to give greater definition and understanding to faith are instructive to us. Faith does not function independent of the intellect, nor independent of information that is processed by the intellect. The Greek word that is rendered by the English word understand, is νοουμεν. It is a word that describes the exercise of mental processes to arrive at a proper understanding of something (Matthew 24:15; Romans 1:20; Ephesians 3:4). So in the author's mind, faith is not the anti-thesis of intellectual activity. Instead his words imply a partnership between faith and intellectual processes. The line between the two is impossible to define. How can faith be imagined apart from being an activity of the mind? So we learn early on in this

treatment of faith, that to understand faith as independent of rational thought is a fundamental error from a Biblical point of view.

Due to faith, we do not explain creation through the visible things we observe. So the universe did not produce itself of itself. Our earth did not produce itself of itself. Now it did produce much of what we see, but its production came about by the command of God (Genesis 1:11). Whatever our theory becomes of the timeframe God sovereignly created in, he brought all that is into existence. he is the cause. Whether we conclude that it came about slowly or in the blink of an eye, we must identify his command as the cause of it all. There is something instead of nothing because of the desire and command of God.

The author's primary point is that embracing Yahweh God as Creator is a result of faith.

This verse makes three important contributions to our understanding of faith. First, it affirms that faith is an essential skill if one is to understand reality. Second, it identifies faith as an activity of the intellect that incorporates rational thought. Second, it identifies faith as the foundational spiritual activity that allows us to believe in a Creator-God.

**11:4 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.**

The author begins a lengthy citation of examples to support the thesis of verse 2, that it was through faith that "men of old gained approval." His first example comes from very early in the record, Genesis 4.

The story of Cain and Abel is a very abbreviated one in Moses' account, with very few details. Cain is reported as the firstborn, and Eve's comment about his birth is stated. The account quickly jumps past the time that transpired before the birth of Abel and quickly reports Abel's birth. It then fast-forwards to report the occupations the two sons took up as men. Then it moves to an incident when they both offer sacrifices to Yahweh. We are told that Cain brought of the fruits he had produced as a tiller of the soil. We are told that Abel brought a sacrifice that was of the fat portions of the firstlings of his flock.

We know nothing from the account of what instruction had been given previously to anyone at all about such offerings. We have no information on when sacrifice to Yahweh began. We have been left to speculate on this. Speculation has traveled in one of two directions. One path of speculation is that God had indeed given them such instruction. Most who embrace this suggest that it occurred when God provided skins of animals for Adam and Eve's covering. A second direction is that specific instructions had not been given on offerings but that the practice gradually developed in the aftermath of the expulsion from Eden. In the Abel and Cain event, humanity was to

learn something significant about what kind of sacrifice Yahweh had regard for. The first course of speculation suggests that revelation had been given already. The second suggests that revelation was progressing in this matter, and that this is a key moment in its progress.

There is strong textual support for the second course of speculation about this event. Moses' narrative presents the incident as having occurred with no previous instruction. His account does not present Yahweh as initially angry toward Cain, as if he had violated a specific formula. It makes a rather simple observation, that Yahweh had regard for Abel and for his blood sacrifice and did not have regard for Cain and for his sacrifice. It seems from the text that this is unexpected and unanticipated to Cain. He gets angry. Now when the Law was eventually given by Moses, both kinds of sacrifices were prescribed and had their place. So there was nothing inherently wrong with a sacrifice of the fruit of the ground. The impression given then is that there was something about the season, the timing, or the purpose and intent of the men in the giving of the offerings that made blood sacrifice the appropriate offering.

The account then presents Yahweh dealing with Cain very patiently and appealing to him to learn from the event the appropriate lesson. At this point in the narrative, Moses does not indicate that Cain had deeply offended God. Cain is simply challenged by Yahweh not to rebel and be angry over the incident and so incur sin. So we have the first example of the younger being chosen over the older. The younger brother Abel provides leadership to the older brother Cain, which if he follows will result in Yahweh having regard for him as well. Cain is unable to rally to this Divine summons issued through Abel and affirmed by Yahweh.

The author of Hebrews seems to be reading Moses account according to this line of thinking. He identifies faith as the reason why Yahweh had regard for Abel's sacrifice. That seems to affirm that Abel concluded from what he did know of God that blood sacrifice would be appropriate. The sacrifice was a step of faith, a gesture by Abel that was spot-on in terms of Yahweh's desire and plan. Yahweh's response sent that clear message, though we are not told what that response was that gave such clear understanding to both men.

Moses' account of the incident, written many years later, became God's eternal testimony to the beginning of two streams in humanity. The one stream would follow Cain, receive mercy from God and the steady appeal to trust him. The other would be represented by a brother eventually born to Eve named Seth, whose offspring would begin to "call on the name of Yahweh" (Genesis 4:26-27). Eve's words at the birth of Seth reflect the understanding that Yahweh had provided one to carry the torch of faith that had been taken up by Abel, then extinguished by Cain. In calling upon the name of Yahweh we are likely looking at the appeal to Yahweh for salvation—rescue and soundness, rather than the self-reliant assurance of one's own efforts.

There is a stark contrast in the entire account of Genesis 4, between the direction Cain's path would take people and the one which the Abel and Seth path would take. In the genealogy of Cain we see the entire world system, its cultural elements, and its justice system begin to form. It forms independent of God, yet bears the signs of his concern, his care, and his preservation. The initial comment on Seth is simply that in the time of his son, Enosh, men began to call on the name of Yahweh. In Seth's genealogy the great figures of the faith that the author of Hebrews will speak of will eventually be found. Luke's report on the lineage of Jesus traces his ancestry back to Adam through Enosh and Seth. And so the author of Hebrews comments appropriately that though Abel is dead, he continues speaking. The rest of the lives that are noted in Hebrews 11 as lives shaped by faith, are in this way cast as the continuing statement of the faith of Abel.

**11:5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should 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.**

In the fifth generation after Seth, we find a child born who was given the name Enoch (Genesis 5:18-24). Very little space is given to Enoch in Moses' account. His birth is noted, then the birth of his son, Methuselah, is reported. Two times however, it is noted in the genealogy by Moses that Enoch "walked with God." Whereas the short phrase, "and he died" dominates the genealogy of Genesis 5, occurring nine times, it is said of Enoch that he "walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." So he is presented by Moses as one who did not experience death, and his "walking with God" God is linked to that great escape.

The author of Hebrews has presented Abel as one whose life of faith lived on despite an untimely death. He now presents Enoch as one whose faith led to his escape entirely from death.

Two things are noteworthy in this statement about Enoch. First, his experience is attributed to his faith. We deduce from this that Enoch's walking with God was not the result of some more tangible experience of God available to him that we do not have. He walked with God by faith, even as we must. That is a significant thing we must remember as we ponder the lives of the "men of old." We tend to think God did things differently during their times, and that this explains the extraordinary developments in their lives. But the witness of the Spirit through the Hebrews account is that the faith of such men explained the things that they experienced. That is not to say that the experience Enoch had is available to all who ever live. But ultimately it did not happen because Enoch followed any formula other than that of persisting in faith and trust in Yahweh.

There is a second noteworthy element in this account. It is the author's assertion that in Moses' account we have testimony that Enoch was pleasing to God. This

undoubtedly comes from the Septuagint's use in Genesis 5:22 of this same word for pleasing, ευρεστηση. At any rate we find in merging the Hebrews and Genesis accounts the clear teaching of the Spirit that what pleases God is not deeds and actions in and of themselves. It is a relationship conducted with him, though he is not seen. It is persisting in that relationship through faith. This pleases him. Enoch's persistence stands out in Moses' account, where we are told that Enoch walked with God "three hundred years after Methuselah was born to him." So three hundred years of walking with God is the summary given by Moses of Enoch's life. That served the author of Hebrews purpose well, having already said of the readers that they had need of endurance (10:36). Enoch's 300 years of persistence were an inspiring example for the writer to appeal to. The ultimate statement of the value of such a life pursuit is affirmed by the fact that Enoch was taken up, and in the author's words, "was not found." Enoch did not die. That is powerful affirmation from Yahweh that Enoch's pattern of life pleased him.

Few have had such an experience with God. Elijah is the only other example we have of a person who did not die. These are meant to inspire us in the life of faith. They powerfully affirm that it is such a life that is to be pursued with persistence and endurance. This pleases God.

**11:6 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.**

The author adds this statement to his citation of Enoch's example. It further reinforces the essential nature of faith for anyone wishing to please God. It is a powerful statement that stands out in Scripture as one that captures and defines its message to humanity. There are two specific things that any human must believe about God if they are to please him. The first is obvious—they must believe he exists. Since God is not visible, no one has seen him (John 1:18). So belief in his existence inevitably becomes an exercise of faith. Using one's capacity to believe what cannot be absolutely proven is the thing God wants humanity to do. To believe he exists is to begin the journey of faith and to take the first step in pleasing him.

The second thing anyone wishing to please God must believe is that he is a rewarder of those who seek him. The word rendered "rewarder" is μισθαποδοτησ, which means a wage payer or a remunerator. The idea is just as the term "rewarder" indicates—God rewards all who seek him out. Those who seek him, find him. The word for seeking comes from εκζετεο, which meant to search out or to investigate or crave. By Hebraism it meant to worship. The author is expressing the idea that to please God we must believe that by his very nature, he is drawn to those who seek him out, and that such a quest of faith is rewarded personally by him.

These two ideas speak to how our journey with God begins, and how it progresses. The essential element in a relationship with God is faith. It is noteworthy that a simple

believe that God exists is essential, but it does not net much. The second element, the belief that seeking him will be rewarded by him is what distinguishes one as a godly person. It is the difference between one who is simply a deist, and one who is a Christian. It is the difference between one who is a marginal, carnal Christian, and one who is a vibrant and growing one.

**11:7 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.**

Having made the concise and critical statement on the one thing we must do to please God; the author returns to his citation of individuals who faithfully did that one thing. They exercised faith and so experienced the grace and power of God in real life matters.

Noah was warned by God or admonished by God about things not yet seen. We find in Moses' account that God initially revealed to Noah that he was about to destroy the earth due to its violence (Genesis 6:13). God then commands Noah to build an ark in response to this revelation he had given him. In Moses' account we have no detailed explanation given to Noah about the coming deluge of rain, an occurrence that he likely had not witnessed. He is simply told that the earth and all flesh, and everything on the earth would perish (Genesis 6:17). The end of the world is a difficult thing for a thinking person to embrace. It requires faith. What Noah receives is the promise from God that he would establish his covenant with Noah (Genesis 6:18). It was enough. Noah carried out this enormous project simply because he believed God was going to do all he had said he would do.

The text says that Noah did this in reverence. This means he did it circumspectly, having thought it through thoroughly, and that he did it out of respect for the One who had spoken to him. He considered no doubt the nature of God as he had come to know him. he considered God's heart in the matter as he himself had revealed it to him. So the building of the ark was a project embarked on by faith, but also with considerable thought. It would not have happened had Noah not believed in God, or in that which God had revealed. Noah then persisted in the work by something faith works in our minds to produce, a deep regard for what is dear to God and for what he wishes to bring about. His plan for us is embraced by us and results in our forward movement to expedite it as he directs.

True to what the author has stated in the previous verse, Noah was rewarded by God for his faith. The verse states three blessings that his faith brought about that were the legacy of his life. First, he saved his household. This was a practical matter and a very critical one of highest priority to God. We can also be certain that it was of great importance to Noah on a personal level and to Noah's family!

Second, Noah condemned the world. As he was building the ark, there was great and ample opportunity for warning to others. He was, during those decades, a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5). The ark in process became a testimony to coming judgment. Noah had the opportunity to try to influence the entire future of earth's population. He failed, and yet he did—being faithful to the unseen decree of God that he had come to believe in. It is a great blessing to be a source of salvation to others, regardless of their response. It is, of course, more of a joy if they respond. But there are a peace and joy that comes with dispensing truth, and it is not as shallow and self-serving as just being right.

Third, he became an heir of the righteousness that is by faith. That righteousness is an imputed righteousness, one sourced in Jesus Christ, and it is absolute. It results in our being justified—forgiven completely for all our sin. It is a declaration of God's favorable judgment of our character and deeds that comes to us despite our shortfalls. It is the biggest of blessings that could possibly be bestowed on humanity by Yahweh. It allows us to be joined in relationship to him for all of eternity.

We find then, that in Noah faith was the substance of things hoped for. That is, it was the essence or foundational thing upon which he built his hopes. Noah's faith was the foundational thing upon which God established his legacy. We find that it also provided Noah with a set of proofs by which he could discern and have confidence in all the elements of God's revelation to him that were unseen and unknown. By such proofs Noah could hold his course despite the questioning and ridicule that must have come his way from others during the long wait for the event he was warning them of.

**11:8 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.**

Abraham modeled New Testament faith, though he lived in an era that we cannot classify as under either the old or new covenants. It was remarkable how little he saw of any of the things God promised, and it is equally remarkable how much we are told he came to know and believe in events of the millenniums beyond him. We are told, for example, that Abraham saw the day of Christ, and was glad (John 8:56). The author will give significant space to Abraham and his immediate offspring, not moving on to Moses until verse 23.

In Genesis 11 we find the record of Abraham leaving Ur. Terah, Abraham's father, is the one represented by Moses as having initiated the departure and having done so to eventually arrive in Canaan (Genesis 11:31). The company of people stopped in Haran, a place in north of modern day Iraq, where they live until Terah's death. It appears to be in Haran that Yahweh summons Abraham to leave his father's house and to travel on (Genesis 12:1-3). It was on this occasion that we have the first report of Yahweh's string of promises to Abraham that would eventually be given in covenant form. He was 75 years old at the time and would live 100 more years (Genesis 25:7).

In Moses' account, Abraham's father is said to have left Ur to travel to Canaan (Genesis 11:31). At that point Terah had a specific destination in mind, though he never arrived there. But when Yahweh calls Abraham, he does not tell him where he is to go, though it is to the same destination, Canaan. He is told by Yahweh simply to go "to the land I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). The author of Hebrews picks up on this idea and uses it effectively to reinforce his own statement that "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Faith imparts to one the capacity to deal with the unknown and unseen. The author of Hebrews reports precisely from Moses' account, saying that

"he went out not knowing where he was going." The word for knowing is επισταμενοσ. The semantic idea of the word is to place upon or to stand upon. It speaks to those things that we know to be true, foundational ideas upon which we act. Faith is a capacity to act on a promise of God, based on the character of God and the conviction of God.

To any who might have witnessed the departure of Abraham, he left on a journey without a destination! He did so with the hope of an inheritance that would be given to him by Yahweh. However at the point of departure, there is no mention that the land would be part of that inheritance. Yahweh simply tells Abraham to go to the place he himself would show him, and that in that place he would make of him a great nation that would be blessed and would be a blessing (Genesis 12:1-3). It was when Abraham arrived in Canaan that Yahweh confirmed that it was that land that he and his offspring would inherit (Genesis 12:7).

Faith enabled obedience to the call of God, a specific call in terms of the first step go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house." Yet it was a call involving considerable obscurity to a place I will show you." So faith enables obedience to the known, in the face of the unknown. There is a significant linkage that we find throughout Scripture between faith and obedience (Romans 1:5). It is not necessarily that faith leads to perfect obedience, since in each of the lives spoken of in this chapter we find significant lapses. But faith produces an action of some sort and to some degree that relates to specifics of the summons of Yahweh to that person. We have already seen that faith can falter and obedience lapse, which is the condition the author saw developing in the readers. He has cited this as the example set in the lives of the generation who came out of Egypt, who stopped embracing God's goodness and so did not enter the blessing they could have. Abraham represents the anti-thesis of that generation. He believed and so modeled for his descendants the way to inherit all that God had promised. We must quickly add that his belief was not without lapses. God does not demand perfection, only a beginning faith and hope in his goodness upon which he can build. Israel by in large, missed the lesson of their own father's life, and so can we. The lesson is to never stop trusting the goodness of Yahweh.

**11:9 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;**

The author begins now to address the persistence and endurance of Abraham's faith and includes his son and his grandson as participants in that endurance. The next few verses highlight not only Abraham's belief in the inheritance, but the fact that he believed in it even against all visible evidence and actual experience.

In this verse the idea expressed is that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, far from owning and ruling the land God promised them, lived like aliens in it. They were subject to its inhabitants and lived according to its customs. There are certainly moments in the account where they show considerable strength, and where their destiny regarding the land is patently obvious, even to key native inhabitants (Genesis 21:22). But the reality was that they never saw the day when their ownership of any of the land would not have been hotly contested.

Three primary ideas expressed here communicate this persistence in belief against all experiential evidence. First, Abraham lived as an alien in a foreign land would. The text is quite straightforward in expressing this. He lived in it as if it belonged to another, though it was the very land Yahweh had promised him. We see this demonstrated in his forming of alliances that would allow for his survival (Genesis 14:13; 21:22-34), in his fear of quarrels with the native inhabitants (Genesis 20), in his courtesy and graciousness toward the native inhabitants (Genesis 23).

Second, we are told that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived in tents. This is presented as evidence that they were living as aliens. Their lives had the trappings of nomads, not of those who settled in as permanent residents. The account of Abraham's life reveals much movement throughout Palestine and even into Egypt. This rather nomadic existence continued with Isaac and Jacob.

Third, Isaac and Jacob are brought into the scene by the author of Hebrews. This he does no doubt to demonstrate the fact that this condition of trusting against all visual evidence persisted for three generations. They went on believing through many passing years when little changed. We still see Isaac having the same squabbles with the native inhabitants (Genesis 26:18-22), and we see the frequent movement of the nomadic lifestyle continue. As for Jacob, we see him spend many years in the company of his uncle, away from the Promised Land. We see his fear of his own brother, Esau, and his care to live peacefully with him in the land he himself had been promised. His life ends outside of the land promised to him. The Promised Land would slowly revert to the control of Canaanites who would have to be subjected many years later.

The faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in persisting in their embrace of Yahweh and his promises was of an exemplary nature in that it endured against all visual evidence. This is the kind of faith that is to characterize the children of Yahweh. It is the kind of

faith the author wants the readers to rise to, rather than a mere pragmatic one that would persist as long as some practical advantage came about through it.

**11:10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.**

This verse reveals something Abraham was anticipating that gave him ability to wait for his entire life. The word that is rendered "looking for" (εξεδεχετο), is a word that always implies waiting in anticipation (John 5:3; James 5:7; 1 Peter 3:20). With the frequent references to the land in Yahweh's promises to Abraham, we might be surprised to learn that Abraham was focused on something else that he was anticipating. The text names this thing that was the focus of his wants. It says that it was a city. It also tells us three things about that city.

The first thing we see is embedded by the author very deliberately within the normal term for a city. A very literal rendering of his words would be as follows; "the particular city—the one having foundations." So the author has in mind a particular city that is a one-of-a-kind city in that it has foundations. Whereas other cities rise and fall, this one is enduring. He can be referring to none other than the heavenly city. It was anticipated by Abraham, though not revealed and described until much later by John (Revelation 21). Interestingly, John notices it's unique foundation and describes its composition in some detail (Revelation 21:19-20).

Cities characterize empires and kingdoms. An inheritance of land might give one dreams of kingdoms and cities. The descendants of Abraham would eventually have such cities. But Abraham was looking beyond the earthly experience of God's presence and blessing, to the heavenly one. There will be an ebb and flow to even godly experiences on this earth. The heavenly is persistent and enduring. So the glory Abraham anticipated in the heavenly inheritance eclipsed the glory of the inheritance God had promised that history would bring to his offspring in the millenniums of time ahead on this earth.

The second thing we see is that the architect of this city is God. The word for architect is a word that describes a skilled craftsman, one engaged in productive art. Every earthly city has its artisans. They are its lifeblood (Acts 19:24; Revelation 18:22). It is probably safe to say that no city on earth has ever been entirely and completely conceived by one artisan. The heavenly city however is different. The Creator is its creator. No earthly city has ever been sustained by the work of one artisan, but by many. The heavenly city is different. Its lifeblood is the result of the enormously creative activity of One.

The third thing we see is that the builder of the city is God. The word rendered builder is δημιουργοσ. It is used only here in the New Testament. It is composed of the word δεμι, referring to the many bound together socially, or what we call "the public." This

word for "the public" is joined to the word "worker." So God is portrayed here in terms understandable to humanity as the great public worker—one who works for the benefit of the many. The word became a term for the maker of the world among some Greeks. In terms of our understanding of Yahweh and his city, we could say that he is a one-man public works department, one who in his city has provided for all the services that the inhabitants of the city would need and desire.

So we find that Abraham's focus was not on becoming an owner of the land marked out for him by Yahweh. In reading the account of his life, we do not get the impression that he was vexed by what life might yield him in whatever time he had on earth. On the other hand, the account of his life does not directly reveal this idea that he was in search of a heavenly city. It is certain that the Spirit moved the writer of Hebrews to make this observation. Was there however, a portion of the text of the Pentateuch where this idea might have been inspired in the author? There is at least a hint that this thought of pursuing a heavenly city shaped the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the words of Jacob when Pharaoh questioned him about his age. In his reply Jacob refers to the years of his life, and those of his fathers, as a "sojourn" (Genesis 47:9). It is quite possible that Jacob's statement expresses the perspective passed on from Abraham through Isaac on this present life. They not only lived as aliens in the Promised Land but regarded themselves as aliens on the earth.

**11:11 By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised;**

From subjective evidence of faith, the pursuit of a heavenly city, the author of Hebrews turns to the very practical result of the faith of Sarah. She received from God the ability to conceive a child, Isaac, at over 90 years of age (Genesis 17:17). The miraculous nature of her conception is emphatic in the Greek text, reading "sterile Sarah herself." This blessing came to her because of her faith. The author of Hebrews says that she received ability because she considered Yahweh faithful (πιστον). He uses the adjective form of the same word he has been using in the "by faith" (πιστει), phrase that he repeats so often in the chapter. We have faith, because God is faithful and proves himself so repeatedly.

Now it is clear from Moses' record that Sarah was filled with doubt about the prospect that she would have a child, laughing at the whole idea (Genesis 18:9-15). Her doubt is memorialized forever in the name Isaac, chosen by Yahweh, which means "he laughs" (Genesis 17:19). So what is evident from the account is that Sarah did not bear Isaac because she had some stellar faith that she would experience that miracle of childbirth at an old age. She bore Isaac because she too had embraced Yahweh's faithfulness and was pursuing with Abraham Yahweh's course for their lives. The result of her embrace of Yahweh was the conception of Isaac, which came despite her own skepticism.

This is an important observation because in Abraham and Sarah we see numerous lapses of faith in the short term, so that in their example of faith we do not see perfection. We certainly see some stellar moments. But we also see them resorting to rather fleshly tactics for dealing with fear (Genesis 12:10-20; 20:2), and in the attempt to give God an "assist" in giving them a son (Genesis 16:1-6).

Their story demonstrates that neither quality nor quantity of faith is demanded by Yahweh. He responds to faith even of a mustard seed quantity (Luke 17:6). So already in these citations of faith by the author of Hebrews we see the immense value placed by Yahweh merely in the presence of faith and trust in the heart. In this way the book summarizes the message of the entire Scripture.

**11:12 therefore, also, there was born 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.**

The author affirms the greatness of the story that grew out of Abraham's faith, the story of the nation of Israel. He does so by borrowing the words of Genesis 22:17. They are dramatic words. Abraham and Sarah's reality is captured in the phrase rendered "as good as dead at that." The entire phrase "as the innumerable sand by the shore of the sea" serves as the subject of the verb "to be born." The phrase "just as the stars of the heaven in multitude" is added to further emphasize the extent of Yahweh's action toward Abraham.

The author of Hebrews is taking his readers back to a critical moment in Abraham's life. The occasion is recorded in Genesis 15. The chapter opens with Yahweh re-affirming his own intention to reward Abraham greatly. Abraham, who was called Abram at the time, asks Yahweh what he would give to him, and refers to the stark reality that he was childless. So Abraham's question was about his legacy, not about gaining some immediate possession. It is at this point that we are told Yahweh takes Abram outside and tells him to "look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Yahweh tells him, "So shall your descendants be" (Genesis 15:1-5). This was nothing less than a promise of several descendants that would be impractical for a human to calculate. The next verse provides commentary on the significance of the moment, saying, "Then he believed in Yahweh, and he reckoned it to him as righteousness." That phrase proves to be a defining one in terms of the doctrine of salvation embraced by the New Testament writers.

So the author of Hebrews is returning the readers to this that was a seminal moment in terms of the message of Scripture. The entire plan that would bring Yahweh's salvation to creation, moved forward as Abraham believed in Yahweh. Abraham became a key player in that plan. His faith became the standard of the people of Yahweh. That was his legacy, and it is a great one. In imitating his trust in Yahweh, humanity finds salvation.

The readers themselves were offspring of Abraham in the both the physical and spiritual sense. They were at a critical moment in their own faith. What would be their legacy? They are made to revisit exactly what it means to be the true offspring of Abraham. By returning them to their roots, the author is hoping to successfully inspire them to push forward in their faith even as Abraham did. His legacy was to inherit the full promise of Yahweh, and that is always the reward of the faithful. His story stands out in Hebrews as in the Pentateuch, in sharp contrast to that of the wilderness generation, who were redeemed out of Egypt but fell in the wilderness due to their inability to have faith and trust in the goodness of Yahweh. They embraced Yahweh as the Creator God but did not trust him solely in the matters of their own welfare in this life.

**11:13 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.**

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived their entire lives and never possessed the land. They never got past their alien status in that land. Again, this is evident in the text of Jacob's brief statement to Pharaoh when he was asked how old he was. Jacob replied, "The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty; few and unpleasant have been the years of my life, nor have they attained the years that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning" (Genesis 47:9). Jacob did not view himself as having received or attained anything of significance in this life. As the author of Hebrews points out, Jacob confessed that himself, Isaac, and Abraham, had been strangers and exiles on the earth.

We see a parallel established by the author between faith and a confession. A confession is the verbal statement of what we have come to embrace as true because of our faith. Sometimes our confession has to do with who we are, as in the case of Jacob's confession to Pharaoh. Sometimes our confession has to do with who God is, as in the case of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:3). Sometimes our confession has to do with who Jesus Christ is, as in the case of Timothy (1 Timothy 6:12-13). But faith allows perception of unseen things and then gives birth to confession, which is a recognition and embrace of what is true.

It is the essential nature of faith to remain constant even when hopes and dreams are delayed. That quality is inherent in the very concept of faith to some degree. We see this expressed in what is a tremendous phrase by this author when he says of the promises that the patriarchs died, "having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance." That statement accords with how the author has presented faith. Faith is the thing which stands under hope, the reason it exists. Faith also enables us to perceive an entire unseen world that is a huge part of our reality. We rightly perceive the forces that play the key role in shaping it. It is because of their perception of

Yahweh's character and power that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob "saw" the promises and welcomed them from a distance.

**11:14 For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own.**

The author's point is that when someone speaks of being an alien in their own land, they are clearly expressing that they belong elsewhere, by affection, by origin, by custom, or by heritage. Calling oneself an alien is an expression of not feeling "at home." That the patriarch's expressed this idea while living in the land that was clearly theirs by nothing less than the solemn oath and decree of Yahweh is significant. There could be no clearer title of ownership. The fact that they used the terms "alien" and "sojourner" reveals that their faith in Yahweh, working together with his revelation to them, had produced in them the practical understanding of the existence of the new Jerusalem spoken of in Revelation 21-22, as verse 16 will indicate. Their faith enabled them to see that even possessing land would not solve the real issues of life in a fallen world. They looked to their redemption, however crude their understanding of it was.

None of this suggests that the promise of the land to Israel was meaningless, nor does it render it insignificant or unimportant. It is certain that the patriarch's saw eternity as the key thing of significance. That only stands to reason. Eternity is always the prime source of hope produced by faith. But ultimately, the significance of something is determined by that which God assigns to it. The land and earthly Jerusalem were and is of great significant to him. Its significance to him is demonstrated in several ways. First, he was willing to give his solemn oath to the idea that his people would possess it (Genesis 15). Second, even during the years of the captivity that came because of Israel's breaking of the covenant, Yahweh repeatedly promised that he would restore Jerusalem's glory (Isaiah 2:1-4; 31:5; 44:2628; Jeremiah 30:18-24; 33:14-17; Joel 3:14-17). Third, it remained significant enough to him that even though he knew the script, Jesus wept at the prospect of Jerusalem's destruction and Israel's loss of life in the land (Luke 19:41). Fourth, Revelation speaks of Christ's rescue of Israel and the city of Jerusalem (Revelation 20:9). The city is the one in which he chose to place his name (Deuteronomy 12:5,11,18; 23:16; Psalm 78:68; 1 Kings 14:21), an understanding that was clear even to Israel's eventual captors (Ezra 6:12). Though we do not know why this land and this city was chosen, we do know that God's choice will stand and will do so for his own reasons.

**11:15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.**

The point of this statement is to remove speculation about the Patriarch's view of themselves as sojourners and specifically what city or region they viewed themselves as citizens of. Some could take their use of the term sojourner to be a reference to the fact that the native land of Abraham was Ur. The author's point is that if Ur, or

Abraham's later residence in Haran, had been their longing, they could have returned to it.

This is an important clarification, because the most natural way to understand the usage of the term alien or sojourner is as a reference to residing in a place other than the one to which one's ethnicity or family lineage can be traced. We would not have the clarity about how Jacob was using this term, nor would we know of the Patriarch's understanding of the heavenly city, were it not for the words of Hebrews.

We view the insight of this author first as itself an insight into how the writers of the New Testament understood the Old. They assumed that an eschatology was present in the Pentateuch and that it was present in the minds of the earliest characters of the Pentateuch. We know from the text that there was a very clear hope of the New Covenant early on (Deuteronomy 30:1-10), and specific elements of an eschatology became known even among the pagans (Numbers 23-24). The authors of the New Testament saw this eschatology in the text of the Pentateuch much more clearly than readers today. It is assumed by them that the Patriarchs knew much more about Christ and about Yahweh's complete plan of salvation than we generally give them credit for.

Second, we view this statement by the author of Hebrews as the Spirit's clarification of how the term was used by the Patriarchs. It is therefore a confirmation of the greater hope that inspired their faith. Revelation is the unveiling of that which we would otherwise not know, and we would not know for certain that the Patriarch's vision was for the heavenly city were it not for this testimony in Hebrews. This provides us with an affirmation that reading the text of the Patriarchal story with the hope of Christ, his glory and ours in view, is as the text was intended to be read.

**11:16 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.**

In the grammar of this verse there is a very noticeable switch made by the author into the present tense. His desire in addressing the readers is to inspire them to endure and persist in their faith (10:32-39). This momentary switch to the present tense is another attempt to involve them more deeply in the story of the Patriarchs, and so, hopefully, inspire their own faith.

The verse begins with the adverb νυν, meaning now. The author has been using the imperfect and aorist tenses to describe the Patriarch's desires and actions. He employs a present indicative to express the Patriarchs' desire for a better country. It is as if the readers are observing them, and the author is narrating the action. He says that the Patriarchs are "now desiring a better country." The word used for desire is ορεγονται, which conveys the idea of reaching out, or stretching oneself. They were reaching for a better country, and this country was the focus and objective of their dealings with Yahweh. Then the author employs a present infinitive to express God's mindset toward

the Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God is presented as currently embracing them and this quest. So both the desire of the Patriarchs and God's response to them are presented as ongoing actions. The author then uses an aorist infinitive to describe God's action of preparing a city for them, action that is being regarded as accomplished.

This entire statement indicates that the Patriarchs had knowledge of and were focused on what we would call the heavenly experience, the inheritance that will come to all those of faith when their redemption is completed. It is this eternal inheritance has served as a steadying influence and inspired endurance in all who have followed in the faith of these men.

There is nothing in Moses' record that specifically tells us how the Patriarchs gained this knowledge of a heavenly city, or how well-developed it was. That it even existed is remarkable since it seems apparent that they did not even have knowledge of the earthly Jerusalem yet.

The fact is that the Patriarchs' entire understanding of significant places in the earthly inheritance was only in a crude and developing stage. When Abram came into the promised land, Moses' account describes Yahweh's appearance to him at Shechem, by the oak of Moreh (Genesis 12:6). It was in this appearance that we have the first mention of the promise of the land to Abram's descendants. Moses notes that Abram builds an altar at that place to Yahweh. Abram then moves within the same area to an unspecified site between Bethel and Ai and builds an altar there. Later in Moses' account, Jacob sees the vision of angels of Yahweh ascending and descending from heaven, names the place Bethel, or house of God, and builds a monument to the experience there. Later, he returns from Laban to the Promised Land and leads his family in putting away their false gods. He does this after being commanded by God to reside in Bethel and to make an altar there to Yahweh. It is reported by Moses that that Jacob buried the false gods they had under the oak tree that is "near Shechem" (Genesis 35:4). In the years of the conquest of Canaan under Joshua, the tent of meeting was by an oak tree in Shechem. By that tree Joshua erected a stone monument to memorialize the covenant with Yahweh (Joshua 24:24-27). The entire area of Bethel seemed early to be regarded as the epicenter of the promised land. The specific mention of an oak tree makes it likely that a specific place was viewed as of considerable significance to the early Israelites. Yet this site seems to just disappear into oblivion after the conquest of the land.

Regarding the site of the earthly Jerusalem, the only suggestion of significance we gain from the lives of the Patriarchs' is found in the account of Abraham offering up Isaac. Abraham is commanded to do this at a very specific place, on a mountain Yahweh would direct Abraham to in "the land of Moriah" (Genesis 22:2). That account speaks of the special name Abraham attached to that place, "Yahweh will provide," and the faith saying and prophetic ideal that grew out of that incident and that name (Genesis 22:14). Many centuries later we are told that Solomon built the temple on

Mount Moriah (2 Chronicles 3:1). So there was a crude understanding of that site. But it seems that Bethel eclipsed it in terms of overall significance.

So we see a slow growth occurring in Israel's understanding of significant places in the land. We do not know the extent of what the Patriarchs knew. It appears that they did not know the full significance of the coming earthly city of Jerusalem. This appears true because the exact location of the place where Israel's worship would be centered was repeatedly represented by Moses as being unknown and yet-to-be revealed by Yahweh (Deuteronomy 12:5, 11, 21; 14:23-24; 16:2, 6, 11).

This mystery regarding the location of the earthly center of the worship of Yahweh makes this entire line of thought expressed by the author of Hebrews more remarkable. We can only deduce from these verses that before Yahweh had revealed his choice of the earthly city of Jerusalem as the place to which he would attach his name, there was the understanding of the heavenly Jerusalem. The author's choice of tenses indicates that this heavenly place was already prepared for those of faith. At the very least we believe it was an accomplished fact in the mind of God and that the Patriarchs had some knowledge of it.

The statement about God not being ashamed to be called their God creates a sharp contrast once again between the Patriarchs, the wilderness generation, and later generations who abandoned faith in Yahweh. It summons the readers to a clear and present danger. It inspires them to mimic right models and warns them against repeating the horrible mistakes of many generations of their ancestors. It is not that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were without fault. It is simply that they embraced Yahweh's goodness and faithfulness and believed in the outcome that he would impose. Their faith in the heavenly inheritance is a great contrast to the curse of the old covenant that Israel had come under through unbelief (Deuteronomy 28:15-68; Jeremiah 23:10). The faith of the Patriarchs in the eternal persisted, while their offspring's faith even in temporal blessing had disappeared.

So great was the Patriarch's confidence in Yahweh's goodness, that they looked past the earthly blessing to the one which would provide them with the fullness of all that Yahweh was. The promise to Abraham that Yahweh himself was his reward (Genesis 15:1), was the greater prize. That confidence in a heavenly inheritance provides perspective on both earthly success and sacrifice. It is this perspective the author of Hebrews wished to inspire in others.

**11:17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son;**

The author cites yet another demonstration of persistent faith in the life of Abraham. Again we see that the tenses of the verbs and participles seem carefully chosen to draw the readers into the full drama of the incident. This entire statement is a melding

together of four verbal ideas. First, that Abraham did what he did while being tried. The term rendered “when he was tested,” is πειραζομενοσ. The word itself is the term used earlier by the author when he speaks of the severe trials of Christ in his earthly life (2:18; 4:15). It is a present participle that expresses action going on at the same time as that of the main verb. In other words, Abraham did what he did while feeling the full force of all the emotion connected with it, under great duress. Second, the action of offering Isaac has an abiding result. Its effect remains and continues. The verb rendered “offered up” is προσενηνοχεν, a perfect tense that expresses action done in past time with an ongoing result. We might say, “He was doing it for keeps.” The third verbal idea adds emphasis to the persistence of Abraham’s action, expresses the idea that he persisted in offering Isaac up. The picture it gives is that Isaac remained bound up as an offering, and Abraham’s hand gripped the knife to kill him, despite all that Abraham was feeling. The verb rendered “was offering” is προσεφερεν, an imperfect tense expressing continuing action in past time. The fourth verbal idea reminds the readers of who Abraham, the one doing the action, was. Implicit in Isaac being his only begotten son is the idea that Abraham was his father. But more importantly to the author’s point is that Abraham, was the very person who had so gladly received the promises, of which Isaac was a key part. Both the difficult emotion of his action and its illogical nature are expressed by the phrase “he who had received the promises.” Received is αναδεξαμενοσ, an aorist participle expressing action that had occurred before the action of the main verb. So Abraham is pictured as exercising faith in Yahweh, though his present order conflicted so sharply with what he had earlier promised. We will see however, that this does not mean his faith was without reason. What he believed enabled him to bring other data to bear on the entire thing he was asked to do (11:19).

The short statement is meticulously formed by the author so that Abraham’s persistence in faith is emphasized. He persisted in faith against the deepest of human emotions, and in the face of great conflict in logic. This picture is continued by the thought of the next verse.

**11:18 it was he to whom it was said, "In Isaac your descendants shall be called."**

This verse adds further detail to the fact that Abraham persisted in obeying Yahweh’s command to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice though it conflicted with Yahweh’s earlier promise to him. Here that promise is specifically named, the promise of an heir that would be born through the union of Sarah and Abraham, even in their old age (Genesis 17:16-21; 18:9-15; 21:1-7). That promise was repeated to Abraham on two occasions before Isaac was conceived in Sarah’s womb. This verse then serves to highlight the conflicting nature of Yahweh’s command to Abraham and so adds to our understanding of the strength of Abraham’s faith.

**11:19 He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type.**

This verse reveals to us what the Old Testament text does not mention—that as he was contemplating the sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham reasoned that God is able to raise men from the dead. It is a critical piece of data in terms of our understanding of faith itself. Without this verse, the picture of Abraham's faith would conflict sharply with the author's earlier description of faith (11:1).

In that description he linked faith to the activity of the intellect. He said it was the conviction, or evidence of, unseen things. So then, he has presented faith as the tool by which we are able to grasp and perceive invisible realities. Only by perceiving these do we have the complete and healthy picture of reality itself. Only by knowledge of these are our powers of reason fully enabled. Implicit then, in his description of faith is the concept that it is essential to sound thought, reason, and logic. Yet thus far he has presented Abraham's act of faith as being in logical conflict with Yahweh's earlier promises.

This verse shows how Abraham resolved that conflict between what Yahweh was clearly leading in the present, and what he had clearly promised in the past. In doing that it resolves the conflict between the author's description of faith and Abraham's experience and example of faith.

In this verse we find that Abraham's faith enabled him to access other data about Yahweh. The words used clearly link faith to mental processing—reasoning. The term rendered "considered" is λογισαμενοσ. That is an accounting term, referring to the processing and categorization of data. It describes what Abraham was doing during the entire incident. He was reasoning. The next phrase states that his faith-enabled reasoning enabled him to contemplate the entire scenario considering the reality of Yahweh's power. The logic that alerted him to the conflict between the earlier promise and the current command, also reminded him that Yahweh was both the giver and taker of life. Therefore Yahweh could easily give life back to Isaac, should he decide to take it. Faith-enabled logic also told Abraham that Yahweh must indeed be planning to do just that, since he had given his promise regarding Isaac's life and future. So because of his faith, and only through it, the conflict between the earlier promise and the present command of Yahweh were resolved and Abraham was able to obey.

We find then in faith that it becomes a partner of one's intellect. It enables us to capture data along the pathway of normal life. This wisdom and understanding acquired by a life of faith then enables us in greater faith and trust moments that suddenly loom in front of us. We rise to acts that would have been clearly beyond us had we not accumulated along the way a more precise understanding of all that shapes reality.

**11:20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come.**

The author has mentioned the faith of the three patriarchs of Israel—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But he has been primarily occupied with Abraham and his wife Sarah. He will now turn to an example of faith from each of the other two, Isaac and Jacob. In each case the author's thought is abbreviated. In each case the event which he is citing has its own complex story, and even considerable intrigue.

This blessing given by Isaac to Jacob and Esau came about through a series of incidents that would shape both their lives for many years. Much has been made of the deception of Rebekah and Jacob. In Moses' account of it all we are told that when the two sons were conceived it came because of Isaac's prayers for Rebekah (Genesis 25:21). The pregnancy was in some way abnormal for her, so much so that she inquired of the Lord (Genesis 25:22). The Lord informed her that two nations were in her womb, that one would be stronger than the other, and that the older would serve the younger. So in this case, the wife and mother knew! Rebekah's later manipulation of the blessing of Isaac was in harmony with what Yahweh had revealed to her and must be seen in that light.

Besides this clear word from the Lord about his plan, we have the record of Esau agreeing to pass his rights as firstborn to Jacob, and it said of him that he despised his birthright (Genesis 25:34). So though there is manipulation on the human side so that Rebekah and Jacob look to be quite underhanded in the matter, we also clearly see Esau's impulsiveness and lack of responsibility. More importantly we see the fact that God's intention was that Jacob inherit the blessing and be the one through whom God's blessing would be delivered to all humanity.

It appears that Isaac may never have understood the mind of God on this matter previously. He was visibly shaken once he realized what had transpired. However, he also did sense that it was both proper and irreversible (Genesis 27:30-40). That he acquired this understanding is affirmed later in that he adds to Jacob's blessing when he sends him to Laban to find a wife. Isaac's words at that time make it clear that he understood fully that the patriarchal blessing was being passed from Abraham, through him to Jacob (Genesis 28:1-4).

The author of Hebrews appropriately skips over all this detail to simply report the fact that Isaac blessed both sons, and that this act reflected his faith. Isaac's words reflect a future for both (Genesis 27:27-29, 39-40). More importantly, they reflect the exact trajectory for both peoples that Yahweh had pronounced to their mother before they were born (Genesis 25:23). He believed in the care of Yahweh and so could project a future for both of his sons. his words of blessing to Jacob later reflect a more precise understanding of what God was doing. They reflect his own faith in the promise made by Yahweh to his father Abraham (Genesis 28:4). They reflect confidence in Yahweh's grace. He believed in the promise of the land and the seed and so passed along the

blessing of the covenant and did so to Jacob, despite Jacob's questionable character in the whole affair.

**11:21 By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.**

Jacob blessed each of his own sons just before his death, and he included in his blessing the two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh. The author here specifically names the blessing of these sons of Joseph, not Jacob's blessing of his own sons. There are some interesting details in this event as it is recorded in Genesis 48.

The event occurs after Jacob has been in Egypt for 17 years. So at this point he has re-discovered his own son, Joseph, who has provided care for the entire clan during the years of famine in the promised land. The author of Hebrews apparently has the concluding text of Genesis 47 in mind as he makes this statement, citing Jacob's apparent act of worship at the close of his conversation with Joseph about where he wished to be buried (Genesis 47:31). The reference to Jacob leaning on his staff comes from the Septuagint version.

The text reports that Jacob was very sick and Joseph, anticipating his death, went to see him with his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. We are informed that when news of their arrival came, Jacob gathered his strength and sat up in bed (2). The story conveys the sense that even in his ebbing strength the Patriarch knew some important business remained to be done.

Jacob shapes the occasion by reciting the blessing that Yahweh had conveyed to him regarding numerous offspring and the land. After this Jacob commands that Manasseh and Ephraim are to be considered as his own sons. He equates their new status with that of his own firstborn Reuben, and his second born, Simeon (5). When he blesses them the text notes that Joseph places them in front of him so that Jacob's right hand will rest on the oldest, Manasseh. But Jacob crosses his hands, placing his right hand on Ephraim. Joseph attempts to correct him, but Jacob insists that though both will be great, Ephraim will be greater, and his descendants will be a multitude of nations (19). This is yet another occasion reported by Moses where the first born becomes subjected to one born later.

The blessing itself comes in two parts. The first part is an acknowledgment of Yahweh's company throughout Jacob's own life. It includes a curious phrase that identifies Yahweh with "the angel who has redeemed me from all evil." This is similar language to that Moses used of the angel of Yahweh who accompanied Israel during the exodus out of Egypt (Exodus 23:20-24; 32:34; 33:2). Jacob's blessing of Joseph's sons is an appeal for the same blessing of God's presence that had been conveyed to him through his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham, that this presence of Yahweh now rests with Ephraim and Manasseh (15-16). So the blessing relates to the future time, as

the author of Hebrews notes. There is a break in the account of Moses at this point that notes the dialog between Jacob and Joseph about the pre-eminence of the younger son Ephraim.

Jacob resumes his blessing of the two sons of Joseph by saying this word over them; "By you Israel shall pronounce blessing, saying, 'May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh!'" He projects by this their full status as his sons and that this would be reflected in their future, prescribing a formula for conveying blessing that was to be a tradition among Israelites. We do see that in the later written literature of Israel, Ephraim's name is used as a synonym for the entire northern kingdom (Jeremiah 7:15; 31:9, 16-20).

The author of Hebrews skips over all this detail, which was likely well-known to the readers. That he has it in mind is obvious in that he cites the act of Jacob in blessing the sons as an action of faith. Jacob was confident enough of the future blessing of Yahweh on his offspring that he desired to make Manasseh and Ephraim heirs of it. All his words are forward looking and reflect their being regarded as his own sons.

**11:22 By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.**

The request of Joseph is recorded in Genesis 50:24-25. He clearly asserts to his brothers that the Israelites would not remain in Egypt. They would return to the land God had promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. His embrace of the promises made to Abraham is clear in that statement. The continuation of the Patriarchal faith is reflected in this request. Joseph's request reflects the same faith that his father, Jacob, had expressed to him regarding his own death and burial (Genesis 47: 29-31). The Patriarch's in faith all saw themselves belonging in the land of promise and made provisions that in death it would be where their bodies would be permanently placed (Genesis 23; 25:9-10; 47:30).

Moses' notes that Joseph makes his request to his brothers. The term brothers could refer here to Joseph's relatives. Joseph died at 110 years of age. It is likely that several of his siblings were already dead. But in the context the term brothers refer to his actual siblings. There is plain reference in the immediate context to Joseph's sons Manasseh and Ephraim, and to their offspring. But Moses says that Joseph makes this request to his brothers. So it appears that Joseph did not charge his own sons with this responsibility as his own father had done with him. There is the irony in that act of his siblings being the cause of his presence in Egypt, and of him trusting them to undo this in his death. But more importantly is the likelihood that Joseph thought that the exodus from Israel would come much sooner than it did. Uncertainty in the timing of the fulfillment of God's promises often accompanies faith. The eyes of faith are to a certain degree blind to time, and this accentuates faith's beauty.

**11:23 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.**

We know little of Moses' parents. We know them simply as a man and a woman, both of whom were descendants of Levi, one of Jacob's sons. The genealogy of 1 Chronicles twice lists Moses' father's name as Amram (1 Chronicles 6:3; 23:13). His parents are unnamed by Moses in his own account of his birth. They appear only briefly in his story of his life, at its very beginning. Then they disappear.

The act of faith done by these anonymous people is noted in the record by the author of Hebrews. He is turning his account now to events associated with Moses, who was used of God to birth an entire era that accentuated the critical place of faith in Yahweh's plan to redeem his creation.

This verse contains two of the same details revealed in Moses' own account of his birth (Exodus 2:2). His parents recognized his beauty—his pleasing physical characteristics. Then they hid him for three months. The author adds his own comment that they were not afraid of the king's edict. The term fear is used by him in the sense of reverence and submission. That Moses' parents felt the classic emotion of fear seems to be revealed by their evasive actions. But their story illustrates something important about faith. It shows that faith rises to rule over the emotion of fear. Faith is composure in the face of fear, a trust in things greater than the forces that initially alarm us. It is the choice to act in accord with Yahweh's desire rather than to act in a way that is shaped by one's own fear. Faith is an embrace, in the moment of fear, of a higher principle as decreed by Yahweh, and a choosing of a course of action that respects him. Moses' parents had respect for the will of Yahweh in the matter of this child that superseded their fear of the consequences of disregarding Pharaoh's command. That is the practical nature of faith and an example of its momentous impact.

**11:24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;**

We do not know much about this pivotal point in Moses' life. In his own account we see him under the care of his own mother until he is weaned and then him being turned over to Pharaoh's daughter (Exodus 2:10). The account notes next that when Moses had grown up, he went out to his brethren (Exodus 2:11). It is on this occasion that he kills an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew. So all we know is that though he was raised in Pharaoh's court, at some point Moses aligned himself with his own people and their plight. Moses' own account represents this decision as one involving considerable passion and one that created considerable difficulty for him. We are left to see that an initial act of faith can lead to an uninformed and sinful course of action, where passion carries the day rather than the Spirit.

His act of murdering an Egyptian had the effect of burning his bridge back to living life as Egyptian royalty. We do not know why the act was never prosecuted later when he returned to Egypt. We do know that it cemented his identity as an Israelite. He was destined by where his beliefs took him to either live out his years as a sheepherder on the desert or return to Egypt and take up the cause of the Israelites. Though he returned with considerable reluctance, there was no real choice, given what he had come to believe about Yahweh and what Yahweh would so dramatically announce to Moses from the burning bush regarding his will for him.

Moses' beginning faith in Yahweh, uninformed, and shaped by his own impulses was forced into a period of dormancy by his actions. At the right time it was stirred, and it shaped not only the course of Moses' life, but the future of an entire people, and Yahweh's future revelation of himself to all of humanity. By mentioning Moses' faith in its early stages, the author of Hebrews has emphatically demonstrated the value of faith to God, even though infant and incomplete in terms of where he wishes to take it. Faith becomes a powerful force because of the way Yahweh is joined to it.

**11:25 choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin;**

This verse highlights the essence of the choice that Moses had to make. His life as an adopted child of a princess in Egypt would have been luxurious. The treasures and pleasures of Egypt were freely accessible to him. But something inside made these wrong to him. It was his belief in Yahweh.

The author of Hebrews represents Moses' faith as informed enough to realize that the status and pleasure of Egyptian life would be temporary. By stating his belief in this way, that the pleasures of sin were passing, he aligns Moses' faith with that of Abraham, in the city whose architect and builder is God. Moses was viewing himself as an alien and a stranger with an eternal destiny where values and pleasure would have totally different definition.

A pattern is emerging in the author's accounting of faith. His account links faith to real-life choices and courses of action. At the same time the Old Testament account is running in the background, and the reader is aware of the imperfect nature of the faith of the various characters. So in the case of Moses, the reader cannot be reminded of Moses' early years without recalling his act of murder, and his great reluctance to become the leader of Israel that Yahweh summoned him to be. The lesson seems to be that faith needs only to be present, not necessarily present in great quantity or quality for Yahweh to be honored.

**11:26 considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.**

The author opened the chapter by saying that faith is "the conviction of things not seen." In that statement faith is presented as how we can accurately perceive the spiritual realm and so function in relationship to it. Through faith we can conceive of and deal with unseen spiritual realities, spiritual phenomena, and even spiritual beings. This in turn gives us the ability to do what Moses is described as doing in this verse. He was able to value the riches and treasures of Egypt considering what he had perceived was true in the unseen realm. He knew the unseen forces at work in the world that give it the illusion of glory. He also knew the unseen forces at work that will control the eventual outcome of all things. And so he regarded the present reproach that he would encounter by identifying with the people of God as the right and prudent thing to do. Interestingly, in standing with Israel he gained esteem with the Egyptians (Exodus 11:3).

Moses was looking to the reward. The Greek word used here is μισθαποδοσιαν. It refers to a requital, either good or bad. This word is used only by the author of Hebrews in the New Testament. This is the third time we see the word in Hebrews. The first time the author used it was to refer to the discipline of the Israelites for the breaking of the old covenant (2:2). This discipline was their "just recompense." The second time was at the end of chapter 10, when he assured the readers that there is "great reward" in enduring in the faith (10:35). His usage of the word here links Moses' actions back to those earlier warnings, hopefully to inspire the readers to imitate Moses rather than those he was leading. The contrast between Moses and those he led has stood in the background throughout Hebrews. The word μισθαποδοσιαν, describes perfectly what Moses was doing as a leader, and what the wilderness generation never did do. Moses looked at the bottom line return of both the way of Egypt and the way of the people of God. The Israelites he led could never see the payoff of the way in which Yahweh wanted to lead them. They kept wanting to go back to Egypt. Only faith enables us to see properly to push forward in the way of Yahweh.

The author describes the reproach incurred by Moses in associating with the Israelites as the "reproach of Christ." Interestingly, he does not call it the reproach of the Israelites, the reproach of God's people, or the reproach of Yahweh. It is the reproach of Christ. Jesus understood the Patriarchs, and those who followed in their faith, as having an understanding and awareness of him, the Christ (John 8:56; Matthew 22:42-45). At what point this awareness came to be in Moses is uncertain. But his writing contains clear references to this coming ruler (Genesis 49:10; Numbers 24:8-9, 17; compare particularly Genesis 49:9 with Numbers 24:9, then Daniel 11:30). Already at the time of Moses, to the few who were astute in the intentions of Yahweh, to reproach Israel was to reproach this coming Christ. Even in one as unholy as Balaam the son of Beor, we see this understanding. This choice of words by the author of Hebrews in the

phrase “reproach of Christ,” reflects that reading and understanding of the Old Testament.

**11:27 By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.**

Moses’ faith enabled him to see the power and strength available to those allied with Yahweh. In seeing this, the power of earthly and human forces becomes inconsequential. In the early hours of the exodus, when the people’s fear is rising over the pursuit of Pharaoh and his army and they begin to express regret, we see Moses summoning them to “Stand by and see the salvation of Yahweh!” (Exodus 14:10-14). In that situation he knew the intervention of God was imminent. Faith was enabling him to lead the people rather than following them in their fear.

We clearly see that Moses had no illusions of his own power and ability when he was initially called to lead Israel (Exodus 3:1-4:17). We see this same perspective later in his conversation with Yahweh after the incident of the golden calf. Moses wanted no part of leading the people if Yahweh’s presence was to be in any way compromised (Exodus 33:1-16). So Moses clearly was enabled to do what he did in leading Israel by what faith enabled him to see of Yahweh’s power and purposes. He was a different man when he had faith that he was speaking and leading for God.

**11:28 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn might not touch them.**

Having touched on the departure from Egypt, the author now reflects on the obedience of Moses in the institution of the Passover (Exodus 12). His obedience was such that it was imitated by all the Israelites. Their obedience saved their families from the plague of death that struck the firstborn in the land of Egypt. The event allowed them to leave Egypt in masse, and to receive from the Egyptians great wealth even as they departed (Exodus 12:35).

The entire event required great faith and trust. It required a belief that God would intervene directly in their behalf, pass through the land of Egypt during the night, visit every home and take the lives of every firstborn of both human and cattle belonging to their oppressors. They were to sprinkle the blood of a lamb on the doorpost of their homes as a sign to Yahweh of their identity, of their belief in his word. When he saw the sprinkled blood, he would pass over that household and so his judgment carried out by “the destroyer” would not rest on it (Exodus 12:13, 23). Even though their faith had been conditioned by the previous plagues, this was still a spectacular hope for a subdued and enslaved people to embrace. Moses led them in this act of faith, gave them thorough instruction and inspiration, and their obedience he presents in his account as complete. We hear nothing in his words of any who did not conform to his instructions. The event stands out as one of their golden moments as a nation in terms

of uniting in obedience to Yahweh (Jeremiah 2:1-2). It marks our calendars in the west to the present time and is likely the oldest of religious holidays in existence.

**11:29 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.**

In the Red Sea event the contrast between those Yahweh has chosen, and those He has not chosen is sharply contrasted. The author of Hebrews summarizes that in this short verse. The Israelites passed through the Red Sea as though it were dry land. The Egyptians attempted to do so and were drowned. The contrast is presented plainly and vividly to the readers.

The entire exodus experience became a signal event to affirm to humanity that the Creator, Yahweh, rescues and saves. The Red Sea incident was the apex of this affirmation of Yahweh's commitment to save. In Moses' accounting of it his faith was unwavering (Exodus 14:13). The faith of the people was more infantile and fragile. At this point, very early in the journey, they already show an instinct to turn back to Egypt (14:10-12). God had anticipated their fears and so specifically arranged their route to demonstrate his power that would work in their behalf in their coming journey conquest (Exodus 13:17-18). Their experience at the Red Sea was to be one of trembling faith that built faith that would lead to an even greater experience of him. The testimony of Moses is that when the people saw Yahweh's great power exercised in their behalf, they "feared Yahweh, and they believed in Yahweh and in his servant Moses" (Exodus 14:31). His account presents them on the far side of the Red Sea, and for the first time as a community of faith. It was a baptism of sorts (1 Corinthians 10:2). It initiated them into what was to be a very normative experience, the experience of Yahweh's strong and saving power working in their behalf, so that they could achieve his purposes for them.

**11:30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been encircled for seven days.**

The wilderness generation did not learn from the Red Sea experience as they should have. Three days after the event they were grumbling about the lack of water. In the following months this became their pattern. They displayed an astounding inability to remember the salvation of Yahweh and to trust in his goodness, this despite the astounding things they experienced.

The writer of Hebrews has warned the readers of falling into such a pattern of life. It is the great hazard of our humanity. Fittingly then, he jumps forward in the account from the Red Sea experience, past the 40 years of wandering, past the judgmental death of an entire generation. He picks up the account with the demonstration of faith at Jericho under the leadership of Joshua (Joshua 6). He effectively passes over an entire generation which he has already soundly condemned for their lack of faith.

The key thing about the Jericho experience was the method God used to conquer Jericho. It was bizarre by all standards of warfare. Yahweh instructed that for six days straight the men of war were to march around the city once each day, led by seven priests with seven trumpets and the ark, in silence. On the seventh day they were to march around the city seven times. After seven trips around the city, the priests were to blow the trumpets, the people were to shout, and the walls of the city would fall flat. So the people had to follow a routine that spanned seven days, and one that from a human point of view seemed irrelevant. They did so because they believed that Yahweh's instructions in the matter would result in his power being displayed in their behalf. He did as he had said he would do, and they quickly conquered the city.

**11:31 By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.**

The entire account of Rahab raises many questions. What exactly were the circumstances by which the two spies sent by Joshua stayed with a prostitute? How is it that Yahweh spares them by the lying and deceit of Rahab. How is it that the men agree to save her and her household, though she is a foreigner and an immoral one at that?

There are many unknowns in the story of Rahab. What is known is that she became a great demonstration of God's grace. She became the wife of a man named Salmon. This man Salmon was the son of the leader of the tribe of Judah named Nahshon (1 Chronicles 2:10). Nashon was the brother-in-law of Aaron (Exodus 6:23). To Salmon and Rahab was born Boaz (Matthew 1:5). Boaz married Ruth, to whom was born Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David. So we find Salmon and Rahab the harlot, squarely in the genealogy of Jesus the Christ (Matthew 1:4). It is an amazing story of Yahweh's great grace working in fallen and unclean people with a most glorious result. We find that the entire story is all explained by the presence of faith in Rahab.

The book of Joshua contains Rahab's clear and plain statement of faith in Yahweh (Joshua 2:9-11). Her faith explains her act, one that is cited twice by New Testament writers (Hebrews 11:31, James 2:25). The label "harlot" clings to her in both cases, as if to bear witness to the dramatic act of grace done in her behalf. By bringing Rahab briefly into his account, the author of Hebrews has captured the exclusive place faith occupies in the mind and heart of Yahweh. It has a distinct consequence during dealings with him. It is an irreplaceable necessity for all who would be his people, and its presence is a treasure that outweighs a litany of moral failures.

**11:32 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,**

The writer is beginning to move into the conclusion of the citations of faith that he has drawn from the Old Testament. He makes it clear to the readers however, that it is not because he has run out of examples that he is moving on. And so he cites this string of examples from various eras in Israel's history. The series of names reads like that recorded with Samuel's words (1 Samuel 12:11), with the addition of Samson, David, and the prophets. In this short list we have examples of faith from the era of the judges, the kings, and the prophets. Each of these persons is a faith story, each as spectacular as those already mentioned. Rather than singling the events of any one of them out, the author will simply give a general list of the achievements of these individuals and others from their eras. Each is an inspiring story. Calling the entire mass and volume of them to the minds of the readers makes for an inspiring journey that has motivated many over the centuries in the body of Christ to persevere in the faith.

**11:33 who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions,**

Beginning here is a list of great acts associated with individuals in the old covenant era. They would have been familiar to the readers, who would have been able to recall names associated with each of the acts. For example, though he has not been mentioned at all in the chapter, Joshua would certainly come to mind as a conqueror. Though not mentioned by name, Daniel is obviously being alluded as one whose faith shut the mouths of lions. The effect on the reader is to remind them that the Scriptures are an assemblage of faith stories, and that faith is itself one of the great themes of Scripture.

The list that begins here has a very positive tone to it. The acts carried out in faith relate to the material realm and the spiritual realm. They are acts that involve moving the kingdom forward. They are the kinds of works we would be attracted to mimic. Then in the middle of verse 35, the tone will abruptly change. The author's list will suddenly take on an ominous tone, speaking of torture that was endured and even death. The entire list reflects the seasonal nature of kingdom life. Whether the personal challenge of the hour is to conquer or simply die a martyr's death, faith enables us to rise to it or to stoop to it and endure in it. Faith sometimes involves a pleasant, enviable work. But it also involves work that most would apart from faith shun. From a human point of view it sometimes involves gaining great commendation and acclaim, but perhaps just as often it involves a loss of dignity and personal acclaim. Either way, with either sets of trappings, faith is that which God seeks to inspire in us.

**11:34 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.**

As heroic deeds are recalled by the author of Hebrews from the record of Scripture, some we associate immediately with a single event. When we think of those who faced the peril of fire, who cannot think of Daniel's friends (Dan. 3)? On the other hand, when we think of those who escaped the edge of the sword, or who from weakness were made strong, who became mighty in war, or who put foreign armies to flight, the examples or each are numerous beginnings in Genesis with Abraham (Genesis 14:13-16). These things were simply common occurrences among the people of Israel and could have been even more common.

Under the terms of the old covenant, we see clearly that these things were to be the rule rather than the exception among the people of God (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). Yahweh knew that covenant would fail, but in its terms, we see his vision for a restored humanity that he intends to bring about through his great salvation. It is a very different strain of humanity. They will rule creation for him as originally intended and do so with the great might with which he enables them, all because of his great grace.

**11:35 Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection;**

In this verse we see a shift occur, and it is done very deftly by the author. The shift itself is in the type of outcome persons of faith are reported as experiencing. It has all been very positive, with great victories in visible, material ways up to this point. Citations of that type of faith-victory will give way to those whose victory was simply to endure in suffering through faith and trust in Yahweh.

The author sets this shift up through focusing on two separate resurrection experiences. The first was one that occurred in past time. In speaking of women who received back their dead, the writer is likely referring to the widow whose son was raised from the dead by Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-24), and the Shunammite woman whose son was raised from the dead by Elisha (2 Kings 4:18-37). These were wonderful blessings that God provided in earthly life for these two women. This phrase fits with the citations that have gone previously.

The second resurrection experience the author reports is one that related to the future. It fits with the citations of faith that will follow. This resurrection is classified as better. The former was a return to the present life, in which weakness and death was once again experienced. The future resurrection is better in the sense that one is raised never to die again. They are raised to a life of immortality and strength (1 Corinthians 15:42-49). Their present was awful. The examples cited in the following verses will bear that out. They endured intense pain of every sort. Only faith made their endurance possible. The author says here that they did not accept their release. By this he means they did not compromise conviction to escape so that they might enjoy more of the

present world. They endured. They did so in faith. They did so because, like Abraham and others, they had set their vision on a better city that was well-founded. Their quest was not for a piece of the earthly dream. It was a quest for the reality of the heavens. They lost in terms of this life, but in the loss had great gain in terms of eternity.

**11:36 and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment.**

From a continual stream of earthly triumphs, the account shifts to recall a morbid trend of sufferings. They were not merely emotional, as in mocking. The mocking was accompanied by scourging and imprisonments. This shift that has occurred in the general tone of the examples is critical in the discussion of faith. As the earlier examples indicate, faith produces that which is extraordinary. It cannot be explained in terms of normal human experience because it is the result of Yahweh's power at work. These examples indicate the same idea, applied to the complexities of the spiritual and emotional lives of people. They are stories of extra-ordinary performance. But they are stories of composure, fortitude and resolve when winning was not in God's plan for his people. It appears that these types of stories were much more appropriate to the author's audience. This shift then, may have been made just for them and their present situation. Whatever the reason, one has not represented the faith-life completely until they have spoken to its history of producing composure in suffering.

**11:37 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**

The Scriptures do not record the detail of the suffering of such prophets as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel and the other writing and speaking prophets. We have enough in the record to know that their lives involved substantial persecution (Jeremiah 37:11-16; 38:1-6; 2 Chronicles 24:21; 2 Samuel 22:18; 1 Kings 19:10). There is considerable tradition surrounding such men. That tradition says that Isaiah was the one being referred to by the author of Hebrews here as being sawn in half. The Septuagint version gives sheepskin, and the material of which Elijah's mantel was made (2 Kings 2:8, 13). But there is much tradition that may have been available to the author and readers that has simply been lost.

The question posed by Stephen, "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?" indicates a sordid tradition in Israel of lashing out against those who spoke truth in Israel (Acts 7:52). Jesus affirmed that this had been the tradition of Israel's pseudo-spiritual leaders (Matthew 23:29-37). The author is likely referring here to some of the lost detail of this horrible tradition. Jesus taught that such violent and depraved kind of reaction to truth would continue (Matthew 23:33-36; Luke 11:49-50). It is not surprising then that the readers had experienced such reaction to their

message, had persevered, and now needed to rise to endure more (10:32-39). These stories would help them have the proper expectation and mindset to endure.

**11:38 (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.**

This verse starts with a parenthetical statement that is such that it leaps from the page and grabs us. It is certainly what many have billed it as the greatest of all epitaphs. More profound, however, than what the statement says about the persons, is what it implicitly says about God. This short statement captures the value Yahweh places on faith itself and on people of faith. It reflects just how unique and distinct he views them among all his creative acts. It allows us to see that faith elevates humanity and restores great dignity to them. It clearly affirms what the author has already stated, that without faith it is impossible to please God. But it adds to that earlier statement the idea that in seeing faith, Yahweh could not be more highly pleased. By faith our depravity is taken from his view, and we are greatly esteemed by him. So faith brings about a remarkable transformation in our status.

By placing this statement amid a general citation of acts of faith, the author gives added emphasis to it. It stops the reader and backs them up to read it again. It is a point of inspiration. It helps set us up for the summons of 12:1, particularly the greatness of the company of witnesses—the "cloud". This body of witnesses is ever-present, witnessing to us Yahweh's nearness to those of faith.

Having placed in his account this pithy statement, the author resumes his citation of acts that faith produced in people. Three things are listed that affirm the idea that faith in Yahweh has enabled individuals to cast aside all creature comforts in the interest of advancing his interests. We see that faith has a potent impact on the most basic human instincts, that of avoiding pain and discomfort. Being faithful to the task he set before them has led people to make great personal sacrifices. And so in the Old Testament we read of great men of power like Elijah, who deserved the best of fare, reduced by the unbelief and hatred of others to hiding in caves (1 Kings 19:9).

**11:39 And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised,**

Very soon the author will move from history to the present world of himself and the readers. But first he will make two observations about those whom he has referred to in this long list of examples he has provided of faith. Some of the persons he has named. In the case of others he has cited their commonly known acts that the original readers would recognize. All had two things in common.

The first thing they had in common was that they gained approval through their faith. There were differences in their spiritual backgrounds. There were distinctions in how

they pursued their faith later during their life. But they had this in common. They gained approval through their faith. The word approval is an important one in this phrase. It means to have been affirmed by corroborating testimony. It is the word that was used three times in the first five verses of the chapter describing God's testimonial approval of the ancestors of Israel (11:2), then of Abel and Enoch (11:4-5). So in the context it is the approval of Yahweh that is being spoken of. This all-important approval is gained through faith.

The second thing held in common by this company of people is that they did not receive what was promised. This obviously does not mean they received nothing, for in many of the cases cited there was an immediate objective gained, and a victory of some sort won. Nor is the promise being spoken of here primarily that of eternal life, since to some degree physical death offers some immediate experience of that. The promise here can only be referring to the experience of the Messianic kingdom, that of the ruler from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10; Numbers 24:8-9; 17-19), the prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy18:15-19; 34:10-12), who would establish justice and pass along to the saints their rightful inheritance (Daniel 2:44; 7:13-28). This is the heavenly country referred to earlier in the chapter by the author, that these were all anticipating (14-16).

**11:40 because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect.**

These all died without receiving the promised experience of the Messiah because the fullness of time had not yet arrived (Galatians 4:4). God had in mind particular people that had to be born, events that had to occur first, and a particular season that had to develop and come about on earth. When the time was right the better things he had promised would come to be.

The author of Hebrews saw what he himself and the readers had as being a "better thing." His entire treatise has been defining ways in which all that Christ had brought about was better. The result of the work of Christ is that we have a better high priest (7:23-28). Ours is a better hope (7:19). Ours is a better covenant (8:6), based on better promises (8:6). This had all come about because we have been provided with a better sacrifice (9:23). Though there is more blessing to come, the person central to the promise has come and done his great work on behalf of all who will be children of God. The stage is now set for the prime moment when the rule of the Messiah will begin and be shared in by God's family, who were now reunited with Yahweh the Creator through the blood of Jesus Christ. The believers of the author's era were anticipating this great event (Acts 2:19-21). Nothing remained to be done. Something better, namely Christ and all that was embodied in him, had set the stage.

The bringing to perfection spoken of here is expressed by the word τελιωθωσιν. In usage this word describes completeness or maturity, not a flawless moral state. This

completeness or maturity that God is bringing about can be seen in several ways. There is a completeness that came to God's family in the Divine-legal sense through the death of Christ and his satisfactory payment for our sins. It was symbolized by the rending of the temple veil at the death of Christ (Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45), when all that stood between us and God was removed. There is the maturity that we can reach in the faith that is more universally available to us through the Holy Spirit's indwelling since the death of Christ. There is in the experience of Christ the sense in which our spirits are made perfect, and rest in the presence of Christ when we die physically (Philippians 1:21-23; Hebrews 12:23). There is the maturity this creation will come to when Jesus becomes its ruler, when his children are raised from the dead and given new bodies, and rule with him (Romans 8:18-23). There is the perfection in the sense of the English meaning of the word that will come about when God creates the new heavens and the new earth for us to inhabit. The promises relating to all these things are those which many died in faith anticipating. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that they did not achieve any of them. We live in better times, experiencing the earnest of our inheritance, the lead edge of the promises that God is bringing about.

# HEBREWS 12

**12:1 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,**

This verse begins with a word used only one other time in the New Testament (1 Thessalonians 4:8).

Though it is rendered with a very common English word "therefore," it is not any of the more common Greek words that we normally render "therefore." Using this more seldom used word is a way of giving emphasis to all the statements the author has recently made, and a way of alerting the audience that some important conclusions are to follow. The author is likely reaching all the way back to his exhortation to us to "draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith" (10:22), and certainly to all the examples of faith just cited in chapter 11. The presence of this transitional word means that if we wish to capture the mind and heart of the author, it is important that we not separate ourselves from the text at the close of chapter 11.

The Israelites who left Egypt, a generation the author has referred to often, experienced life under a cloud. This cloud was a visible reminder to them of Yahweh's presence with them in their great undertaking of faith. It was to be a source of assurance to them to help them believe and trust in Yahweh. That cloud is referred to by Paul with the Greek term νεφελην (1 Corinthians 10:2), a term which is used 26 times in the New Testament.

The word the author uses here for cloud is a different one. It describes a great mass of cloud without the sharp outline of a single, solitary cloud such as a thunderhead. The word he uses is νεφοσ, and it occurs only here in the New Testament. In our day we might refer to the presence of such a cloud as a condition of cloudiness. The author apparently wishes to emphasize the idea of the greatness of the size of this cloud that surrounds us. So he chooses the word νεφοσ, a large cloud, and he precedes it with the pronoun τοσουτον, meaning "so vast as," to further emphasize its greatness. This is consistent with the idea that we have a better covenant, better promises, and a better high priest. Our cloud is different. It is larger and it is better in terms of stimulating our faith. It consists of the testimony of people in real-life. It reminds us of Yahweh's presence with his people, despite their own weakness and imperfection. We have more than the Israelites to encourage us. Our cloud is the extensive written testimony of the Old Testament. The New Testament writers regarded these writings as an enormous asset (2 Peter 1:19).

This cloud is a figure of a great company of witnesses. When the Scripture speaks of "witnesses" of faith events, it is not simply referring to those who observed and can reliably speak of what it looked like to the eyes. It is speaking of those who

participated in it and experienced it (Acts 1:21-22; 10:41; 1 Thessalonians 2:9-10). When we read of individuals like those cited by the author from the Old Testament, we are reading of their real-life experience of Yahweh's power and partnership. Their experiences are a testimony of his covenant love and faithfulness. Their testimony goes beyond that of the physical senses. It is physical, but also emotional, mental, and spiritual.

The author says that we are "compassed about" by this great cloud of witnesses. He uses the word περικειμαι. This is the word he used earlier to speak of the infirmities that "encompassed" Christ in becoming human (5:2). Such bodily weaknesses permeate the entire experience of living with a fallen body in a fallen world. The word is used by Luke of being bound or impaired physically in some way (Luke 17:2; Acts 28:10). So it is a word associated with limitation and difficulty. The readers were enveloped in trial and suffering. But they could be equally enveloped by the real-life experiences of this great cloud of witnesses. It appears that through the choice of this word the author may have been attempting to strengthen the association between a time of trouble and the faith building capacity of the testimony of Scripture.

Having captured through the imagery of "a great cloud of witnesses" all the faith stories of chapter 11, the author will now move one step closer to his exhortation. That exhortation is simply this, "Let us run with patience the race set before us." So he is switching imagery, creating in our minds the challenge of a race. The cloud of witnesses are now not just witnesses to us of Yahweh's faithfulness. They are witnessing our faith in action. Spread before them is the earthly scene in which we are living out our faith. This idea, that we are being watched, will be recalled again towards the end of this chapter (18-24).

Before and after the exhortation to run the race, the author attaches important simultaneous actions that define what is involved in running with endurance. So we have given to us a practical understanding of things that must happen if we are to rise to the exhortation and follow through.

A laying aside of encumbrances precedes the call to run. This is standard practice when engaging in a race of any type. Unnecessary weight and restriction must be laid aside. The term rendered "lay aside" is αποθεμενοι. As the English translation indicates it means to put away. It is the term used of taking off an outer garment, a cloak, to engage more effectively in physical activity. It is used once in this way in the New Testament (Acts 7:58). It was adopted by New Testament authors to portray the critical role our personal actions play in the sanctification process. We must execute decisions to separate ourselves from what conflicts with Yahweh's agenda for us (Eph 4:22, 25; James 1:21; 1 Peter 2:1). So the term represents taking the important first steps inspired by the Spirit, so that an end might be achieved. That is important. These things are not the end. But they are an important beginning.

The encumbrances are referred to by that general term, rendered "weight" in some English translations.

The word refers to a prominent mass. The idea of heaviness is not so prominent in the term as is the idea of impediment of progress. There are things which simply slow us down in our pursuit of the faith, that are not essential to our lives. They may not be sin in and of themselves. But they become sin to us because of this. They could include very normal earthly concerns.

To this general term the author adds a more specific term to define what must be set aside. He calls us to set aside sin, and it is described as "easily besetting" sin. The adjective used by the author to describe sin is ευπεριστατον. This adjective is a curious word, not occurring in the rest of the New Testament, in the Septuagint, nor in the Classics. It is formed by joining the Greek words for "well-standing-around." It may be a term that is drawing on the imagery of a race. As such it could be a veiled reference to the skillful, intentional, and strategic hindering of a runner by other runners in a race, calling attention to sin's hindering nature. It could be meant to draw the reader's mind to the spectators the role of just watching as opposed to running—calling attention to the inactivity in the faith that sin produces. Nothing is more natural than for us as humans to have sin turn us into mere spectators in the race of faith. And nothing is more certain than the enemy placing people in our path to slow us down. Whatever subtleties may have been intended in the term are unknown to us. What seems certain is that the author is portraying sin as very naturally occurring in us, and as very debilitating to the life of faith.

We must be alert to sin's lethargy, identify it, and discard it as a sprinter would a warm-up suit. This action is presented to us by the author in a way that we understand it as a preliminary step, something done before we attempt to run. It is also presented to us as the same challenge that all the heroes of the faith mentioned in chapter 11 had to do. This is captured by the English translations through the little word "also." We also, as those in previous eras, must lay aside encumbrances. This is the great human challenge in living the faith.

In the Greek text before the exhortation and command to run, the little prepositional phrase δι υπομονησ occurs. It means "with patience," or "with endurance." Taken together with the command, "a patient kind of running," or "an enduring kind of running." The author is referring to a strategic style of running one adopts with the intent of having strength for the duration of the event. A patient or enduring runner paces themselves. They do not let the actions of other runners divert them from their focus. A patient, enduring runner has a plan to either manage their available energy or to replenish it along the way. A patient and enduring runner knows well their capabilities and plans for them. There is a myriad of things that can be cited to draw parallels between running events and the living out of the faith. The primary message

of the author is that we keep running and stay in the race. He is concerned that the readers have quit or might soon quit (10:36).

The command is delivered through what is called in Greek grammar the hortatory subjunctive. It is a common means of delivering a command. It is delivered in the first person plural. The giver of the command is presented as one participating in the desired action, responding obediently with the hearers. It reflects the mentality the spiritual leaders of the day had, that of servant leadership. They summoned followers up to the spiritual plane they themselves were committed to living on. They viewed themselves as needing to practice the very things they were demanding of others.

The author refers to the race as the one that is "set before" us. That might lead us to make the application that everyone has a prescribed race ordained for them to run. While that is a legitimate point that can be deduced from Scripture the idea here is not that the race is ordained, but that it is clearly marked out for us so that we understand that which Yahweh wants us to do. The idea is that it is "laid before" us, as one might clearly mark a course to be run or might supply a map of the course. It's the clear description is in view more so than its predetermined nature. We are to patiently run the course that Christ has laid out for us. The next verse will show that he made it plain to us by running it himself.

**12:2 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.**

The author adapts from the figure of the race one more idea. It is the idea of a proper focus, of being preoccupied with the finish. As is his custom, the author uses a word that expresses a very precise idea in his exhortation. "Fixing our eyes" is the rendering of the Greek word αφορωντεσ. It is a compound formed by prefixing the preposition meaning "away" to the word meaning "to stare," or "to look intently." It is used only here in the New Testament. So in the etymology of the word is the idea of looking away from other things. That is the idea the author is trying to convey to the readers. There are many things that could distract them, if they allow themselves to focus on the immediate. He wants them to be purposeful, and focused on their practice of the faith, Jesus being their lone standard and example.

The author singles out two ideas about Christ that make him the logical object of our focus. Both ideas he relates to "the faith." He employs the definite article to identify Christ with the specific way of thinking and acting that he has been instructing the readers about. It was "the faith" practiced by everyone from Abel to Daniel, Isaiah, and the other great figures of faith that have been cited. It is not a new or recent concoction of ideas. It is the way of life that would never have occurred among humanity if not for the revelation of Yahweh. Jesus Christ has been revealed to us as

the central figure of our faith. Christianity's teaching from its inception has been that we are incomplete until we are conformed completely to Jesus Christ.

First, the author says, Jesus is the "author" of that faith. The English term "author" is somewhat misleading. It connotes to us the idea of origination. Though a case can easily be made for the idea of Christ originating the faith, the use of this word suggests something different is the author's intention here. This word occurs earlier in Hebrews where Jesus is said to be the "chief leader" over several offspring that Yahweh would bring unto glory (2:10). This is the word αρχηγον, and it conveys that Jesus is both the authority of the faith and the credible model or example of it. When focusing on Jesus, we see that which he commands us to do, and we also are inspired as to the way we are to carry it out. So he is the chief leader of that which is to shape our lives, and that idea of authority and example is captured in this first term the author uses of Jesus here.

Second, the author presents Jesus as the "perfecter" of that faith. He is reminding the readers of Jesus' role as our great high priest, one who represents us to Yahweh, who understands the nature of our weakness and so imparts to us that which our "race" demands of us (4:15-16). The word rendered perfecter is derived from the same root as the word used earlier by the author in calling the readers to maturity (6:1). The primary idea it expresses in Scripture is just that, maturity or completeness the arrival at one's potential. Jesus can be seen as both the One to whom we can turn in seeking completeness and as the One who works for our maturity apart from what we might be actively seeking. Like a parent with their own children, he seeks our maturity whether we are seeking it. The readers are seeing Jesus as the One who died to bring them into Yahweh's family, and as the One whom they should mimic and who continues to work to reproduce his own character in them.

The author speaks of an apparent connection between the joy that was "laid before" Jesus, and his enduring the suffering of the cross. This is the second time in as many verses that he uses a derivative of the word προκειμαι, rendered by the English "laid before." Other than these two uses, this term occurs one other time in the book of Hebrews (6:18). It refers there to the revelation of that which is God's will or plan for us, that which lies plainly before us in the Scripture. Here in this verse we see that a certain joy was plainly laid before Christ. The laying before Christ of this joy is not an easy thing for us to conceive of, since he always existed, and so from eternity past had knowledge of his own incarnation and the work of the cross that would go with that.

To understand this message of the author, we must first understand precisely what he is saying. The NASB and most other English versions present to us the idea that Jesus endured the cross "for" the joy set before him. This gives the impression that Christ was motivated by a future result. In other words, he was looking forward in time to accomplished redemption and to his own exaltation, and so, motivated by this eventual result, Jesus endured the cross. However, the author uses the Greek

preposition αντι here. It is a word that calls attention to a contrast between two opposing things. The word "for" does not really capture its function in this sentence. By choosing this word instead of other terms that could have conveyed purpose or result, the author seems to be saying that Jesus endured the suffering of the cross "in contrast to" the joy set before him. So the message is not primarily that Christ was motivated to hang on the cross by the reward of exaltation.

There are two ways we should understand the timing of this thought process, that is, when Jesus was thinking in this way. First, this mentality began or perhaps was always present in Christ in eternity past, when he decided to lay aside his glory to bear humanity's sin on the cross (Philippians 2:5-9). This volitional act by Jesus led to his condescension, his laying aside of his glory to take on humanity to carry out the role of sin-bearer. Secondly, Christ embraced such a mentality as a human, as he matured and became aware through the Scriptures of his role in the plan of God. Laid before him in Scripture was the fact that this was Yahweh's will for him, that there would be a joyful ending, not only his own exaltation, but the redemption and reclamation of humanity. That glorious ending demanded his suffering. And so, in contrast to that glorious ending, he ran the humiliating and painful race that would make the ending possible. This was an eternal sacrifice for him, in that once becoming a man, he remains forever a man. He was not motivated by his exaltation, for that was a step down from the existence he had before the incarnation. He was motivated simply by his own nature and character as God.

The author uses the classic biblical word for endurance, which is formed by joining the word for "under" to the word "remain." Jesus submitted to, or "remained under," the pathway of the cross and finished his work on it. This is the kind of endurance the readers had demonstrated (10:32) and are being summoned back to. The author adds to this idea of remaining under the idea that Jesus "despised the shame" of all this. Humiliation and shame are very natural human emotions that accompany moments and seasons of weakness or failure, either real or perceived. The humiliation that was part of the Lord's entire incarnation experience, where he voluntarily laid aside his glory so that many denied his identity, did not instigate a response in him. The author chooses a word that etymologically conveys the idea that Jesus "stared down" the shame of it all. That is inspiring imagery. Jesus' example calls us to look such natural emotions that arise from within us in the face, and so intimidate them, that their sway over us is negated.

We are then reminded of the outcome of Christ's sacrificial laying aside of his great glory. The author makes a statement that parallels the teaching of the Apostle Paul (Philippians 2:5-11). Yahweh has bestowed on Jesus the position of sitting at his own right hand. This is the fuller statement of the meaning behind the titles of Messiah, or Christ. Throughout Scripture this position of sitting at the right hand, is recognized as that of the one to whom the full authority of the sovereign has been given. So though Jesus remains forever a man once incarnated, the glory and function of his position as

the Son of God has been restored to him. This was the persistent teaching of the Apostolic company (Acts 2:22-36; 5:29-32; 7:56). This description accurately portrays the equality of the Son with the Father yet affirms the submission within the Godhead of the Son to the Father (John 5:19).

**12:3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart.**

This verse consists of two phrases linked to the previous verse by the conjunction γαρ. It adds further thought to the exhortation of verse 1, to run with endurance.

The word order in the first phrase of this verse is such that it begins and ends with similar sounding words. These words are both derived from the word λογοσ, a word utilized by New Testament writers to speak of revelation and truth systems. The word that begins the phrase is αναλογισασθε, which is a command to contemplate and to think over. In this word's prefix, ανα, the idea of repetition is conveyed. So the author is commanding a repeated consideration and learning of Jesus Christ. The last word in the phrase is αντιλογιαν, which sounds like the first word in the phrase. This word has been used by the author to speak of a contradiction (7:7), and a dispute (6:16). It is an expression of the sordid motives at work in those not submitted to Yahweh. These sordid motives lead to their twisted and perverted reasoning and destructive behavior. Jude describes those characterized by this as like Korah, foolish, dangerous, and morally compromised (Jude 11-16).

In the first phrase then, the author has contrasted what safeguards our thinking from this that naturally takes root in humanity. It is the contemplation of Jesus Christ, and specifically how he endured this contradiction in others that took aim at him.

The second phrase of the verse is a statement of the practical result of this self-rule, the ability energized by the Holy Spirit to rule over our own hearts. It guards against weariness of mind, literally "of soul." Weariness of soul refers to that which the author was likely seeing in the readers, a slowness in their inner beings regarding the things of the Spirit. It is a loss of spiritual vibrancy and energy, a lethargy that sets in because of nothing more than allowing ourselves to think by mere instinct. The result of this inner lapse is the outward one captured through the word rendered by the NASB with the expression "lose heart." That is the rendering of the word εκλυομενοι. This word expresses the physical collapse that occurs when we don't eat (Matthew 15:32). Elsewhere it expresses what happens emotionally and spiritually when we are not shepherded (Matthew 9:36). It describes what happens to Christians so that they are kept from being faithful (Galatians 6:9). Here it means to cease from the focus on Christ that is the source of spiritual health.

The author will go on to describe how the readers have fallen short in their imitation of and obedience to Christ.

**12:4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;**

The author speaks words here that should be held in the mind and recalled frequently by followers of Christ. Particularly within American Christianity, our sufferings and trials for the most part are not worthy of comparing with those of Christ. This thought brings us a perspective that is critical. Many have shed blood over the centuries to safeguard and convey the faith to others. In the moment our difficulties can seem over-whelming. But in most cases, we have not had our blood shed for the cause of the truth. Our challenge is still that of rising to the level of sacrifice displayed by Christ.

As noble a path as the readers had walked (10:32-34), this was their reality. They were losing heart over difficulties that fell far short of those incurred by Christ. They had not learned to draw strength in faith from him to the degree they should have. They were under-developed. Through the Spirit they had greater capacity for eternal impact.

There are important ideas expressed here by the author with respect to our actions against sin. The first is the idea of resistance. The word he uses is αντικατεστητε. Like many words in Hebrews, it is used only here in the New Testament. The word καθιστημι occurs numerous times, however. It is a word that describes authoritative appointment (Matthew 24:47; Acts 7:10), a judicial action (Romans 5:19), strong protective action (Acts 17:15), and ordination (Titus 1:5). The author has used καθιστημι several times to express these ideas (2:7; 5:1; 7:28; 8:3). Now he takes this word and prefixes to it the preposition αντι. This indicates that he wants to express action that contrasts with that which establishes, ordains, and brings about sin. So we can understand this as a call to action that undoes sin. Christ leads this effort, first by what he accomplished through his work on the cross (Romans 5:19; 2 Corinthians 5:21), and second through what he accomplishes through our suffering, which helps complete that work (Colossians 1:24). Our Christ inspired efforts teach the truth of the gospel and so undo in people what slavery to sin has brought about. We can conclude that the author is not summoning us to a defensive kind of resistance with respect only to our personal sin. The word he uses reflects the Church on the offensive as God's instrument, retaking ground lost in the fall of Adam. We are attacking, not simply standing our ground.

The second important idea expressed here concerning our actions against sin is that of striving. In the grammar of the sentence the undoing of sin is the main action we are called to. Striving is a participle meant to shed greater light on this experience of undoing sin. The word the author uses, αντ αγωνιζομενοι, also occurs only here in the New Testament. However the word αγονιζομαι, from which it is derived occurs seven times. In most of these uses it speaks of expending physical and mental effort to achieve an important moral and spiritual objective (1 Corinthians 9:25; 1 Timothy 6:12). It means to contend. The author prefixes to this word the preposition anti, likely to emphasize the idea of us being an opposing force, seeking to do what is opposite to

the norm. There is a literary effect produced in the phrase by two words that begin with the "anti" sound. The author attracts attention to this idea; the faith life goes against the normal moral movement of humanity. In our faith we are swimming upstream and are attempting to move others along with us.

It seems that in each phrase the author has composed thus far since late in chapter ten, the readers are being pointed to the idea that endurance is required of them and that the payoff of faith should not be expected to loom up on the horizon quickly.

**12:5 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;"**

The author will now quote from the Septuagint, Proverbs 3:11-12. Those verses contain an exhortation that the readers have forgotten. By forgetting he is not necessarily speaking of them not being able to recall the words, but certainly of not applying it to their own trials.

The most common metaphor used of believers in Scripture is that of children. God has likely chosen it because the experience of being a child is common to all humanity, and that of being a parent is common to most. So we are addressed often in the Scripture as sons. The feelings and responsibilities that go with these roles we should ponder well because they instruct us regarding our relationship to God and what he is doing in our lives.

This quote from Proverbs is a classic one in this regard. The exhortation was likely written by Solomon, a man familiar with the diverse looks of God's corrective actions. In this section of it we see two types of actions of God that we will experience. It speaks first of how God "disciplines" us. That is the rendering of the word παιδειασ. It refers to all that must be done in child-rearing from instruction and tutoring to corrective action. So the author is calling to mind the constant concern of good parents to shape their children in such a way that they succeed. If we know enough to embrace that responsibility, we should certainly expect God to exercise it, but to do it more precisely, more consistently, and more effectively. In the context, the readers are being challenged to seek out God's objective in allowing the hardship and difficulty to crowd into their lives. His hand is in their circumstances. So this section speaks of God training us.

Second, it speaks of God rebuking us. The Scripture reports God doing this through people, through written words, and through circumstances. Rebuking or admonishing refers to firm words that come in these varied ways to us. A rebuke is usually a warning of danger, and often of impending consequences. It is never easy to receive. There are numerous stories in Scripture that demonstrate the catastrophe that comes when we refuse a rebuke from Yahweh, and the blessing that comes when we are attentive to it.

We also see in this section of the quote from Proverbs two commands that are given to us regarding God's "child-rearing." First, we are not to marginalize the value of this process, caring little about it. It is the most critical thing to do in life, to be conformed to his desire for us. The original readers were marginalizing his love and care for them by running from hard things.

Second, we are not to faint when we are being rebuked by him. It is not to seem traumatic. We are not to allow ourselves to see it as shameful or punitive. We are not to allow our minds to entertain the thought that we cannot endure it. It is certain that what God has allowed, he will provide grace to endure (1 Corinthians 10:13). Our trials are not uniquely great. They are "common" to all. They likely fall short of those experienced by Christ. Fainting likely refers to the subtle work of pride that makes us overdramatize our own experience and viewing hardship apart from faith and confidence in God's grace and empowerment. Solomon's father ran forward to engage Goliath, and in that act modeled what faith can make of us in trial if we engage it.

**12:6 For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives."**

This verse provides the rationale and inspiration for the exhortation of the previous verse—not to take lightly the discipline of the Lord. There are three verbs in this sentence that describe actions of Yahweh toward his offspring. All are in the present tense, describing actions in progress. So we have three simultaneous actions of the Lord that his offspring are presently experiencing.

The first of these three verbs is the verb αγαπαω, which means to love. This action of love is presented as the basis upon which Yahweh carries out the other two actions. This is consistent with the way in which his actions are presented in the revelation of the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:8; Jeremiah 31:3; Hosea 11:1). Yahweh's covenant love is of great significance that is hard to overstate. It is a "first principle" in contemplating the actions of Yahweh and his Son, Jesus Christ.

The second of these three verbs is παιδευω, which we have already seen refers to all the actions that are a part of responsible child-rearing. It is the logical outflow of love toward one's child, to take every action possible to insure their blessing and success. There is always present this equipping process in every believer's life—action either initiated by Yahweh or approved by him that is intended for our ultimate benefit.

The third of these three verbs is μαστιγοω, meaning to flog or scourge. The Hebrew text of Proverbs 3:12 uses a word that speaks of judicial reproof and rebuke. The Septuagint rendered the text with this

Greek term that seems harsher, a term which throughout the New Testament refers to flogging (Matthew 10:17; John 19:1). It is possible that by the time of the Septuagint translation, the translators saw within the range of meaning of the Hebrew word not

only the judicial rebuke a behavior incurred, but the ensuing punishment. And so they chose to use the word flogging, a common punishment in the ancient world. It is certainly possible that the Septuagint translators worked from a different Hebrew text on this point than we have. At any rate, we have the Spirit's inspired use of the Septuagint in this text, which is a matter that must be pondered often in the study of Hebrews, whose author references the Septuagint repeatedly. It is apparent that Yahweh wished us to consider such severe sufferings as still an instrument of some purpose in his plan, even as Christ was called upon to do. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that Yahweh, knowing the eventuality of the scourging of his Son, brought about purposefully the Septuagint rendering.

The message of these verses is that severe and unjust suffering should not cause us to doubt God's sovereignty, or his love for us. It should not cause us to lose heart and faint. He is present in such things as he was present and working in the sufferings of Christ. His sovereign power enables him to justly reward and compensate us for any injustice suffered. He can bring about justice and good despite the worst that injustice and evil can inflict.

**12:7 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?**

This verse begins with the preposition εισ. Often when this preposition occurs it is signaling a statement of the result that comes about from a certain action. That is the case here. We are being told the result of endurance. That result is παιδειαν, the recurring term in this passage for the training and tutoring God brings in our lives to help us mature and grow into whom he desires us to be. It is certain that such maturity comes about because of God. But it is also certain that it results only as we endure the process, determining to extract from life's moments all that Yahweh wishes us to learn from them.

The author's point to the readers is once again that they must endure. There are great victories for them that relate to eternal matters in the difficulties they are wearying of. The ability to endure is, by itself, worth a great deal. If it is all a particular season develops in us, then the season will prove to be of great value. The ability to hunker down and repeatedly do the difficult, the unpleasant, and the routine is uncommon in humanity. This alone will distinguish us in the work God has for us. It will open doors for us that would not otherwise be open.

In the second part of this verse the author begins a statement that will affirm that we should be expecting difficulty as the norm in our lives. He begins with the statement that God deals with us as with sons. Later it will be clear that he means by this that God deals with us as those that are his offspring, because of his willful and intentional choice. We were anticipated and desired, and so now we are loved and cherished. We

are viewed by him as ones he is particularly responsible for. All of this is captured in this statement that God deals with us as with sons.

The last thing we see in the verse is a question, a rhetorical one—one to which there is a single, obvious answer. "What son is there whom his father does not discipline?" The answer will be referred to in the next verse. It is, "None!" or "Only a bastard!" In the normal human experience a father disciplines a son. That is an essential and normal part of the relationship. Any other condition is considered dysfunctional.

A critical message is beginning to emerge in this passage. It is this; the presence of difficulty that is of the sort that demands endurance of us, is a sign to us of our belonging to Yahweh and of our being loved deeply by him. This is an important observation. One might conclude from a cursory reading of Scripture that blessing means ease and a lack of obstacles in one's path. But God is much too concerned with who we are becoming to allow this. Specifically, he is too concerned with our ability to trust in his goodness, to allow us to live a life where every door is propped open for us. So we will encounter difficulty. We will encounter those things for which there are no quick and easy solutions. They will be things that require persistent, ongoing courses of action carried out in conjunction with him, in which we must endure. They will require routine of us that will tend to wear us down. In this resistance our maturity and completeness as his offspring will become more visible.

We must clarify that the strength God wishes to develop in us is that of faith—our ability to trust him, to draw from him, and to be content to subject our desires to this. In the end παιδιαν yields more than the normal human quality of self-discipline, though it shares common ground with that. It is distinguishable in that it brings about self-sacrifice, a specific focus on his objectives rather than the more normal human pursuits of, say "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

**12:8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.**

Instruction, training, discipline, are all a part of one's existence as a child. This has been true of all children, during all eras of history, in all the earth's diverse cultures. The only exception is in the case of the illegitimate, those for one reason or another who are unloved. There have always been children, aside from those orphaned, who for various reasons have been emotionally abandoned and left to raise themselves. These are at a distinct disadvantage, though some with these roots have made notable contributions and have achieved at high levels (Judges 11:1-3).

The author's point is that structured and purposeful parenting are a part of family life, and this is particularly so in the family of Yahweh. He is a concerned Father, very much involved in a personal way with all who belong to him. We will experience in life hard

things from him or at least allowed by him for the purpose of building in us enduring faith.

**12:9 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?**

The author has just spoken of the normalcy of discipline. It is an expectation of parents that they discipline their children. It is present where there is love. He will now contrast our experience of discipline from our earthly fathers with that of Yahweh, whom he refers to as "the Father of spirits." This is a clear reference to the fact that he has brought about our existence, one that will endure for all eternity.

Our fathers are those who brought about our conception in the womb of our mothers. Our physical existence, and many of our physical traits, can be traced to them. These discipline us, and we respect them. This is the way of the earth as God has ordained it. This is natural in the sense that we can be taught to do it. The author regards his readers as having learned to respect their fathers as part of their earlier years.

God is our Father in a much different sense. It is what makes us unique among all living things. We bear his image in that we are spirit beings, having an existence that goes beyond the meta-physical world. His wisdom, guidance, and care relate to those things that impart life—life as he lives it and means for us to live it. In submitting to him we enter things that impart spiritual life. Submission to God brings about the restoration of the blessing lost by Adam and Eve in the fall. That is what God means when he speaks of salvation and bringing us life. It refers to a way of living, not so much the place that we live in.

The matter of submission to this "child-rearing" process that is being carried out by Yahweh is of prime importance. It brings the inheritance that is not perishable, that is undefiled, and that does not fade away (1 Peter 1:4). It is the antithesis of our present life. In this sentence the author continues to contrast the discipline of our spiritual father, Yahweh, with that of our earthly fathers. This sentence has the classic look of a Greek statement of contrast. The English idiom, "On the one hand…on the other…." is often used to render the Greek terms μεν and δε that we see governing the two halves of the sentence.

In the imagery of the sentence, in one of our hands we hold for examination the discipline of our earthy fathers. We can observe two things about it. First, it was carried out by them for a short time. Our fathers shape our lives during the brief season of our childhood. The passing nature of this relationship is brought out in these words, which in turn raises thoughts of its brevity, and its incomplete nature. Second, earthly fathers parent according to their judgment. Latent in the author's words is the idea of imperfection. This is not delineated specifically, but flawed understanding and even motive can immediately come to mind in reading the words "according to what

seemed best to them." The words of the author are meant to draw attention to the inexact and imprecise nature of parenting being carried out by flawed humanity. Though we are fully aware of this in our own experience, we know enough to leave the principle of parenting intact. We do not stop parenting, and we do not release children from being subject to their parents. Incompleteness and imperfection are part of the inescapable reality of the earthly relationship between fathers and children. We can't help but see this as we examine and ponder parenting earth style.

In the imagery of this sentence, we hold in the other hand for examination the parenting of our heavenly Father, Yahweh. We notice that it contrasts sharply with that of our earthly fathers in that it is for good, not simply according to what seems good. He is morally spotless and so is capable of nothing else but good. The term rendered good is a term used to refer to gathering or amassing a profit. There is no trial and error in Yahweh's parenting as there is in our own. Profitability, bottom line life results, shape God's actions. He knows, he doesn't guess. The idea of profitability is further defined in the sentence as a certain result or outcome he has in mind for us. The outcome of his discipline is to bring us to partake of his holiness. When we are spoken to regarding God's holiness, what is being said to us is that he is unique, unlike any other living thing in terms of his character and his existence. We could understand his holiness as referring to the fact that he is wholly set apart or "otherly." He is distinct from us and every other living thing. Humanity was made to share in this "wholly otherly" existence. This is the very thing forfeited by Adam and Eve in their choice in the garden. So by discipline, Yahweh is seeking to restore this character and existence to us.

The contrast then between our earthly fathers and our heavenly Father is that of their character, their inherent competency, and the inherent potential of their efforts. Why would we subject ourselves to the marginal earthly process, but refuse to do so to the heavenly one? That is the question the author raises in our minds. It is pragmatic. If the lesser of the two works, why not trust the greater of the two?

**12:11 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.**

Having contrasted the discipline of our earthly fathers with that of our heavenly Father, the author now speaks to the common ground that heavenly and earthly discipline share. Discipline, whatever its source, is not enjoyable when we are amid it. It is sorrowful. The word rendered sorrowful is λυπησ. Elsewhere in the New Testament it is used to describe a wide range of unpleasant pain. The range of pain the word speaks of runs from that of a woman giving birth (John 16:21), to the unpleasantness we can feel in parting with our money (2 Corinthians 9:7). It covers the whole range of emotional and physical pain. The truth is that God will allow things in our life that cause us various levels of pain. He works in us, just as he works through us in the human development process. We discipline each other in various ways in society

because there is not another way to establish and maintain all that holds culture and society together. In our fallen state, the pain of discipline is essential to our maturity.

The second portion of this verse reveals an irony. It is that God allows pain to come our way to bring us into the path of blessing. His goal is that we be "trained" by it. The word for "trained" is γεγυμνασμενοισ. It is derived from the word for "naked." The contestants in the ancient games competed naked, and they trained naked. This term developed as one that described those who trained and competed. So we have the picture of unpleasant and painful things having the capacity to shape us in such a way that blessing and reward result. The key is for us to be "trained" by them. Latent in the terminology is an assumption regarding both endurance and faith, the two themes the author is summoning us to in this section of his treatise. There is an endurance that faith enables in us that is essential to our becoming who God wants us to be.

This verse notes for us an expectation we should have. We should expect the difficult and the unpleasant if God is present in our lives. We should not expect Christianity to "work" in the shallow pragmatic sense of that expression. It is not a ticket to a painless life in the present. It is enablement in pain to emerge better, more conformed to the lifestyle of faith modeled by Jesus Christ.

**12:12 Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble,**

The author's words logically shift into a summons to re-engage the faith and the hardship that goes with it. The readers are assumed to have lost heart and to be suffering fatigue. They have become focused on their pain. They have fallen into the common trap of viewing their own discomfort as extraordinary and debilitating. This is an exhortation that tells them they have greater capacity than they are showing. It is a logical conclusion the author has reached based on what he knows to be true about God, Christ, and the people of God all that he has been re-iterating to them.

This should not be viewed as merely the common human call to "reach down for that something extra!" The author's words have shown that grace imparts to believers a Divine capacity. Faith and trust allow us to experience this power that is quite beyond the energy of self-help and self-improvement. These words are a call to the decisive moment when we exercise faith and trust in the promises of God and the example of Christ. Like the many persons listed in chapter 11, we can choose to push forward in trust and are then strengthened miraculously by the Spirit for the seemingly impossible steps we must take.

There are decisive moments in the life of faith. That life is, in fact, a series of many such moments. The term faith itself implies a pushing on beyond what normal mental processes would give us permission to do. It is a confidence in the unseen that when present, leads us to press beyond the seen.

**12:13 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.**

The intentional choice to implement faith, to shape one's course of behavior by God's testimony, is energized by the Holy Spirit and so has great healing power. That is the positive outcome of those moments that demand a faith decision. Conversely, to stop purposefully acting in faith, is to abandon oneself to a natural spirituality that enslaves us all over again to evil. It is the experience of spiritual atrophy and inability. The positive side of this faith principle is dominant in this verse. But the negative side is ominously present as well.

At first glance, one might think that the writer is building on the image of the fight with discomfort and pain that any competitor must cope with to finish a race. There is an ability within every human to overcome their own body's desire to quit and to rest. But on closer examination, the author's words are not speaking to this. He is contrasting legitimate impairment in a limb and of that original injury worsening on the one hand, and on the other of healing and soundness that can come to that impairment. So this is not merely an issue of sports psychology and mental toughness. It is a matter of legitimate inability.

The author is speaking to our existing moral impairment as humans, our inherent tendency to drift downward to satisfy our natural instincts which is nothing less than to walk away from our Creator. When it comes to Godliness, we walk with a decisive limp. This impairment is either enabled or healed by the paths we chose to walk in. The straight paths spoken of here refer to those directed by a trust in what Yahweh has revealed. This "straightness" represents holding a steady course of conduct that aligns with his counsel. This is language from the Old Testament that represents the choice to turn "neither to the right hand, nor the left" (Joshua 23:6-7), but to keep our eyes "straight ahead" (Proverbs 4:25). To turn from Yahweh's counsel is to further damage our conscience and to deepen our moral inability. To walk straight, trusting his word and conforming to his ways, is to heighten our conscience, to give his Spirit greater control and freedom, and so to bring moral soundness where there had been sickness.

The author's message to the readers stated bluntly is this; to act in faith is to prevent sliding backwards into spiritual atrophy. It is to restore spiritual health. Faith fully enables the miracle of the new birth to continue. Unbelief interrupts God's work and then begins to undo it so that when continued, the last state of the person is worse than the first (Luke 11:26; 2 Peter 2:20).

**12:14 Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.**

In this verse the author begins to give pragmatic definition to what it means to make straight paths for one's feet. He begins with an important command about relationships. This is an appropriate place to start because so much of our life consists

of relationships. Nowhere is our impaired moral condition more apparent than in the multitude of damaged relationships we all experience. This was one of the first things God addressed with Adam and Eve once they had fallen into evil. It remains a most common starting point in his personal dealings with us.

The command is that we pursue peace with all people. The word for pursue is διωκετε. Its meaning is to flee or to pursue. Interestingly, through the idea of pursuit, it became the term used to describe the act of persecution. In fact, many of its uses in the New Testament are such. Typically, they are rendered in English translations with the word persecution. So the command describes a hard, relentless pursuit of something, in this case peace.

The difficult thing about this pursuit of peace is that it is to be with respect to all people. We do not have the option of choosing for any reason to maintain animosity and hatred and so strive with others. Christians are to live peacefully with all people. Implied in the word pursue is an important responsibility; when strife breaks out, we are to be those who initiate the dialog of peace. We are to initiate confession of fault. We are to let go of the quarrel (Proverbs 17:14; 20:3). So we are not simply to choose peace where it is available, we are to adopt a position of vulnerability, then initiate movement that is required for peace to come about.

There is a second thing given in this verse that we are to pursue. It is called sanctification. This sanctification is referred to as "the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord." The entire phrase makes clear that a particular sanctification is in view, a sanctification that is of utmost importance in Christianity, because seeing the Lord is contingent on it. This is a difficult statement to understand.

The word used here for sanctification is αγιασμον. This exact word occurs nine other times in the New Testament, though related terms occur many other times. It is a noun. Three observations can be made about its usage. The first observation is that αγιασμον is the name assigned to a family of deeds marked by their alignment with Yahweh's commands. They are practical deeds of holiness. Five of the usages of this term in the New Testament fit this description (Romans 6:19, 22; 1 Thessalonians 4:3, 4, 7). These verses clearly teach that such deeds are an expectation of believers, the result God calls us toward and which we are to diligently pursue. The degree to which this expectation comes to fruition within each individual believer is unspecified and unclear. That is where debate and difference of opinion arise.

Another occurrence of this word appears to align with this general usage. Like the passage in Hebrews 12, the occurrence of the word "sanctification" in 1 Timothy 2:15 raises some difficulties. In that verse "sanctification" is listed along with faith, love, and sobriety, as that which women are "saved" by, as they persevere in them. The context is Paul's teaching about the roles of women in the Church. The term salvation in 1 Timothy 2:15 should be understood in the sense of its normal broad usage in

Scripture—of the full experience of Yahweh's salvation plan. It is inconceivable that Paul would be speaking here to how one was justified, having been so insistent on justification being based exclusively on faith in all of his writings. The meaning of αγιασμον as it is used in 1 Timothy 2:15 is that of the first observation above. It refers to a family of deeds aligned with Yahweh's commands. Conformity to these marks the experience of Yahweh's salvation, being raised to a place of usefulness in Yahweh's kingdom plan.

The second observation regarding this term is that in two of the ten usages it is joined to the qualifying phrase "of the Spirit," so that it reads "sanctification of the Spirit" (2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). This short phrase seems to be describing the holiness that is true of us by virtue of our union with God's Spirit. It is a kind of defacto sanctification. As God's presence in certain places made those places holy (Exodus 3:5; 26:33-34), so by virtue of his presence in us we are deemed holy (Acts 3:21; 4:27, 50; 1 Corinthians 3:17 cf 6:19). Another occurrence of this word in 1 Corinthians 1:30 appears to be speaking of this defacto sanctification as well. That verse says that "Jesus has been made sanctification to us." Christ's work in our behalf separates us from the penalty of our sin so that we are re-joined to God. There is a judicial sanctification that happens to us because of the Sin-bearer. It sets us apart from the rest of humanity that remains under condemnation.

All this figures into how we understand the difficult statement in Hebrews 12:14 regarding αγιασμον. Is the author speaking of the judicial act of God, who because of the work of Christ in bearing our sin, sets apart as holy all who believe? It is certainly true that this is the sanctification "without which no one will see the Lord." Or is the author speaking of the pursuit of that family of attitudes and deeds that align with the commands of Yahweh? If so, then it means that "seeing the Lord" depends on that sanctification having been attained by us, with the degree left in question. That makes "seeing the Lord" conditional on our follow-through.

Before defining exactly what the sanctification the author has in mind is, it is useful to establish what he means by the phrase "see the Lord." The word used here for see is οψεται. It is a form of the verb οπτανομαι, which we find used in three ways in the New Testament. In most cases this word refers to seeing or being seen, the function of the physical sense of sight (John 1:39; 1 Corinthians 15:5-8; John 16:16-19; Matthew 24:30). There are several other Greek words that are rendered "see," but that often refer to things like mental or spiritual perception and understanding. The word οψεται, usually refers to actual seeing with the eyes. This literal experience of sight sometimes becomes a figure for the experience of something. And so several times οψεται is used in a second way, in this figurative sense to speak of entering a tangible experience of some sort (Matthew 5:8; Luke 17:22; John 3:36; Romans 15:21). Finally, οψεται is the word employed in the phrase "see to it," urging that attention be given to something (Matthew 27:4, 24; Acts 18:15; Revelation 19:10).

Based on the majority of uses one might assume that the experience being referred to in Hebrews 12:14 is that of physically seeing the Lord, laying eyes personally on him, the experience of heaven. That would mean that sanctification, whatever meaning we assign to that word in this context, is a prerequisite for being in the physical presence of Christ. However, Jesus himself uses this word οψεται to say that all on earth will see him and his glory (Matthew 24:30; Mark 14:62; Luke 21:27). In the pure sense of physical sight then, all will see the Lord. This means that it is quite possible that the word οψεται should be understood here in the more figurative sense, as speaking of the experience of the Lord. In fact, it is likely being used by the author of Hebrews to refer to the full experience of Jesus' intervention, care, and miraculous power in the present life.

Given this meaning, we can rather easily see the contribution this verse is making to the overall theme of the author. He is speaking to them about their present experience of the salvation of Yahweh. The phrase "see the Lord," sheds light on how the author is using the term sanctification. He is speaking of that way of thinking and behaving that conforms to Yahweh's commands. Those ways are God's ways. As he is holy, his people are to be holy. In such choices of faith they enter a constant experience of his presence with them—they see him.

The evidence is that the readers had entered this experience of Christ (10:32-34). However, like the Israelites and in a way typical among all of humanity, they had begun to drift from the pattern of trust and faith, and so their experience of Christ had waned. The words of verse 14 add to the summons back to the holy ways of Yahweh. In a return to those ways of faith and trust in his promises, the readers would renew their experience of Christ. Without such a return, their experience of Christ would continue to deteriorate until they became like the generation who never entered the experience Yahweh had for them of the Promised Land. The principle remains true for the people of faith to the present day. In repentance and rest we experience salvation (Isaiah 30:15).

**12:15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; and that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;**

With these words the author continues to give practical meaning to his command to the readers in verse 13 to "make straight paths for your feet." He is also shedding light on the figurative expression of that verse, "so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed." He is giving the readers the kind of direction that will prevent a downward spiritual spiral and instead create forward movement in the faith.

The principles here in this verse were revealed in the earliest writings of Scripture. In fact, the verse agrees with Deuteronomy 29:18 as it appears in the Alexandrian Septuagint Cod Exodus. So Yahweh's early testimony to his people noted the danger

of a root of bitterness that lies dormant in us, that can spring to life. There can rise within us that which destroys both our own spiritual life and that of others. For that reason this summons to keep watch over our innermost thoughts is most urgent.

The first word of the sentence prescribes this diligent watching over, a posting of a guard against a threat. The word, επισκοπουντεσ, rendered "see to it," is a participle. As such, it is presenting action that is to accompany one's pursuit of peace and sanctification. So the picture given is that coming short of God's grace is an opposing force to the pursuit of peace and sanctification and must be guarded against.

What does it mean to come short of the grace of God? God's grace is what leads to our justification, our sanctification, and one day to our glorification. It is not simply what causes us to believe in Christ. It is that which enables us to live a holy life. Yahweh does things for us and in us that are foreign to us and beyond us. They are simply Divine favors. They rescue us from our self-destructive behavior and enrich us (1 Corinthians 1:4-5). So God's grace is the name given to a series of favors he extends to us to fill up our emptiness (2 Corinthians 9:8; 12:9-10). One of these favors is the gift of faith. It is the ability to trust in the One we cannot see. God grants that ability; it is not inherent in our humanity (Ephesians 2:4-10). In each moment of our lives, no matter what the circumstances, he is there to grant such favor to us so that we are strengthened for whatever the moment holds.

This verse clearly shows that the availability of these favors from Yahweh, does not mean that we automatically draw upon them and rise to the moment. In fact, throughout the book the author is presenting failure as the real and present danger to all who read his words. Experiencing Yahweh's favors depends on us choosing to look now through the eyes of faith, trusting his sovereignty over it and his purpose in allowing it (Hebrews 4:16). That moment of decision brings his favors to bear on the experience. Then, trusting what he has prescribed for such a time, we set out on that course and are enabled by his Spirit to run it. That is what his grace does repeatedly in the lives of his children. It enables them to do what is humanly impossible. Falling short of his grace is the failure to act on faith in such moments, a failure to trust his goodness and walk the path he prescribes.

In the place of appropriating God's favor that is extended to us at such times, the circumstances can embitter us. The word bitter comes from a word that means sharp. It came to be used of pungent and even poisonous substances. Bitterness is the natural human response to trouble. When we feel injustice, we naturally move into things like malice and revenge, pessimism and despair. We don't think to entertain the critical questions. The critical questions are these: Since my good God allowed this, when he clearly could have prevented it, what goodness can I gain in it? What does he prescribe in such situations? What thinking and behavior does he want me to rise to?

Yahweh's choice of referring to this influence within us as a root is important for us to understand. Bitterness is being represented as rooted in our beings, even as Christians. Now one day it will be removed. But until then it is present. It is represented as that which can send forth growth and then bear fruit. So there remains in us something that is a part of who we are in this world, something that can undo our spiritual lives. It can lead us to behave like natural human beings.

This thing in us that springs to life leads to trouble—pure and simple. The word rendered trouble creates the mental image of the unrestrained behavior of a mob. Bitterness does not lead to the pursuit of peace.

It does not lead to thought and actions that distinguish us from unregenerate humanity. Bitterness causes us to blend in and be part of the multitude who instinctively react.

The impact of bitterness in us extends beyond us. Many are defiled by our unwillingness to rule our own hearts. It is not just that we endanger ourselves. It is that we undo what Yahweh is doing in others. The word rendered defiled, stands in sharp contrast to the idea of sanctification. What is sanctified is holy. What is defiled is contaminated, even poisoned. What is sanctified is of God. What is defiled is of humanity. What is sanctified is set apart and distinct. What is defiled is common and run-of-the-mill. Falling short of grace makes the Christian community into something very earthy. It becomes normal and regular, indistinguishable from normal societal organizations and gatherings. There is with bitterness the loss of the dignified and honorable use that Yahweh would love to bestow on us.

**12:16 That there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal.**

As opposed to pursuing sanctification, the readers are warned against living out the antithesis of that which Yahweh wishes to do in them. Two types of people are spoken of, and then Esau is identified as an example of these. The first kind of person is one who is immoral. The term used is πορνοσ. From a purely literal point of view, that term refers to a male prostitute. The term was used however of anyone who compromised their convictions for gain of some sort. It was a Hebraism for an idolater. So the lifestyle the author is warning against is not necessarily one of sexual sin, though that is certainly one common manifestation of it. It is a lifestyle marked by the compromise of Yahweh's standards and principles for the sake of personal pleasure or gain.

The second type of persons mentioned here are the godless. That is the NASB rendering of the term βεβηλοσ. That term appears in the Scripture and in Greek literature as the antonym of holiness, or sanctification. Profane would be an accurate way to understand it. In the thought of the Jews, it referred to those living apart from knowledge of Yahweh. In their fleshly pride they came to view all Gentiles in this way.

They used the word as a synonym for Gentile. So the term "godless" expresses accurately the Jews common understanding of the term. It is significant that the author chooses to use this word in speaking to what we believe to be primarily a Jewish audience. By doing so he is communicating to them in no uncertain terms the precarious nature of their spiritual state. They could fall into the way of living that they believed was characteristic only of the Gentiles.

The statement becomes even more powerful with the addition of the example of Esau. Esau, though clearly the child of Isaac, was not chosen by Yahweh to inherit the promises made to Abraham and Isaac. In fact, Yahweh clearly states "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (Malachi 1:1-3). The testimony of all the prophets to the Israelites was that Esau's forfeiture of the blessing would continue to play out in God's plan (Jer. 49:8-10; Obadiah 18). A most repulsive thing among the Jews of the era of Christ was that the Herod's, descendants of Esau, exercised authority over them. So the author's suggestion that among the readers there could be persons who followed in the footsteps of Esau seems to be a deliberate attempt to ratchet up the emotional urgency of his appeal to them.

The author reminds them of the detail of the story of Esau's sale of his birthright (Genesis 25:27-34). In the account of that story, a precise, crisp, and damning statement summarizes it, "Thus Esau despised his birthright" (Genesis 27:34). That became his legacy. Not only did he forfeit the blessing reserved for the firstborn, but he also established the eternal reputation for himself as one who compromised everything of value, for a single moment of pleasure. His behavior in the entire affair as it played out in the years following was that of one who believed he was victimized. He seemed to believe that there should be no consequences and that he would not have to accept the responsibility for his own plight (Genesis 27:36, 41). The bitterness that sprang up in Esau led to many years of exile for Jacob but did not alter the outcome or change the legacy that Esau's actions shaped for himself. It is a tragic story of carelessness.

The author's choice to mention that the entire inheritance of Esau was forfeited in exchange for a "single meal," gives the verse a very precise power in his argument. Being diligent, persevering in belief and trust, not drifting away, all the author's appeals to the readers are powerfully reinforced by this example of how a single impulsive decision can ruin one's legacy.

**12:17 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 it with tears.**

The age we live in since the time of Christ, has been in many respects the age of repentance. Repentance has been a key part of the message of the Gospel. There has been great power in it and Yahweh has been summoning humanity to it. Forgiveness has been always available, God's patience seemingly inexhaustible in supply. Our

experience of this can lead us to believe that the opportunity of repentance is always available to change all human situations. The reality is that the opportunity of repentance is not always present. When Adam and Eve sinned, there was not opportunity for them to undo in their lifetimes the consequences of their actions. When the wilderness generation doubted the goodness of Yahweh, there came a time when their repentance did nothing to alter the consequences that they brought on themselves (Numbers 14:39-45). Early in the Scriptures, Esau provided an example of this (Genesis 27:30-41).

The author of Hebrews brings into the minds of the readers the tremendous emotion of that moment when Esau realizes the magnitude of what he has lost. The Genesis account captures the emotion of both father and son as the reality of the loss of the blessing clobbers them. Isaac physically demonstrates his distress with violent tremors. Esau is said to "cry out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry," begging for a blessing from his dad. Isaac does not compromise the truth of it all in his words to Esau, despite the deep emotions that the record indicates were over-whelming him. The entire story is one of the saddest in Scripture. They make the reader want to reach in and change the moment and in some way compensate Esau. There is no comfort for Esau, just an ominous projection given by Isaac of the legacy that awaited him. He was rejected, and the news was delivered by his own father, who loved him deeply and even favored him (Genesis 25:28).

The incident is an important demonstration of the fact that opportunity can be lost and lost to the degree that repentance cannot bring it back. The author's point is that the thing he has been speaking of the blessing of rest with Yahweh, can be forfeited. It can be cast aside and compromised, so that even genuine and sorrowful repentance cannot gain it back. This all happens when we fall short of the grace of God and that root of bitterness that is latent in all fallen humanity springs to life. When we allow that, our lives are shaped by us, our circumstances and our world. Anything can happen to us and will. We create a series of consequences that we will live with that repentance cannot alter. This is not to say forgiveness is unavailable. It is to say that the recovery of the full blessing that was once ours to experience is forever gone.

**12:18 For you have not come to a mountain that may be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind,**

These words re-cap the experience of the exodus generation at Sinai, at the time of the giving of the Law. Specifically, they are referring to the sensory experience of the congregation as they gathered at the foot of the mountain to meet Yahweh (Exodus 19:10-20:21; Deuteronomy 4:10-11; 5:22-27). The author's point in this verse and the next is to establish once again the superior nature of our present experience of Yahweh through Christ over that of those who lived in the previous eras. This has been a recurring theme in his words thus far (2:1-4; 3:5-6; 4:8-10, 14-16; 5:1-10; 7:22-25; 8:6-7; 9:11-14; 10:110).

The author's thought begins with phrases that describe what our experience is not. That is important. The author names a fantastic series of physical experiences that were a part of the events at the establishment of the Old Covenant. They are set forth with words that connect them to the senses of sight, touch, smell, hearing, and taste in the readers. His message—these are not the experience you have come into. The clear message will be that our entry into the New Covenant is not merely an experience of the metaphysical, with stimulation of the senses through fantastic sights and sounds. As fantastic and awe-inspiring as the phenomena of the Old Covenant were, our experience with Yahweh is different. If it is him, we seek, we will not find him through the Old Covenant.

**12:19 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.**

In the previous verse we saw one primary point of the author. It was that the sensory experience of the Exodus generation at Sinai is not our experience in coming to Yahweh. This verse adds to that a profound point. It is that our experience is not one that inspires fear and causes us to desire distance between ourselves and Yahweh.

The desire for distance was an important result of the Sinai phenomena that the Old Testament text records (Exodus 20:19; Deuteronomy 5:25-26). The response of Israel is one that the presence of Yahweh can bring about in fallen humanity. God's will be that our faith in his goodness over-ride this more instinctive fear of him and that we draw near to him. However, that instinctive fear is important, being the starting point in understanding and responding obediently to his grace (Exodus 19:9; 20:20). The amazing nature of Yahweh's grace stands out dramatically against the backdrop of his might and power.

General revelation instills a reverence and fear, if we accept it. It also raises hope of his goodness. Special revelation reveals more precisely God's good and gracious character. It enables us to trust the good news that this mighty, transcendent God has infinite love for humanity and desires to rescue and bless us. Our experience of God is not merely of his terrifying might and power. The implication of his abilities and acts is not that we should stay far from him. That reaction is one that reflects only partial understanding of him.

The account of Moses reveals that the Israelites never actually moved beyond the initial fear of Yahweh that such phenomena produce. They never came to trust in his goodness. Their practical theology was that God was angry and had ulterior motives in bringing them out of Egypt. They easily let go of their belief in the promised land and feared that Yahweh had brought them out of slavery only to kill them in the wilderness. So their belief did not fail over the point of God's existence, or his power. It failed at the point of embracing his goodness and the perfection of his character. This is a critical failure that will most certainly block one's progress toward maturity.

The author is moving the readers in a certain direction in this section of Hebrews. Our understanding and experience of Yahweh is that of those who have become convinced of his goodness and so persist in drawing near to him. This drawing near should be especially true of us when encountering trial and trouble. If these things come our way, even more reason to draw near and cling to the One who has thoroughly demonstrated that his sovereign power is overall, and that his goodness shapes the outcome he has in store for us.

**12:20 For they could not bear the command, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned."**

Exodus 19 is Moses' account of this incident. Israel journeyed until they arrived around Mount Sinai, and it is said that they camped "in front of the mountain." From there Moses went up on the mountain. Yahweh spoke to Moses and said that if Israel would keep his covenant, then they would be to him "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." It is interesting wording, because they are not told they would be a kingdom with priests, but one of priests. The offer sounds more like a new covenant type of offering at this point.

We are told that Moses went down and delivered this message to the elders of the people. The official reply was, "All that Yahweh has spoken we will do!" (Exodus 19:8). Moses then returns to the mountain and delivers this reply of the people to Yahweh.

At this point Yahweh says to Moses, "I shall come to you in a thick cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe in you forever." So the Lord intends to create a theophany in the sight of the people. The purpose of it is to affirm the leadership of Moses and establish the authority of Moses' words "forever." The account reports that Moses delivered these words to the people. So they are told ahead of time about the nature of the event.

It is at this point that the account indicates that Yahweh told Moses more about the physical events that this event would involve and how the people were to conduct themselves. It is at this time that some official "boundary" was established between the people and the mountain which they were not to cross until a specific signal was given. Whoever crossed that boundary; however it was designated, was to be put to death (Exodus 19:12). This was true of both man and beast (Exodus 19:13).

There was a designated "all clear" signal—a long blast of a ram's horn. When this signal sounded, they were to come up to the mountain. In these instructions there seems to be an intended opportunity presented to the people to participate in some way in the experience of Yahweh's entire interaction with Moses. It appears that Yahweh's desire was for them to "draw near," and it seems that it was intended to be nearer than it eventually was.

At the prescribed time, which was the "third day," while the Israelites were still in their camp, the phenomena on the mountain began to occur so that the people "trembled" (12:16). Moses leads the people out to "meet God" and they stand at the "foot of the mountain" (12:17). At this point, as the mountain was shaking violently, Moses speaks to Yahweh and Yahweh answers with thunder and then summons Moses alone to the top (Exodus 19:19-20). The people themselves are apparently still not beyond the prescribed boundary (Exodus 19:23), and the warning not to cross it yet is delivered to them by Yahweh through Moses. The record of this event given in Exodus indicates that it is to this assembled congregation God delivers the Decalogue, the ten commandments.

In Moses' additional words on this incident in Deuteronomy 5, additional insight is provided. He indicates that at some point the people were too afraid to go up on the mountain. The implication is that the opportunity was available to them (5:5). As that account continues, we find that after the giving of the Decalogue, a delegation of the people comes to Moses and asks permission not to go near. They ask him to go near in their behalf and then bring back God's message to them (Deuteronomy 5:23-27). So there is present in the moment a great fear of Yahweh's presence. A contradiction in their faith appears. They had learned "that God speaks with man, yet he lives" (Deuteronomy 5:24). Yet they ask, "why should we die?" (Deuteronomy 5:25). At this point they certainly believe in Yahweh's existence and presence. They do not trust his goodness.

This then is the entire incident that the author of Hebrews is looking back on with these words. The Israelites did not trust Yahweh enough to overcome the fear associated with the command not to touch the mountain, and the display of Yahweh's power that went with the occasion. It was in this sense that they could not bear the command, even though Moses makes it clear to them that the purpose of the power display was to instill in them reverent fear and so curtail their sin (Exodus 20:20). The idea of not being able to bear the command is that they faltered under it, becoming so fearful that they were unable to enter the privilege of an audience with God. It seems possible from Moses account that God had in mind for them all a much deeper experience with him that would have touched their hearts in a deeper way to better equip them to obey more whole-heartedly (Deuteronomy 5:28-30).

The point the author is building toward is this; as great and overwhelming as that moment of the great theophany was to the Israelites, the opportunity that stands before us, though different, is greater.

**12:21 And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I am full of fear and trembling."**

The description of the presence of Yahweh occupying Mount Sinai in both the Exodus 19 account and the Deuteronomy account certainly are summarized by these words attributed to Moses. We do not know the source of these words. It is possible that they

were a part of some tradition, a kind of common knowledge that the Hebrews had passed down from the event. It is possible that the author of Hebrews is offering them as a kind of summary of the testimony of his written words. Some suggest that they are an allusion to Moses statement in Deuteronomy 9:19, where he is frightened on behalf of the people for their offense to this holy, powerful God. We simply do not know with certainty the basis upon which the author offers this quote. It is certain that Moses likely felt the things described here, even as the people did.

The record shows that Moses' own faith quieted him amidst the high drama of God's display of his power. He sought to bring sufficient composure to the Israelites so that they would come nearer to Yahweh's presence (Exodus 19:20). But his description leaves no doubt, the sights and sounds were frightening and overwhelming.

The author of Hebrews adds this testimony of Moses to his account for a finishing touch. He uses the Greek word φοβερον, which speaks of that which is fearful or frightful, even terrifying, to describe the sight on Sinai. The NASB has rendered the term "terrible." The author has presented to the readers the entire phenomenon as one that overwhelmed the participants with fright. Sinai was a very sobering experience. By current standards, it was traumatizing. It was not an experience that combined with faith in the Israelites to produce a compelling reverence for Yahweh. The author will now contrast with that experience the holy reverence of the spiritual realities that are ours.

**12:22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels,**

As the author has stated in verse 18, we have not been summoned to a physical experience involving sights and sounds that appeal to our physical senses. There was a physical location known as Mount Zion, located within Jerusalem, where the Temple was, and where today stands the Moslem Mosque. It was a holy place and remains one, designated by Yahweh as the place he chose out of all the locations on earth to place his name. It speaks of his sovereign Kingdom and the actual place of his dwelling, the place referred to as heaven. The author has shifted us from events that happened on Mount Sinai, to things of which the temple mount in Jerusalem were a figure, but that have their existence in heaven.

The teaching of Jesus, passed on by the Apostles, was that humanity's worship was radically altered by the incarnation (John 4:19-26; Galatians 3:15-29). The author has advanced this idea, showing that Christ brought about a whole series of "better" things in the relationship between humanity and the Creator. The old things were pictures of these realities. In fact, they were pictorial promises of what God would bless us with. In all such pictures the real things are always better than those things that merely try to illustrate or represent them. In spiritual matters this is particularly true.

Consequently, in this verse we see a listing of real things. These things are not passing sensory displays of God's power like the lightening, thunder, clouds, and earthquake associated with the commencement of the Old Covenant. These things are Yahweh's enduring creations. They are part of his world, and they exist through eons of time and into eternity. They are things of unparalleled grandeur that reflect comprehensively who he is. Through these, we do not get just a partial view of him, as the sensory things of the earthly Zion provided.

Our experience in Christ is the fullest possible, given the current fallen state of our physical beings. We are joined to God in spirit, and so are the temple of God, the place in which he can be found on the present earth. Presently, it is impossible for us to be more fully in his presence than we are by being joined to his Spirit in this way. Paul referred to our present relationship to Yahweh as that of being "seated in the heavenly places with Christ" (Ephesians 2:4-8). The author of Hebrews names some of those things that are associated with the heavenly places. This experience is spiritual. It will become a physical one when Christ returns.

Because it is spiritual and our senses are physical, this experience of ours with Christ can be perfunctory and so less impactful than that provided by the lightning and thunder of Mount Sinai. It would be easy for us if given the choice, to choose a few minutes of the sensual with its lightning and thunder over the more spiritual experience of ongoing communion with Christ. This is the very danger the author of Hebrews was warning his readers against. It is the danger of being sluggish, of not drawing near. The failure to draw near is often a failure to believe that our experience of God can be tangible, that it can be accurately sensed, and so of real and practical value. The author's statements are given here in sensory kinds of language to shake us from this tendency of our rational faculties to downgrade the value of our great spiritual privilege.

Our challenge is to believe that our ongoing audience with God is real. We should not expect to see him for he is spiritual. To see him with our current sense of sight would be more reason for doubt than our not seeing him. Our experience of angels, though not visible, is perpetual. We can experience the peace, tranquility, and safety of heaven even though it will generally elude our physical senses.

**12:23 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,**

With these words the author continues his listing of the better things that are a part of that which God has summoned us to come near to. In the citation of these things emphasis is added to the fact that these are no mere physical signs like the smoke and fire of Mount Sinai. The things listed here are personal and alive. They are real in the deepest sense in that they exist eternally.

The first living thing mentioned in the verse is “the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven.” It is a challenge to say with precision whom these persons are. A few ideas have been proposed over the centuries to give meaning to this phrase. Generally, these various interpretations seem to follow three categories of thought.

One of the categories of the varied thought we see regarding this phrase is that which suggests that when the divisions of chapters and verses were added, this text was essentially marginalized, then corrupted. There is some evidence of this, and it suggests that the term general assembly, which is one word in the

Greek New Testament was originally understood as relating to the word “angels” in the previous verse. Some of the better manuscripts have the text in this way, and some early church fathers cite the passage in this way. Besides this ancient evidence there is some logical evidence in that there is overlap in meaning between the term rendered general assembly and the term for church, which also was used of an assembly. So there are interpretations that relate the term “general assembly” to the “myriads of angels.” The text then is read, “the general assembly of the myriads of angels.” This leaves the challenge of the interpretation of the remainder of the verse, and these usually align with one of the following two categories.

The second category of interpretation is that this entire phrase is a reference to a special group of believers, the elite of God’s children. Those who interpret in this way cite the term first-born as being a reference to those of special privilege in the minds of the Jewish readers. There is no doubt to the validity of the idea that the firstborn had special significance in the Law. They reason therefore, that this phrase is composed by the author of Hebrews to impress on the readers their opportunity to draw near and join the company of a very distinguished group of God’s people. There are several strains within this category of interpretation. They all embrace some form of the basic idea that the phrase refers to a highly honored or decorated segment of God’s family that we can draw near to.

The third category of interpretation relates this phrase to those whom Christ took with him from paradise into heaven at his resurrection. This general assembly refers to the dead of the Old Testament era who had been in paradise awaiting the sacrifice of Christ. Upon his death and resurrection, they have been officially enrolled in heaven. This line of thinking grows out of the interpretation of a few problematic texts in the New Testament. It has as its advantage that it explains a few problematic texts. But it is by no means a problem-free solution. Still, it seems best to embrace this idea charitably.

Having embraced this idea, the interpretation of this first rather lengthy phrase in this verse is that “the general assembly and church of the first-born enrolled in heaven,” is referring to the believers of the Old Testament era, who are now with Christ in heaven.

We are united with these by the Spirit of God, who based on Christ's death, has joined himself to these and welcomed them into his eternal dwelling.

The author then adds to his description of the experience we have been brought into the staggering idea that we have come "to God, the Judge of all." What the Israelites were warned against doing until just the right moment, and what their own fear kept them from even desiring to do, has been accomplished for us. Ours is not merely an audience with God for a glimpse of his glory. In coming to belief in Jesus Christ, we have been brought into God's family so that we have a permanent place with him. There is no possibility of being in the company of or belonging to anyone greater. There are many descriptive phrases the author could have attached to God, but he chooses to remind us that God is Judge of all. To have relationship to the one who has the ultimate word on the morality of our thoughts and actions, on the nature of our achievements, and on our eternal destiny, is an asset that trumps all others.

The author's idea in speaking of God being the Judge of all, is not to suggest that nothing is required of us morally, that we can live as we please and count on leniency. What will follow is that this creates an expectation from us that he is enabling. The expectation is that what is just and declared proper and righteous by his standard is that which we are to seek out and embrace for ourselves. If we are living in the family and kingdom of the One who champions what is just and proper, we can be certain that he looks for what is just and proper in us. It is certain that he will lead his own household by no other standard than this. The very next phrase shows that this is the destiny he has for us.

When we were joined in spirit to God's Spirit, we were also joined to the "spirits of righteous men made perfect." This statement speaks of those persons who have preceded us in death and whose spirits are continually in the presence of God. Their experience in the presence of God is not presently a bodily one. But it is one they are conscious of and that they participate fully in.

The reality of our spiritual unity with such as these, and any practical experience of that is very difficult for us to comprehend. We have no description of this intermediate experience of God and heaven that believers have from the time of their physical death to the time of their resurrection. We do have a series of statements by Christ and his apostles to the effect that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 5:6-8; Philippians 1:23). Thus we do not know the detail of the experience of these spirits of righteous people, now made perfect. We do not know what our experience of them is, or what their impact is on us, or if there is any at all. It seems most likely that our association with them is one that escapes our direct perception. Statements like those made in this section of Scripture might indicate their awareness of our roles and actions in the kingdom of God, and we surmise that they might play some intercessory role in these. The author's point is not for us to speculate on the nature of our relationship with these, but simply to state the reality that we are

one with these and share their destiny. Through belief we have been ushered in to a distinguished company.

**12:24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.**

The author has left the mention of Jesus and his blood to this last statement in his description of the experience we have been brought into through belief in Christ. This likely is because his objective in the entire treatise has been to show the progressive order of God's salvation plan as it has unfolded, Christ appearing in his proper time after creation, the fall, the patriarchs, and the era of the old covenant. Mentioning Christ and his blood last may be employed here by the author as a way of drawing special attention to him.

Reaching back to his earlier statements, the author names Jesus again as the mediator of a new covenant (Hebrews 7:22; 8:6). The understanding that he desires most to impart to his readers is that the old covenant has been replaced as that which orders the lives of the community of faith. The new has come. And so this entire contrast that began in verse 18 between the visual phenomena of the old covenant and the spiritual reality of the new covenant reinforces that important idea. This statement on Christ is the capstone of this great theme.

The author speaks appropriately of the "sprinkled blood." The old covenant had much sprinkled blood in its ceremony. Over the centuries the volume of sprinkled blood was enormous. The author is referring to the sprinkled blood of which all that blood only spoke symbolically. All that blood foretold the sprinkled blood of Jesus, the Christ and humanity's sin-bearer. It is his blood that redeems us, and atones for our guilt before God, the Judge of all. Yahweh's salvation plan reached its critical moment when the Roman soldier pierced Jesus' side, and his blood was poured out on the earth. We have come into the presence of Yahweh; the blood of Christ already having been given by him in our behalf. It is that blood that makes the prescribed and effective appeal for our pardon.

To this statement about the sprinkled blood of Christ the author adds this rather curious statement about the blood of Abel. The words "the blood" do not appear in the Greek text but do seem to be implied and so are added in many English translations. Moses' account of the first recorded sacrifice, and the first murder is in the mind of the author in making this citation (Genesis 4:1-11).

Moses' account is abbreviated in terms of providing us with any information about how Abel knew what kind of offering would bring Yahweh pleasure, or even if he knew. But Moses does give us very definitive information on God's response to the two offerings. He tells us that God had regard for Abel, and for his offering, but God did not have regard for Cain, or for his offering. So Moses does specify that God's regard or lack of

regard extended to the men themselves, not merely with their offering. We are left to speculate as to the precise reason for this distinction that there came to be in the mind of God with respect to these two individuals. Cain's reaction to Abel that leads to the first murder comes in the aftermath of God's personal warning to him. Yahweh warns Cain very pointedly about the importance of his response to his own growing bitterness towards the obvious revelation that came through the event.

The blood sacrifice made by Abel spoke loudly to humanity about atonement for sin. Yahweh's response to Abel's blood offering contrasts sharply with his reaction to the sacrifice of Cain. But it is likely that this blood of Abel's sacrifice was not the thing which the strength of the blood of Christ surpassed. It is likely that the author of Hebrews is referring to the blood of Abel himself, that is, the blood which flowed from him as his life was taken at the hands of his brother Cain. Yahweh's own words to Cain were significant. "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground, and now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand."

The text of Genesis 4 does not specifically delineate what Abel's blood was saying to Yahweh. But the implication is not hard to draw from it. Implied is that Abel's blood was a witness to God of humanity's resistance to righteousness and so of their utter corruption. The idea of the guilt of humanity being attested to by the witness of the blood of victims in the earth is cited elsewhere in Scripture (Isaiah 26:21). The blood of Christ is stronger than the blood of Abel and the blood of the millions of other nameless victims of evil's violence on the face of the earth throughout its entire history. The blood of Christ renders all who believe in the gospel free from guilt of their sins against each other. His blood will ultimately free them from their fallen state that causes murder to lurk within each of their hearts.

**12:25 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 shall we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven.**

Ultimately the one who spoke in both the case of Israel under the old covenant, and the readers under the new covenant was Yahweh. At Mount Sinai the Israelites asked that they not personally hear Yahweh speak, but that Moses stand alone in his presence and pass Yahweh's words along to them. They assured Moses that they would listen to his report and obey his words. Yahweh assured Moses on that occasion that the Israelites did not have such a heart in them (Deuteronomy 5:29). The history of Israel under the old covenant bears this out. Both the generation who witnessed the events at Mount Sinai and all the generations that followed refused the words and testimony of Moses. Generation after generation missed out on the blessings of Yahweh and instead experienced his discipline. He persistently sought to draw them back to his words, as Moses had recorded them, that would give them life. They did not escape the consequences of their neglect, nor have they to the present day.

The One who has spoken to us is Christ. He is God's own Son, sent from heaven. He was the One to whom Moses' writings pointed. He is Yahweh's wisdom, incarnated, for us to see, to hear, to touch, and to examine (John 1:1-14; 1 John 1:1-4). The message of Jesus was both an invitation and a warning from Yahweh (Luke 19:41-44; 21:5-36). It is an invitation to obey and be forgiven and blessed. It is a warning that Christ himself will return to enter judgment with all who reject him.

The author of Hebrews is warning against the same hardness of heart that crept in among the Israelites. Because spiritual weakness is a part of our humanity, it is a constant challenge for us to not become "dull of hearing" (5:11). The author's warning is that should we lapse into such a state, as Israel continually did, our experience of Yahweh will be the same as theirs. We will experience his corrective discipline. In fact, our entire lives can be marked by that experience rather than the great and persistent experience of transformation.

**12:26 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."**

The author speaks from the record of Moses, referring to the fact that at Mount Sinai the entire mountain quaked violently (Exodus 19:18). It was meant to be a sensory experience and affirmation to Israel of two important things, Yahweh's great power and authority, and Moses' great privilege (Exodus 19:9; 20:20). It was meant to inspire obedience.

The second half of this verse is a quote from Haggai 2:6. That prophecy is one that re-affirms the promise made by Yahweh to his people when he brought them out of Egypt. It is his promise to glorify among all the nations of the world his name and his people. The promise is of his powerful intervention in Earth's affairs, in which he will impose his will entirely and completely on humankind. That intervention will relate not only to earthly governments. It will move decisively against the unseen spiritual beings and authorities that seek to work their havoc in both the affairs of earth and heaven.

The message of Yahweh has always been clear on this point. His plan is focused on bringing about his Kingdom. As it brings about his kingdom his plan will do two things. First it will prove his right to be the exclusive ruler over all that Isaiah Second, it will exercise that right (Isaiah 45:5-6, 23-25; Habakkuk 2:13-14; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28). This is the grand end he is orchestrating, and it is the grand purpose which all things good and evil serve.

**12:27 And this expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, in order that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.**

The usage of certain terms in the prophetic writings, Day of the Lord, shaking, trembling, indicated that there are various interventions Yahweh carries out against

evil, and that these prefigure a great judgment against evil and its hosts that will result in the destruction of the earth (Isaiah 13, 14, 24; Jeremiah 4:2331; Joel 2, 3). Yahweh is presented as one who in his sovereignty holds evil in check during the season in which he has given the earth in some measure to man (Psalm 115:16). However a season called "the day of the Lord" a shaking of the earth is planned that will bring an end to the order that has been established by fallen humanity and the evil one.

The prophecy of Haggai 2:6 aligns with this pattern of prophetic pronouncements in the Old Testament. Haggai's words are speaking primarily of the shaking of the earth that occurs as the Day of the Lord begins, as Messiah establishes and carries out his rule on the earth. He goes on to project that existing nations will come and submit to Yahweh's rule in Jerusalem, on the present planet earth (Haggai 2:7-9; Isaiah 11:11-12). The New Testament writers add to this the understanding that the Day of the Lord refers to this entire season of Christ's reign on earth, a thousand-year period that ends with the fiery destruction of the present creation (2 Peter 3:9-13; Revelation 20:11-21:1).

In citing this verse in Haggai, the author of Hebrews primary interest is to call to the attention of the readers the phrase "yet once more." The Greek phrase is $\varepsilon\tau\iota\ \alpha\pi\alpha\xi$. The author uses the word six other times. He has employed it where a single occurrence of something is in view, such as the single sacrifice of Christ (9:8, 26), each person dying once (9:27), and the single purging of worshipers from sin through Christ (10:2). He wants to remind us that we are only one great event away from a total change in all that we know. The intervention of Christ will shake the entire order of the earth and Yahweh's people will assume rule over it (Daniel 2:44; 7:13-28). Yahweh's justice will prevail over it.

The author goes on to say what this single great event will bring about. It will involve the changing or removing of things that can be shaken. The word rendered "removal" by the NASB is the word the author used earlier for the change in law necessitated by the change in the priesthood (7:12), and the translation of Enoch (11:5). So he has used the term not so much to speak of destruction as he must speak of transformation and change.

What exactly is the author identifying as the object of this shaking and transformation. The NASB has chosen to render the Greek term $\pi\varepsilon\pi\omicron\iota\eta\mu\varepsilon\nu\omega\nu$, with the short phrase "created things." In our understanding this implies the things God has created, primarily physical things. However, the simple meaning of the term is "things that have been done." While the destruction of the earth is certainly a part of Yahweh's eventual plan, this term is not necessarily speaking of that. It is referring to the removal of established things and likely has in mind the order established by the evil one and by fallen humanity. The shaking of the earth refers to the undoing of this that has been done to God's creation. It is a work of restoration and redemption that Yahweh will bring to the planet. It will stop short of the final state he intends to put things in. It extends to the resurrection of believers, the undoing in their bodies of the results of

the fall and death, both spiritual and physical. It will involve what is termed a "restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21), or what Christ called "the regeneration" (Matthew 19:28). What happens during this day of Yahweh's presence on earth should be understood as a renovation of the old rather than a new creation.

None of this softens the action of the season known in Scripture as the day of Yahweh. That action taken by God will be decisive, violent, and terrifying. The time leading up to it is compared by Christ to the experience of birth pangs (Matthew 24:8), a time of unsurpassed tribulation (Matthew 24:21-22). The entire testimony of Scripture is that it will be a time of the spending of the wrath of the Holy One against the sin of humanity and against the evil one himself (Isaiah 2:12-22; 13:6-13; Amos 5:18-20; Revelation 6:15-17). This terror is what the writers of Scripture were foreseeing when they spoke of the shaking of the earth.

The changes imposed by Christ on the earth will result in the establishment of that which will not change. This is the resting of the control and authority of rule from the various kingdoms of the earth and from the evil one, and the entrusting of it to Yahweh's called and redeemed ones, headed by their redeemer, Jesus Christ. This is in accordance with the promises Yahweh made through the prophets of the old covenant era. Due to the character and authority of its head, the God/man Jesus Christ, this kingdom of the chosen ones and its authority over creation will never be shaken (Daniel 7:14,27).

**12:28 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;**

The called ones of God are even now receiving from Yahweh that for which they have been called an unshakable kingdom. A kingdom was the purpose for which Adam and Eve were created, which they forfeited. Theirs had been the blessing of Yahweh, which blessing included relationship with him and the right to rule over his creation (Genesis 1:26-31). This kingdom in and over creation, headed by man, was Yahweh's purpose in eternity past and remains the end toward which his plan of salvation is aiming. It is the focus from which he will not be diverted. It is for this reason that our kingdom that we are receiving cannot be shaken. It is his will that it be so.

This verse sets before us the appropriate response on our part to this restored blessing from Yahweh. We are to "show gratitude." The remainder of the verse will give definition to this response. The word rendered gratitude in the NASB is χαρισ—grace. The precise words of the author are "let us have grace." Grace is the word used throughout Scripture to describe Yahweh's gratuitous actions toward humanity. His favors have been extended freely to us. His actions are not done for some later exploitation of us. That is a matter of primary importance in motive. It is certain that God does gain glory through this plan of his that involves us. But it is certain that we

are not exploited in the matter but rather become objects of great blessing and benefit. As he has behaved gratuitously, we are to respond likewise—not seeking to exploit him or others for our own advantage. Our objective is not to use God and the blessings of God for our own kingdom building, as Adam and Eve chose to do. It is to discharge faithfully our stewardship of his blessings so that his kingdom is advanced.

But this is much more than a call to a certain manner and tone. The words that follow this exhortation are "through which." This is a prepositional phrase that indicates that grace is the source through which the action that follows comes about. So the exhortation, "Let us have grace…" likely has in mind a summons to appropriate God's favor that comes to us through the indwelling Spirit. It is favor by which we rise to behavior other than what is natural and instinctive in us. We are being called to do more than show gratitude. We are being told to use our kingdom position and kingdom resource to rise to kingdom work. So more than just a call to a particular kind of tone, this is a summons to the action of behaving in the power of the Spirit of God.

It is through such grace living on our part, where we are inspired and enabled by his Spirit in us, that service to God comes about. The author has used this word rendered service, λατρευω, five other times.

It is formed from a word that describes a hired menial. It is used often in Hebrews for supportive acts and objects that enable and enhance the worship of God in others. It is used often in Scripture as the term for worship or worshippers. Through availing ourselves to the grace of God present in us, that which inspires and enables worship is carried out by us.

Three ideas are added to this term for worship or service. The three ideas indicate the way grace inspired service to God is carried out and attitudes that accompany it. They help us recognize it, nurture it, and rule over opposite attitudes and actions. The first of these ideas is expressed by the author through an adverb that indicates that such service is acceptable, or well-pleasing to God. The work produced by grace aligns with all the statements Yahweh has made in Scripture about what he seeks in us. It is service that brings him joy.

The second and third ideas are expressed through a prepositional phrase, governed by the preposition μετα. This preposition expresses association and relationship. Attached to this preposition is a compound word that combines "taking" and "well." It is used of appropriate respect and reverence. Grace properly appropriated by us results in reverent and respectful service to God. Also attached to this preposition is a word used in the Scripture only here, that refers to fear and awe. It heightens the idea of respect expressed by the previous term in this prepositional phrase.

The message of this prepositional phrase is that our familiarity with Yahweh through Jesus Christ does not promote a low-level, casual service to him. And so the rest that comes with maturity does not promote ceasing from spiritual work. Rather, by his

favor working in us we rise to help him in what he is doing. The mature do this spiritual work not because they are scared, as were those at Mount Sinai. The mature carry it out due to the high respect they have come to have for him, one that has grown into awe. This awe is the staggering realization of the surpassing value of participation with him. When he summons, there is no greater privilege or joy than to engage with him in what he is doing.

The entire verse then, describes what we can become as we allow Yahweh's gracious favor to do its full work in us. Through the presence of his grace we serve in a manner that is well-pleasing to him, a manner marked by awe. This is the lifestyle the readers have stopped short of and which the author is summoning them up to.

**12:29 for our God is a consuming fire.**

This short phrase adds further explanation to the presence of respect and awe that grows in us through the work of God's grace. Its growing presence of awe in us is our logical response to truth. The words of this verse are consistent with the earlier imagery of the Mount Sinai occasion. There was fire there and the Israelites were afraid they would be consumed by it. These words harmonize with that occasion, yet they are subtly different. They are different in that they speak of God himself, not of phenomena that he has produced.

The message in this verse is that God himself is the One of all-consuming greatness. All other work we might do for all other causes other than him will perish. It is all in that sense fuel for the fire that he has appointed to consume the present creation, a message that persists throughout the Scriptures (Jeremiah 51:58; Habakkuk 2:13; 2 Peter 3:7). This phrase then emphasizes the absolute and unique eternality of God. There is an appointed end to all else. God is himself the all-consuming end toward which he has directed the present creation. We must avoid becoming diverted, as the readers had become, from the primacy of his will, which alone will determine the relative importance of all else.

# HEBREWS 13

**13:1 Let love of the brethren continue.**

This verse marks a return by the author to a very practical tone. The implications of all the deep theological points that his discourse has touched on are of a very practical, real-life nature. The gospel is about the relationship between the Creator and humanity, so the understanding of its inner workings and its central figure has major implications on human relationships. Much of this chapter has to do with how relationships within the community of faith are to be conducted.

This is a command to continue and persist in the simple practice of brotherly love. The term for brotherly love is φιλαδελφια. It is formed by combining the word for affection with the word brother. The word for brother is itself interesting in that it is formed from the word for womb. It speaks of commonality and shared identity even though used often of relationships between those not physically related. So this is a summons to persist in displaying through deeds our affection for other Christians. This ongoing display is to be a visible part of life within the Church.

Very often in the Christian literature of the late 20th century, another term in the Greek New Testament for love, αγαπη, was given an elevated status over φιλεω. Thankfully, that fad has passed. Verses like this one reflect the call of New Testament writers to us to have genuine affection for one another. Brotherly love calls us to be to each other what good friends should be. Very often we can be thinking so much of some ideal state of love that we miss the promptings of the Spirit that have to do with basic friendliness and friendship. The unregenerate can at times do better than we do in displaying simple acts of kindness that characterize the relationship between friends.

There is no better rule and guide for the affection of friends than that set forth in the Law of Moses. We often mistakenly view love as a New Testament phenomenon, appearing out of nowhere after the giving of the Holy Spirit. But the Law is full of standards for the relationship between persons in Yahweh's family. The New Testament commands regarding relationships within the Church are in most cases applications of these. So we find in the Law that God's children do not have the option of loving some within the family and hating others, of holding grudges, or of not speaking the truth to each other (Leviticus 19:17). They were called to obey "the golden rule," usually attributed to Christ (Leviticus 19:18). There was to be affection among them so that they responded to each other's physical needs (Deuteronomy 15:7-11), looked out for each other's property (Exodus 23:4), and did not seek their own profit in doing so (Exodus 22:25-27).

It is likely that the author of Hebrews is reaching back to this clear teaching in the Law. This is the old rule in the family of Yahweh. We are to continue to live by it and pass it

along. In the verses that follow, classic acts of brotherly love are set forth that we are to mimic.

**13:2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.**

The practice of hospitality was a common courtesy in the ancient near east. The Church was to observe this practice. The author subtly sets a high standard for the practice of hospitality by his apparent reference to an incident in Abraham's life, recorded in Genesis 18.

In that story Abraham invites three strangers to rest from their journey and be fed and nourished by himself and Sarah. They consent to do so, and Abraham and Sarah provide them a full meal with no cost spared. Abraham's offer of hospitality to them is noteworthy. It is not obligatory. He begs them to allow him the privilege of hosting them. We are uncertain from the narrative itself at what point Abraham realized these visitors were angelic. The author of Hebrews indicates that he entertained them "without knowing it." At the very least, Abraham did not initially know they were angels and so was extending the level of hospitality he would extend under normal circumstances.

The message of the author is clear. Like Abraham, we are to aggressively pursue the practice of hospitality. We are to share our best even with complete strangers, doing so with no regard for repayment. As in the case of Abraham, there is the potential of unexpected and unsolicited blessing in this practice. These ideas are clear in the author's words and there is even a hint in them of the teaching of Jesus, that in caring for those who are his children, we care for him (Matthew 10:40-42; Matthew 25:3041).

**13:3 Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.**

The command to remember is a charge to summon to one's own mind, habitually, those who have been imprisoned for the sake of the gospel. In the author's earlier quote of Psalm 8, this word remember, is the word that is used to describe Yahweh's remembrance of and kind action toward humanity (Hebrews 2:6). So this is a command to us, as family members, to do what our Father does. In Yahweh's family, this is a family value, and a part of what is meant by continuing in brotherly love.

The term added to this command to remember is as significant as the command itself. It describes the extent to which these imprisoned ones are to occupy our thoughts. The author attaches to the command a perfect participle, συνδεδεμενοι, a term that means "ones bound together with." By this term he summons us to deepest empathy, as though chained to these imprisoned ones and in their constant company. His words

may come out of his own present experience as one who is himself imprisoned, or who has stood by Timothy in his imprisonment (Hebrews 13:18-19, 23).

All these words add still more to the command to exercise brotherly love, showing that it is more than acts of kindness, and more than normal human sympathy. It is a bearing of the burden of one another's trial. It involves contemplating the suffering of another. Then it is allowing one's own emotions and spirit to get underneath that burden and feel its weight. Then it is the practice of the prayer and supportive action that flows out of that contemplation.

The author expands the scope of this command to include not only the imprisoned, but all who are mistreated. The author uses the same word he used earlier in describing the mistreatment endured by many who practiced and proclaimed the faith (11:37). It refers to having experiences that are injurious in some way, particularly the emotional torment that goes with injustice. From a practical standpoint this includes the entire body of Christ at one time or another. And so the command to remember a specific part of the family of Yahweh, becomes one that has implications for our daily practice of life in the body of Christ. Elsewhere in the New Testament we find that this supportive fellowship extends as well to entering the celebration of others, to "rejoice with those who rejoice" (Romans 12:15; 1 Corinthians 12:26).

This is the supreme challenge of Christian fellowship, to enter the emotional and spiritual experience of others. Only through the Spirit are we capable of carrying out such action in a way that overall growth in the faith is promoted for all. This Spirit-energized practice should not be confused with the kind of commotion that mere emotional participation with each other in concern, grief and suffering can create (Mark 5:8-39; Acts 21:12-13). The outcome of mere emotional participation with each other can be as harmful as it is helpful. It can multiply the pain and add to the bitterness of it if it is mere fleshly activity. Done in the Spirit this sharing of the burden gets people through trial and helps all involved to rise to accomplish God's objectives amid it and in its aftermath.

We are capable of this level of empathy because we have all suffered mistreatment. Mistreatment is part of our experience in a fallen world and in fallen bodies. The author uses the term "in body" to describe our present state of existence. There is no definite article with this word body, though one appears in the NASB version. Were the definite article present; we might assume that the author is referring to the idea that we are in the body of Christ. But he is talking about our existence in fallen human bodies in a fallen world. Such an existence means that we are subject to the various levels of trauma that mistreatment can inflict. All who have had physical life in this world have experienced mistreatment, and particularly those who have determined to live the faith. Our own experience of injustice equips us for a ministry of empathy, if we allow ourselves to feel our own pain and then that of others.

**13:4 Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.**

Virtually every New Testament writer spoke to the importance of Yahweh's family governing their sexuality well. This author's approach to this subject is as significant as his actual words. He prefaces his command about sexual activity with the command to honor marriage. The word honor, when used objectively means costly, precious, or valuable. When used subjectively as it is here, it refers to that which is esteemed, valued, and beloved. So our God-designed sexuality is not spoken to until the importance of treating marriage in an honorable way has been commanded. The marriage vow and covenant then, is cast as the over-arching principle that influences the sexual activity of the Christian. Honor becomes that which is to govern marriage, and our sexual activity reflects whether we honor marriage. We see elsewhere in the New Testament the association between honor and sexual behavior (1 Thessalonians 4:4).

The concept of honor is an important one that is always undermined and sacrificed when we behave by instinct—in a self-centered way. Honor is the opposite of self-centeredness. To practice honor is to behave with the idea in mind of higher ideals, of things more important than one's own immediate interests. It is to sacrifice, to bestow life and dignity on another. It is to make a stand for important principle, for what is true, right, and just. It is to place the fiber of society that holds it together, above that which meets some immediate personal need and desire. So the first idea expressed in the verse is that the marriage vow or covenant be held in high esteem and have sacred value. Implicit is the idea that this objective is more important for the mutual good of all than is our own sexual pleasure. So among all who are part of the family of Yahweh, our sexual behavior must be such that our marriage relationship is strengthened and marriage as an institution is strengthened.

Our ability to behave honorably separates us from animals and is part of how we bear the image of God.

This is why dishonorable sexual behavior is characterized by Paul as a sin against our own bodies (1 Corinthians 6:15-20). Only among humans is the command relevant to govern our sexual drive with honor. It is the dignity and beauty of humanity that we are enabled to exercise sexual restraint as opposed to living by instinct. So among all in whom the image of God is being restored, there is a standard of sexual expression that we are summoned to rise to.

The author's second command is stated in the NASB as "let the marriage bed be undefiled." The word marriage has been added, and the verb of being understood. So the statement by the author consists only of the words, "the bed undefiled." The term rendered bed is from the word for a couch or bed, that came to be understood as speaking of the sexual act itself. The word is κοιτη, related to the English term coitus. So the language the author uses is quite direct. There is not a condemnation of sex,

but there is the command that it be undefiled. The word rendered undefiled is αμιαντοσ, which means untainted or pure. This verse then is a call to husbands and wives to be pure in their sexual partnership not to have sexual activity with other partners as the rest of the verse will show. This is the command of God and to obey it is to honor one's own marriage, and the marriage union itself.

The last phrase of the verse reminds the readers of their accountability in this matter. God will enter judgment with those who disobey the boundaries he has placed on sexual activity. Two groups are referred to who do so. The first are the πορνουσ, a term that speaks of a wide range of sexual sins, to behavior outside of the sexual norms set forth by Yahweh. The second group are the μοιχουσ, those who commit sexual acts with partners other than their own spouses, of if they are unmarried, with those married to someone else. The phrase reinforces the absolute nature of the commands of Yahweh in sexual matters. The strength of our sexual desires and drives leads us to soften these commands. But the language of Scripture is direct and strong in giving them (1 Thessalonians 4:4-8; Genesis 20:3; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5).

**13:5 Let your character be 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,"**

The author now gives commandment regarding our "way," that is, the path we chose to walk, the pursuits we give our energy to repeatedly as we move through life. One thing is to be avoided. We are not to allow a love of money to shape those choices. Such a love is instinctively in us. We love money because we like the things and experiences it gives us access to. Because of the transitory nature of our lives and the things themselves, this pursuit of money proves an empty one. The truth warns us of this, and the wise person avoids it.

The author exhorts us to embrace instead something contrary to our instinct's contentment. The word for contentment used here is αρκουμενοι. Its root word is αρκεω, the etymology of which means "to ward off." This is an apt description of contentment, which is not naturally in us. Discontentment is in us. From a Biblical point of view, contentment is a state of mind we must bring ourselves into through warding off with the truth our pursuit of empty things. Our natural discontent is a lingering result of our spiritual death, our separation from God. We cannot replace the losses incurred in our separation from God through the things of the world. Our loss of the glory of God through sin can only be mitigated by Yahweh's plan of salvation. Knowledge of this truth is what will help us understand what we are feeling when we feel discontent and will help us "ward off" the illusion of things.

Contentment is the belief that we have enough things. It is believing against the idea that more things will enrich us in the sense that our inner being craves. That craving is a symptom of our fallen state. It is not a symptom of a need for more of what money

can buy. And so the author calls us to be content with what we have, what is presently around us and included in our circumstances.

We must remember in processing this that the pursuit of money is what the author has commanded us to restrain ourselves from This is not a call to be content with unsanitary, unhealthy conditions in ourselves and in others. Improving quality of life to an appropriate and fair standard of necessity is a legitimate goal for all people. From a Scriptural point of view, what is to be warded off is the pursuit and hording of wealth as one's life ambition and as a solution to our discontent. This is idolatry. It is placing something in Yahweh's place. Because it is idolatry, it is an empty pursuit.

The author delineates the rationale for this command regarding money. It is that we have Yahweh. He has joined himself to us in a relationship that he will never break. Our destiny is to inherit all that he has and to experience the perfection of all that he is. The author quotes Yahweh as saying, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you." This covenant relationship with Yahweh is being regarded by the author as it has been presented in Scripture, as the thing of consummate value, the assurance of ultimate strength and triumph.

The phrase "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you" is punctuated with quotation marks in most English versions. Most of the time when we see such punctuation in Hebrews, we find that the statement in quotes can be found in a particular location in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament. This, however, is a free paraphrase of a promise attributed to Yahweh on four separate occasions in the

Old Testament. The first time this promise occurs in Scripture is when Yahweh appears to Jacob at Bethel (Genesis 28:15). On that occasion Jacob is fleeing from his brother Esau and so was leaving the land of promise. Yahweh appears to him and proclaims his sovereign care over him. With a statement like this one in Hebrews, Yahweh promises to bring Jacob back to the land he has promised to Abraham. Subsequently, this promise of Yahweh's presence is presumed to be the inheritance of Israel forever. So Moses assures Joshua of Yahweh's presence going ahead of Israel into the land. He re-iterates to Joshua the promise made to Isaac, that Yahweh will not fail him or forsake him (Deuteronomy 31:8). And so the second time we see this idea expressed in the Scripture is when the passing of the torch of leadership from Moses to Joshua. The third time this idea is expressed in Scripture occurs a short time later, when it is stated by Yahweh himself. He appears to Joshua in the opening days of his leadership over Israel to assure him that he will be faithful in being with him (Joshua 1:5). The fourth time we see this idea expressed is when David is charging Solomon with the building of the Temple (1 Chronicles 28:20). As in the case of Moses and Joshua, this promise of Yahweh is cited by David as that which is to give Solomon strength and courage, rather than fear and dismay.

So we find that this promise is one that has been applied in Scripture to three important transitions that occurred in the leadership of Yahweh's covenant people. It has been cited in the transition from Isaac to Jacob, from Moses to Joshua, and from David to Solomon. We find Christ presenting himself as fulfilling to a greater degree this promise of Yahweh to his followers (Matthew 28:18-20; John 14:16-18). It is appropriate that it be cited by the author of Hebrews in the important transition that had occurred with the arrival of the promised Christ, and the inauguration of the new covenant.

**13:6 so that we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?"**

This is a quote from Psalm 118:6 (LXX 117:6). Psalm 118 is the last Psalm of the Hallel (from the Hebrew word for praise), which begins with Psalm 113. This group of Psalms were read in their entirety on certain Jewish holy days. The author of Hebrews injects this quote from these now, after reminding the readers of the great belief of their Jewish heritage, that Yahweh will never leave or forsake them. He is present in all his power and wisdom in every moment of every day and will remain so for all of time and eternity. This is the ultimate treasure that anyone could hope to gain.

When Jesus came to the disciples walking on the water, and they were screaming at the sight of what they thought could only be a ghost, his words were, "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid" (Mark 6:50). The presence of Christ is always reason for the highest measure of courage. The author of Hebrews draws from the same family of words as Christ did on that occasion when he speaks of our confident embrace of Yahweh as our helper. Saying the words and expressing the truth inspires courage.

The words of Psalm 118:6 remind us that what men do to us; they only do because God's plan allows it. Other humans can do nothing to us without Yahweh's permission. He is the sovereign and righteous judge who will justly compensate for all injury and damage. When his judgments are complete, we will bless and honor him. It is not that others can do nothing to harm us in the short term. It is that they are accountable to Yahweh, who will judge rightly and act upon and against the evil they have done. The outcome will be our deep and enduring blessing.

**13:7 Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.**

The author invites the readers to take a pragmatic look at the lives of those who brought them the truth of the gospel and had led them in the faith. He does not name them, so we do not know who they were. But the fact is that there must have been something admirable that the truth brought about in them. This is interesting in that it is very likely that these leaders and teachers suffered for their embrace of Christ. So it is not that the result of their conduct was wealth, health, and prosperity. The author

does not name the result of their conduct. From our perspective we are left to speculate as to who the individuals were and what their lives looked like. But the author is not afraid to cite them as possessors of those things that would be admirable to the readers.

The outcome of any life will be determined by what the individual believes in. We are called to imitate the faith of these individuals, not simply to try to mimic their deeds. As is the case in the rest of Scripture, this call to trust has been the recurring theme of the writer. It is the lesson of the Old Covenant that only when faith is mimicked do we find what is pleasing and good to Yahweh.

Though we do not know the names of the individuals being held up here as examples to mimic, and though we have no specifics regarding the outcome of their lives, Scripture persistently presents the life lived faithful to the faith as the only one worth living. In fact, its message is more urgent than that. A pragmatic way of expressing the Scripture's witness about various life patterns is this; the life of faith in Yahweh is in the end the only choice that will work. It is precisely for this reason that there is such urgency associated with Yahweh's salvation plan for humanity, and for the message of its truth the gospel. The gospel is not presented as the best option for humanity. It is presented as humanity's only option.

It is on this basis that the author composed this statement on mimicking the pattern of life exemplified by the faithful leaders of the movement. The truth provides a foundation by which soundness and health take hold in our inner beings. Untruth produces thought patterns in us that cripple and maim us, through which we are battered by Satan and his schemes to destroy and undo what God desires.

**13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever.**

Aside from Jesus Christ, there is no human who has ever lived of whom this statement can be made. Theologically, we have assigned a term to this attribute of Yahweh, referring to the fact that he does not change as his immutability. The immutability of God is an important idea that can be clarified in several respects but never fully and completely explained. Like all his attributes, God's immutability will always retain a mysterious and illusive quality about them, a result of his infinite nature. He is infinite and so lies beyond our finite understanding.

In all attempts to understand some aspect of Yahweh we must affirm that he is Holy. The fact that Yahweh is holy is repeated in the Scripture in his own testimony of himself. In Christian vocabulary, holiness is often understood as a term for God's infinite moral stature. However the term itself, both by etymology and usage, refers to a person or thing that is set apart and so distinguished from other similar things. When Yahweh testifies of his holiness, he is proclaiming his absolute uniqueness. He has revealed that he is set apart and distinct from all else—from us and from any other

living being. His testimony is that we are like him, created in his image. But we do not find in his words the antithesis of that idea, namely, that he is like us. His testimony of himself is that he is wholly and utterly unique, set apart from all that he has created. One aspect of this absolute uniqueness of his is that he is immutable.

From a practical standpoint, Yahweh's immutability is not so hard to imagine once we ascribe to him several other things he has revealed about himself. We understand from revelation he has given that he is omniscient—all knowing. There is nothing hidden from him and that includes the secrets of the human heart (Psalm 44:21; 94:11; 139:1-4). Included in his omniscience is foreknowledge (Isaiah 41:21-23, 44:68; 46:8-11; 48:3-5). Since we have in Yahweh a being who knows all things, including all that will happen in time and eternity, there is no need for him to change in what he has determined to do. Since there is no need for him to change, then the only reason for him to change would be a whimsical streak in his nature. There is no evidence of the presence of such a thing in his nature in Scripture. On the contrary, Scripture presents Yahweh as a rock (Deuteronomy 32:3-4; 2 Samuel 22:2-3), steadfast and eternal (Psalm 62:2,6; Isaiah 26:4). It also makes straightforward statements about him not being subject to such whim (James 1:17).

We also understand that God is complete. By this we mean that his attributes are present in him and exercised by him to the perfect degree. He is not imbalanced in anyway, and his personality is not weighted in a certain direction. His decisions then are perfect (Deuteronomy 32:4; Job 37:16; Isaiah 25:1; Romans 12:2). There is no need to revisit them or to adapt to unanticipated change.

We understand as well that it is God's nature to plan, and to plan details (Isaiah 14:24, 27; 37:26; 46:11).

Scripture presents reality as conforming to his plan, even those things which are done by evil men (2 Kings 19:23-28). Though not the source of evil, he has allowed it, knows ahead of time its every move, and acts against it to ensure that his purposes stand (Proverbs 16:4; Isaiah 33:1; 54:16-17). He has foreseen evil and all that would be orchestrated through it, and his plan is such that it has anticipated perfectly every action and reaction of the forces of evil.

What can we say then of the times and moments when God is presented as relenting or changing courses that he has previously determined (2 Samuel 24:16; Psalm 106:43-46; Jonah 3:10). What seems apparent in these kinds of incidences is that when Yahweh made his plan, he foresaw changes in all the changeable things which he created. He foresaw changes in the earth and in humanity due to evil. He foresaw the myriads of changes among humanity in different locals as kingdoms rose and fell, and as epochs and eras passed. All these his plan acts in or against, so that when time is finished and judgment passed, his purpose will prevail.

As changes occur according to the will of others or the imposition of natural law, these are all foreseen in his plan. When the Scripture testifies of Yahweh repenting, it is reporting action in eternity past that is being carried out in present time. By portraying himself as experiencing all the appropriate emotion and feeling in the moment as that plan unfolds and people live it, Yahweh reveals that he is a person. As the source and embodiment of love, he lives that plan with humanity. His expression of outrage and empathy at the abuses and losses of individuals along the way reinforces to us the totality of his attributes. He is more trustable in that he feels the losses incurred by good people due to the things his plan determines. Because he does not change, we can be certain that his plan is taking changeable earth and humanity to a different end where all that is right and just will prevail.

Our hope is in the very thing the author of Hebrews emphasizes here, that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. We are in the phase of his plan where our lives are subject to all kinds of change, much of it damaging and hurtful. The hope Christians have always embraced is in the end of the plan, not in the journey.

**13:9 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 thus occupied were not benefited.**

Among the living things that God has made, humans are unique in their rational ability. Of all the losses we experience in our separation from God, our loss of understanding of ourselves, our world, and life, is perhaps the most intolerable. And so there is in us a natural quest for knowledge and understanding. As humanity has searched for and contemplated things like origins, destinies, and causes, there has been enormous diversity in our conclusions. As Christianity spread, it began to penetrate these various religious and ideological spheres. These also began to mix with Christianity, and so there was the potential that the faith would degenerate and be entirely lost. The writings of the New Testament concern themselves with this problem. In every case, the New Testament authors set forth boundaries based on the teachings of Christ, to serve as a rule or standard for the Christian faith. The term "orthodoxy," was born out of this concern. It is from the Greek word ορθοσ, which means straight or correct, and δοκεω, which means to think or consider. In time the official writings that would serve as the standard for the faith were embraced and what we now know as the New Testament was formed.

The formation of the New Testament was the attempt to gather into one volume the thought of Christ as he gave it to the apostles. And so writings that were either personally written by the Apostles, or over which they had exerted primary influence, were preserved and propagated as the legitimate standard of the faith. These writings, combined with those of the Old Testament, have served as the standard by which understanding and wisdom in real life matters is developed. They have been the rule by which the legitimacy of teachers and movements have been judged. Within these

boundaries, there has been considerable diversity. But the fundamental teachings and beliefs have been preserved intact.

We see this important concern reflected in this statement by the author of Hebrews. Among humanity there is such a great fascination with ideas, that new schemes almost always attract a following. Two things seem to attract followers. First, something like that which is known, but that is in some way improved in the judgment of the hearers. These are not looking for a total change, just variation. Second, something that is totally different. There are always those who live on the edge and are anxious for new and different experiences. The author's statement covers these two things. His command to the readers is that they not to be "carried away," as plunder and captives would be in an invasion. This can happen when subtle changes to the truth occur, or when completely foreign ideas are injected into it. It is the truth that sets us free, and any change to truth inevitably leads to a loss of freedom.

After giving this command, the author touches on the specific varied and strange things that were the concerns of the hour. From his words we surmise that the dietary laws of the Old Covenant were being injected into the teaching of the Church. This would be an expected thing among Hebrew Christians, and it would take some time for them to figure out exactly how to live life under the New Covenant. They were breaking with strong tradition in viewing themselves as under Christ and therefore not obligated to the Law.

The author states that it is good that their hearts be strengthened by grace. That is what the gospel offers.

It puts individuals right with God and joins them to his Spirit. He strengthens their inner beings for all that he has called them to. Grace is the favor of God extended continually toward us because of Jesus Christ. Our inner beings can be greatly strengthened by grace.

Judaism was teaching that only through obedience to the Law could we be made right with God. It had missed the lesson of its own history, more than a millennium under the old covenant, and the consistent experiences of its curses rather than its blessings. Their reality was just as the author of Hebrews states here, that they had not been benefited by their fixation on the Law. By this he is referring to the fact that they had not laid hold of the blessing of Yahweh. The Law, due to the moral inability of humanity, offered only one prospect—its curses. Yet, Judaism's teachings died hard in the early Church. They were ingrained in the culture of the Jews. They also nestled well with normal human wisdom with respect to deities—that they must be pleased through good behavior.

Merit systems continually creep in where there is a strong doctrine of grace. Grace goes against nearly every religious strain developed by humanity. Yet it has proved our only hope. We must be fixated on Christ. Specifically the vicarious nature of his death,

burial, and resurrection. That is, that these accomplish for our benefit a work in Yahweh's eyes. It is these that put us right with him. The old covenant exposes us. The new covenant forgives and restores us to fellowship with Yahweh. Christ's death in our behalf provides an entirely different way of living to those who embrace them (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), which his burial and resurrection affirm.

**13:10 We have an altar, from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.**

The author has just alluded to those who were advocating that believers should observe certain dietary laws, likely those of the Mosaic Law. He hangs onto the idea of eating and food, then adds other old covenant imagery to it. his objective in this verse is to help the readers understand the error of these false teachers, and their own great privilege in Christ.

In the temple and tabernacle service that existed under the Law of Moses, the priests were allowed to eat of those things that the worshipers brought to sacrifice to Yahweh. A specific portion of every sacrifice was designated for their consumption. This was their right and privilege by virtue of their ordination. All others were strictly excluded from this benefit.

The author adopts this as imagery to illustrate that unbelief keeps one from deriving benefit from the sacrifice of Christ. Christ is the "altar" spoken of here, the one which we serve. Those who had not believed in Christ, in like manner to those outside the priesthood under the old covenant, have no right to partake of the sacrifice of Christ. Their unbelief denies them that right and its enormous benefit. They are still under the law and in that sense "serving the tabernacle." Belief in Christ was and is essential if one is to presume it's benefits.

It was not an easy matter to bring Israelites to the point where they were not "serving the tabernacle." There is much in the New Testament writings that is focused on this challenge. Socially and culturally great pressures were brought to bear on the Jews to remain true to Moses and the traditions of the nation. The language of the old covenant itself struck a healthy fear in all who would cast it aside in a presumptuous way. So the old ways were not easy to let go of and were dying hard.

It seems obvious from the painstaking work of the author in previous chapters, that he was concerned about the readers in this regard. In the end, they had not come to fully understand the all-sufficient nature of the suffering and death of Christ. His words were aimed at helping them fully understanding that Jesus' death released them from all the obligations imposed by the Law of Moses. They opened huge opportunities to them in their experience of Yahweh. But the hearer's reality was that they were still serving the tabernacle in some sense and so living out a low-grade experience of Christ. This remains common among Christians.

**13:11 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.**

The author refers here to the regulations prescribed by the Law for the sin offering, and the offering on the Day of Atonement (Exodus 29:14; Leviticus 16:27). Relatively small portions of those animals brought for sacrifice were burnt on the altar. A small amount of its blood was placed on the horns of the altar, the rest poured out at the base of the altar. The rest of the animal was to be burned outside the camp. The one burning the carcass was to wash his clothes and bathe his body with water and then could return to the camp. These instructions were consistent whenever sacrifice was made for the collective sin of Israel or for individual sin.

The symbolism of this rite is never specifically delineated in the account of Moses, nor does his account specify the oral teaching that accompanied this practice. It is evident from the prophetic writings and from the New Testament writers, that the practice was meant to provide an experience of the truth of Yahweh's commitment to atone for the sin of his people (Deuteronomy 32:43). The specific teaching that gave clarity to all the symbolism was likely to be provided by priests and Levites to the people. It was not, to the demise of the nation (Isaiah 5:3; Jeremiah 3:15; Hosea 4:1-6; Malachi 2:1-9). It was all meant to build trust in a profound eventuality, the placement of the guilt of sin on the sin-bearer, Messiah or Christ, and the removal of that sin and guilt from the persons and from the presence of Yahweh. It proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**13:12 Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate.**

The author points out a detail in the events of Christ's death that is consistent with the symbolism designed to point Israel to faith and trust in him. Like the burning of the animal of the sin offering outside the camp, Jesus' suffering occurred outside the gate. All the gospel writers provide this important detail. Their reports delineate clearly his being led away and his exit from the city of Jerusalem to the "place of the skull," for his crucifixion (Matthew 27:31-32; Mark 15:20-22; Luke 23:26-33; John 19:17).

This was the event the sin offering of the old covenant symbolized. The author of Hebrews points out that Christ's work sanctified the people. What the community of Israelites only could anticipate before, they now could enter fully through belief in Christ. His work sanctified them, removing all guilt and uncleanness from them and rendering them holy. It allowed them to be indwelt by God's Spirit. The readers had entered this reality, truly becoming children of Yahweh through faith.

**13:13 Hence, let us go out to Him outside the camp bearing His reproach.**

In the Greek text this verse begins with a relatively uncommon conjunction, τοινυν. It is an inferential coordinator, introducing a course of action appropriate with conditions and ideas that have just been stated. The facts that Christians embrace have just been

highlighted by the author, namely, that in Jesus' humiliation at Golgotha we have been sanctified by Yahweh. This then is the action that is appropriate considering that great fact.

The author's statement doesn't have near the implications to twenty first century western world Christians that it had to the original readers. The Israelites of the first century were being asked to leave mainstream Judaism, which had aligned itself against Jesus as the Christ. Jesus had spoken of the trauma he would bring to that community (Matthew 10:34-39; John 16:1-3). Embracing him would cost them family relationships and social standing. It would have financial implication for many. They would leave the camp of Judaism, the Law of Moses, all the traditions that had been developed through centuries of this tight-knit community. They would be excommunicated and cast off. In This experience they would bear the reproach of Jesus', the distain that led to the jeers and taunting he endured as he gave his life for his own.

The truth of the gospel has always brought about distain among the mainstream of humanity. As the gospel made its way into the gentile world, it seemed curious, odd, and in the end irrelevant and bothersome to them (Acts 18:12-13; 24:25-27; 26:24-32). When its thought and lifestyle intersected with gentile religions, the reaction against it was violent (Acts 16:16-22; 19:23-41). And so there has always been a level of reproach associated with embracing Jesus Christ and so also a sense of isolation that comes with the experience of faith.

**13:14 For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.**

The focus and pursuit of those of the faith has always been on the inheritance that would be theirs in eternity (Hebrews 11:13-16). In the sense of gaining personal happiness and reward, the present was to them a lost cause. They have always been led and inspired by an eschatology, a belief and a doctrine of last things that would inaugurate new things. The experiences of the present fallen creation are marked by every kind of shortfall. It cannot deliver life as God intended life to be lived. But God has a plan of rescue. For humanity there is a restoration to soundness and health that Yahweh is working. It involves his judgment, his rule, and eventually an entirely new earth. This vision of his for the redemption of this creation and the new beginning he has promised, has always been running in the background of the community of faith.

The author speaks of the lasting city. For much of earth's history, every kingdom has had its chief city where its ruler lives, that was the stronghold and crown jewel of the kingdom. God's kingdom is represented in this way in the Scripture. Jerusalem was anticipated in the writings of Moses. It was not known specifically by that name, only anticipated as a specific place Yahweh would choose to put his name (Deuteronomy 12:5, 11, 18; 23:16). David came to know the place, wrested it from the control of the

Jebusites, and headquartered his kingdom there. It was David who came to understand that the temple was to be built there and that Solomon his son would build it.

In the final pages of Scripture we read of the new Jerusalem, descending on the new earth. It is presented as the place of Yahweh's dwelling and where the throne of his eternal kingdom will be located. This is the city and the ending that has been anticipated by people of the faith over the millenniums of time. There have been earthly demonstrations of Yahweh's government, assurances that his plan is on course and of his capability to bring about this end. These will continue. There will even be an earthly, visible kingdom headed by Christ in the location he chose to place his name, the Jerusalem of the promised land. But the consummate fulfillment of the promise of the faith is the city that will endure for eternity, the final enduring place for God's people. It is apparently being prepared by Christ (John 14:1-2), and it will come down from the place God currently dwells to the new earth when the plan of God for this creation has run its course (Revelation 21:9-22:5).

**13:15 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.**

The author commands the readers regarding something they are to do for God. They are commanded to bear up a sacrifice of praise to him. The author also tells them how exactly this is accomplished and brought about. The praise of God is presented here as the fruit or outcome of something else. The NASB reading is that praise to God is the outcome of giving thanks to "His name". The name of Christ is presumably in view here. However the word rendered "give thanks" is ομολογουντων. That is the word for confessing. It is rendered by the word confession or confess in every use in the New Testament except this one. It seems best to understand the author as saying that through the confession of Jesus as the Promised One, the Christ, a sacrifice of praise is offered up to God. This confession and embrace of Jesus as the Christ are the going "out to him outside the camp" that he has called the readers to (verse 13).

There is no greater act of God in our behalf than what he has done in the incarnation, the death, and the resurrection of his Son. To acknowledge Christ is to honor God and to dishonor Christ is to dishonor God (John 5:23). All who honor Christ will be honored by God (John 12:26). It is when we believe in the Son that we work the works of God (John 6:29). In the confession of Christ then, we have the high praise of God. There was and is no greater thing anyone can do in praise of Yahweh. It was and is especially noteworthy when an Israelite embraces Jesus, breaking from the ranks of those in the mainstream camp of Judaism who reject him.

**13:16 And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased.**

With this verse the author moves from the inner worship and praise of God to the outward display of it. In doing so he reminds us of that God desires both. These two-dimensional practices of the faith seem to be one of the great challenges of the community of faith. Either we are busying ourselves with tasks at the expense of the weighty matters of the heart, or we are supposedly engaged in the inner dimension of the faith blind to practical needs of others that God is summoning us to (Isaiah 29:13; Micah 6:6-8).

Both dimensions are present where there is spiritual health (James 2:14-26; Romans 12:1-8). There is strong evidence that each is a catalyst for the other (Luke 7:42-47; 1 John 3:16-17). If we are lacking in the outward deeds of ministering to others, we can be certain that we have lost touch with the leading of Yahweh in our hearts. If on the other hand we are engaged in the deeds of the faith but are not persistently opening our hearts for his scrutiny, we can be certain that we are not practicing the faith as it has been delivered to us.

The two things the author reminds us of are not complexed Doing good in the Scripture is the practice of the normal deeds of human kindness and generosity (Micah 6:8; Galatians 2:10; James 1:26-27). The call to "sharing" is the rendering of the word κοινωνιασ and refers to the many dimensions of Christian fellowship—the basic sharing of life. Fellowship is not just speech. It is deeds. It is the intentional practice of friendship.

**13:17 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.**

This verse continues the practical tone of this chapter, the look of one's life when faith and trust in Yahweh are fully integrated into it. It focuses on a key relationship in the community of faith, that between Christ-followers and those whom Christ has called to leadership.

We are informed by the author that the leaders "keep watch over your souls." The term most often used for guarding is φυλασσω. It is used of keeping valued things or prisoners secure (Luke 2:8; Acts 12:4; Acts 28:16). It is used of maintaining a certain standard of behavior (Romans 2:26), or of teaching (1 Timothy 6:20). However, the word used here by the author of Hebrews is αγρυπνουσιν, which simply means "not sleeping." It emphasizes alertness, readiness, and awareness of that which constitutes a threat. This term reveals the function of leaders within the faith community and their necessity. They are summoned and placed in position by Yahweh because of danger to the entire community, danger which requires their presence. Without them loss would occur for all.

The loss leaders protect against is related to “souls.” This term is used in several ways in the Scripture. It is most often used of what we would term the physical life and earthly existence of individuals. So it refers not exclusively to the immaterial parts of our being and matters of heaven and hell. The term refers as well to the experience of earthly life, to things like lifestyle choices and the practical outcome of everyday matters. Leaders are called to be alert to what is going on in the lives of those they lead. The clear implication is that they are designated to provide protection against destructive and unhealthy patterns that will otherwise develop among people.

We are also informed that these leaders will have to “give back” an account of their watch. The term used for this giving of the account is αποδωσοντεσ. This word appears 49 times in the New Testament, in varied applications. It is used often by the gospel writers for the payment of debt, or of a rightful share (Matthew 21:41). In the Epistles it is used in the same way, but also for the giving of an explanation or of a rationale for some behavior (Acts 19:40). These ideas are conveyed by the writer of Hebrews in his two other usages of this word. He uses this term in speaking of Esau “selling” his birthright (12:16). He uses it to speak of action that “yields” or “gives back” a certain consequence (12:11). The common thread of meaning in these usages of this term is that of providing legitimate requital. So we are reading about the fact that the calling and designation of leaders comes with the just expectation that they will provide a legitimate explanation of the events that occurred during their watch.

An instinctive notion that can arise in us is that leaders have greater freedom and are a law to themselves. We can even be attracted to leadership because of this. This can certainly be the case where self-serving leaders gain power. However, it is not ultimately true since God will hold all individuals accountable at every level. The abuses of self-centered leaders will be confronted, because all will be called before the righteous God who will hold them responsible. Of this we can be certain. The author has woven this idea into this command to the followers.

Two commands are given to the followers. The first is that they obey those who lead. The word rendered obey is πειθεσθε. It is a slightly unusual word to use where a command to obey is given. It is used 56 times in the New Testament. Most often it speaks of the act of persuading, or in the passive voice of being persuaded. It occurs two other times in Hebrews. It is the word rendered faith in Hebrews 11:13, faith being the result of having become persuaded. In Hebrews 13:18 we will see that it is rendered sure, also the result of having become persuaded. The command is in the passive voice, and so it is a call to be convinced by the leaders, to arrive at a point of being convinced of the calling that rests on them as leaders. Many followers resist being led. They take pride in their free spirits and in skepticism and so are rather easily led by the evil one. They embrace the role of being contrarians. This word is likely utilized by the author to assure that such a posture is not viewed as wise or normative. Our challenge is to be wise in our own personal relationship with God yet persuaded with respect to the office of those designated as our leaders.

The second command reinforces this idea of being persuaded. It is the command to place oneself under another. The author does not use the word we normally see in the New Testament for submission. He chooses a word that appears only here. By etymology it means to "yield under," and is used from Homer down as the term for giving up resistance. No one can submit another, though they can subject them. To submit is something that a person themselves must do. It is an act of the will to defer to the thought and judgment of another, in this case due to respect for the position God has conferred on them. This is to be our voluntary response within the community of faith to those God has called into the office of leadership.

The author relates all these commands to a very specific purpose. That purpose relates to what will be said about them in the official report the leaders will give to the Lord of their season as Church leaders. The objective is that the leader's accounting of them be a joyful one. It is possible that through their lack of faith and submission the accounting could be a grievous one. The word rendered grief is a word that means "to sigh." It is the word used of the sighing of Jesus as he bore the burden of the sickness of others (Mark 7:34). It is the word used of our groaning in our present fallen bodies (Romans 8:23; 2 Corinthians 5:2,4). It is the word used in a negative way of us murmuring against each other (James 5:9). We all have memories of hard things with people that make us sigh. Our goal should be to become followers that are a delight to those charged with leading us, and to be seen as such in the official account they give of their leadership.

To not rise to such a purpose or objective is unprofitable for us. It is without gain. We must not be deluded by the contrarian spirit of the age. The result of such a spirit is a loss of eternal legacy. Whatever we might grasp for ourselves for the short season that is this life will be our only benefit. There will be no eternal gain through such a spirit. Our eternal legacy will be tarnished by our failure to place faith in the leaders God has designated and respond appropriately to their authority.

**13:18 Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things.**

The author commands the readers to intercede in his behalf, and on behalf of those associated with him. The verses that follow name Timothy as one associated with him, so that we expect he himself was part of the circle of the apostles. The following verse speaks to his desire to be restored to the company of the readers. The implication of this and the rest of this letter is that he is incarcerated. This is the circumstance that he wishes the readers to help resolve through their prayers.

Before mentioning his desire that they pray for his release and restoration to them, he chooses to affirm the integrity of his ministry. The accusations against the apostles came mainly from Jewish circles and were slanderous. Before asking the readers to pray for his release he reassures them that they will be praying for the just and fair by

the highest standard of justice. He uses the same word to describe the certainty he has of his own integrity that he used in the previous verse in commanding the readers to believe in their leaders. It is a word that describes being persuaded and so placing faith and trust in something and embracing it as dependable and reliable. There is restraint in prayer for someone when there is no certainty that they have been adhering to God's course in the choices that have shaped their circumstances. On the other hand there is a persistent burden to pray for those who are innocent victims of the lies and schemes of the evil one.

The author wants the readers to be confident in their prayers in his behalf. He mentions that he has behaved with a good conscience. This means making decisions according to what is fair and right by the dictates of conscience. It eliminates decisions made from either expedience or animosity. He was convinced that his good conscience had manifested itself in good deeds. The Greek words used to describe both his conscience, and his deeds are an adjective and an adverb from the same root that expresses goodness, honesty, and integrity. The term for conduct is one used earlier in his writings of the readers when they had followed the conduct of those persecuted for the faith (10:33). Curiously, it is formed by joining the word for twist, with the preposition that indicates up, or again. It came to be a term that spoke of busying oneself. The author is expressing that there was a clear pattern of integrity in his own heart, and it had translated into the very actions that had led to his imprisonment.

**13:19 And I urge you all the more to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.**

Having reminded the readers of his innocence as a defendant in the issues for which he was imprisoned, the author urges them to increase their prayers in his behalf. His call is to an exceeding abundance of prayers in his behalf. The term for more super-abundance refers either to greater number of prayers, or perhaps more intense prayers.

We see in the New Testament the belief in volume in connection with a prayer effort. We see this in its rather frequent connection with terms like "unceasing" (Acts 12:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:17), "at all times" (Luke 18:1; Ephesians 6:18) and for "all people" (1 Timothy 2:1). This is peculiar to the rational mind. We are praying after all, to an omniscient God, who has assured us that he already knows what we need and has commanded us to take no thought for such things (Matthew 6:31). He has assured us of his sovereign plan with respect to earth's affairs (Isaiah 43:13). This information can make prayer seem irrelevant and unnecessary. Yet Jesus himself called us to persist in it and presented the idea that multiplied prayer made sense from a rational point of view (Luke 18:1-7).

Christian people have always had to manage this tension that exists in the whole practice of prayer. Yahweh certainly does not need our prayers to act, nor is he bound to act in accordance with what we wish him to do. Yet we are told that repeated and

fervent prayer is effectual (James 5:16). In the end we practice it in faith and do so because we are summoned by the Holy Spirit, through the writers of Scripture, to practice prayer.

**13:20 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,**

This verse and the next together form a pronouncement of a blessing on the readers. The subject of the action, God, is stated immediately in this verse. This is followed by a short clause, and then a lengthy one that identify him as the source of our salvation and care as his children.

In the various polytheistic religions of the ancient world, it was not uncommon to believe in a particular being as the god or goddess of peace. So the Greeks had Eirene, and the Romans had Pax, both of whom were goddess of peace. From the midst of these cultures the Holy Spirit inspires the author of Hebrews to identify Yahweh as the God of Peace. Identifying him in this way is common in the New Testament (Romans 15:33; Philippians 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23). He is also called the God of glory (Acts 7:2), of hope (Romans 15:13), of comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3), of love (2 Corinthians 13:11), of grace (1 Peter 5:10), and of heaven (Revelation 11:13). He is presented as the source of "every good and perfect thing" (James 1:17). We are told to be inspired by his completeness (Matthew 5:48), and this is the image of Yahweh that is persistently developed in Scripture.

The fact that God is complete in peace, and therefore the consummate peacemaker, is the beginning point of understanding his posture toward humanity. His plan to rescue fallen, alienated, and rebellious humanity grew out of this, that he is a peacemaker. The incarnation of the Son and his sacrificial death were compelled by his desire to bring peace. It is not that he needs peace. He cannot be legitimately threatened and what he has set about to do cannot be thwarted. The prosperity of his plan does not depend on peace. He is equipped adequately to squelch immediately all hostility while it is still only a thought somewhere buried in the heart of some being in some place. So he is good at war, but by nature seeks to bring peace. So this is an important fact, that Yahweh is a peacemaker. His willingness to become a man demonstrates that he is willing to embrace the vulnerability that comes with being a peacemaker.

As a result of being the God of peace, he has both provided and accepted the blood of Jesus Christ as payment in full for the sin of humanity. Christ, who was without sin of his own, bore the guilt of Adam that permeated all of humanity and produced the guilt of all others. Because he himself was guiltless, Yahweh accepted Jesus' blood as the just payment for our guilt. The proof of this is the resurrection of Christ. All other humans die as Adam did, due to sin. Jesus died due only to our sin. Since his blood paid for our sin, and he had no sin of his own, death had no power over him. The moment God accepted Jesus' blood as the atoning sacrifice for our sin, Jesus'

resurrection was assured. So as the author of Hebrews says in this verse, in Christ we find the peculiar case that he was raised by God through the power of his own blood. That can be said of no other person that has ever lived.

In Christ we have the Great Shepherd of the sheep. He is the one who laid aside his own glory and dignity to become a man, and who then as a man gave his lifeblood for the eternal well-being of his own. In his blood we have the legal instrument of a covenant, initiated and consummated by the Creator God. It is an eternal covenant. Unlike most legal agreements, time is not of the essence in it. This covenant establishes a relationship that transcends time. So this that is called in Scripture the New Covenant is the projected one that undoes forever the fall of Adam and restores the blessing that had been meant for humanity. It restores and re-joins humanity to God in a relationship that will never be broken.

**13:21 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.**

Having established the source of the blessing that he is about to pronounce, the author now delineates the blessing itself. It is the blessing of Genesis 1:28 that was forfeited in the fall of Adam. The restoration of this lost blessing to humanity is a key theme in Scripture that surfaces here. To the original readers and to us who presently read Hebrews, this equipping is the immediate blessing of the experience of the first installment of the New Covenant. It is the blessing of living in union with our Creator through the Holy Spirit—who is the earnest of our inheritance (Ephesians 1:14). This present equipping will give way to a heightened experience of this union with Yahweh that will be ours when Christ returns to rule the earth. That heightened experience will also give way to the consummate experience of our restoration, when we reside with God on the new earth. The blessing at that point will be fully restored.

The language of this blessing harks back to humanity as they were originally conceived in the mind of God. We were conceived in the mind of God and then created by him as uniquely capable agents of his, whose purpose was to carry out his rule over earth. His desire was and is that we rule for him. It is not that we are to rule instead of him, as humanity soon slipped into doing. But his desire is to make us those with whom he partners so that what pleases him we bring about.

The central figure and catalyst in bringing about this desire of God is Jesus Christ, his own Son. It is through him that Yahweh will undo the catastrophe of Adam's choice, restore his image in us and render us unable to fall from the dignity and purpose that is his plan for us. When we look at Christ we are seeing the solution to the human dilemma, evil, and to the earth's dilemma, fallen humanity. We are also seeing the capability of an unfallen human as an instrument in the hand of God to bring about his will.

So this and the previous verse capture redemption, the great series of actions taken by Yahweh to bring about freedom from the curse of evil for us, so that we might serve and bring about his purposes. The call of the New Testament writers is for us to enter this way of living. The Holy Spirit is stirring within us and among us so that together as a living organism we are being equipped for a more vibrant experience of redemption. Diligence in matters of the Spirit is the focus of the Spirit's work. Whether toward Scripture, toward the exhortation and teaching of others, or toward his own subtle leadings from within us, alertness and diligence lead to our being equipped for a much different life than the one that we instinctively fall into.

**13:22 But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.**

The words of the author here show that he understood something of the nature of his own writing that had come about through the Holy Spirit's inspiration. It was brief, particularly compared to the work of men of the Scripture like Moses, or David. It was brief compared to the work of Luke, or to the multiple written documents circulated by Paul. At the same time there was and is that about the vocabulary and thought of Hebrews that requires time, a high level of attentiveness to detail, and considerable persistence and endurance. It is in this sense that a reader must hold up under its demands. Hebrews yields in proportion to what is invested in it by way of analysis and meditation. That is true of all the Scripture, but to a pronounced degree with Hebrews.

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

Many have concluded that the author of this Epistle is Paul and there is considerable evidence in favor of this. This reference to Timothy certainly makes one think of Paul. At the same time, the reference to Timothy as "our brother" lacks the sense of deep affection that characterized Paul's emotional ties to Timothy (1 Timothy 1:2, 18; 2 Timothy 1:2; 2:1). Yet it would not be totally uncharacteristic for Paul to refer to Timothy as a brother, a term that certainly has affectionate overtones. In the end this mention of Timothy does not give us a definitive identity with respect to the author.

However, the citation of Timothy is certainly proof that the author moved in the circle of the apostolic company. He showed anticipation of Timothy coming to the location where he himself was, and an expectation of traveling with Timothy in a coming ministry venture. This shows personal relationship between the two and a level of affinity in ministry. So while the author's identity is not certain, we gain valuable information about the era the epistle was written in and the associations of the author through this verse.

The release of Timothy is referred to, and again, we do not know anything about the details that lead to this statement. The request for personal prayer in verses 18-19 lead

us to speculate that the author was imprisoned, or at least under legal scrutiny. This verse and the following one lead us to speculate that the author is in Rome and is himself free. It appears at first glance, that Timothy has been imprisoned somewhere other than Rome, has been released, and will now make his way to Rome. But that requires some assumptions as well. We cannot be certain that the loosing referred to here with respect to Timothy is a release from prison, though that is likely. Nor can we assume that the author is in Rome. We can conclude only that Timothy is now free from some obligation that had restricted him in some way. Since he is free, it is possible that he will come to where the author is, and that the two of them will make their way shortly to be with the readers.

Any views we develop of the author of this epistle based on the details revealed in these concluding remarks, while tenable, should not be seen as the absolute end of the matter. The details support Paul as the author, him being in Rome, his own impending release from legal obligation, Timothy's arrival in Rome, and then a subsequent journey by the two of them that will bring them to the readers. But the details do not demand that scenario. The fact is that the search for conclusive evidence for authorship of the book remains open.

**13:24 Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.**

These words indicate that this was a general epistle that was addressed to readers in a geographical area. It seems addressed to a specific geographical area because the author anticipated a visit in which he would see them all. It seems not to be a specific church because of the command here to greet all their leaders. This indicates that the letter was intended to circulate and was addressed to a general audience in various locations. It seems not to have been sent to a specific leader or leaders, and no personal names are given. The greeting to leaders is an appropriate show of respect and support for leaders at the local church level.

The reference to "those from Italy" could mean that the author was in Italy and was sending greetings from those he was associated with there. On the other hand, he could have been visited by a group of individuals from Italy, or fellowshipping with a group of Jews who had been expelled from Italy. In this reference we once again find a detail that is not definitive.

**13:25 Grace be with you all.**

The letter ends with the classic greeting that is found in Paul's epistles. It is appropriate to the letter, which has been aimed at keeping the readers from lapsing into a perfunctory practice of the Law and a return to classic Judaism.

This parting word is a blessing, in classic Jewish style, that reminded the readers of the new direction the incarnation had brought about within the family of Yahweh. Yahweh

had spoken in past eras through the prophets in many and diverse utterances. They had spoken of "chesed," Yahweh's loving, compassionate, unmerited care for his covenant people. But then he had spoken "in Son." The word grace summarizes the life and message of Christ, grace that the Law and Prophets predicted, and that was realized in the lifework of Jesus Christ. His family would be and would be forever enabled by his grace.

# APPENDIX 1

The writer of Hebrews warns his readers against the danger of suppressing the truth (Hebrews 3:7-19). He utilizes the words of Psalm 95, and says to them:

Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, 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;' as I swore my wrath, they shall not enter My rest." (Hebrews 3:8-11 utilizing Psalm 95:8-11).

This Scripture from Psalm 95 is referring to a series of incidences in which the Israelites squelched the clear witness of their conscience and their concrete experience that God was good. They did not chose in those times to trust in Yahweh's witness of himself, or in their experience of deliverance experienced to that date (15 such incidents are reported: Exodus 14:10-15; 15:22-26; 16:1-12; 16:17-28; 17:2; 32:1-6; Numbers 11:1-3; 11:4-12; 12:1-15; 14:1-12;16:1-11; 16:41; 20:2; 21:4; 25:1). These incidences began just hours after they had been released from bondage in Egypt because of Yahweh's judgment of the Egyptians through the plagues (Exodus 14:10-12). Their distrust of Yahweh's character reared its head again just three days after they had walked through the parted Red Sea and seen the entire army of Pharoah destroyed by the hand of God (Exodus 15:22-26). A total of five are recorded before the incident when they see the fire and smoke on the mountain and are afraid to meet Yahweh. Five more are recorded from the giving of the 10 Commandments until the moment in Numbers 14:20-25, when God bans that generation from entering the promised land due to their unbelief.

After they are so banned, five more incidents are recorded as if to confirm the judgment of God. So in their minds Israel suppressed what they had concretely experienced of God's goodness, in favor of a course of distrust and fear. This pattern of thought they continually allowed themselves to revert to despite the continued patience of God and proof of his goodness.

In the account of Moses then, a great and important irony is presented on this subject. Pharaoh hardens his heart against the clear voice of Yahweh and seeks to prevent the Israelites to leave Egypt. Against the backdrop of Yahweh's miraculous deliverance of them, Yahweh's covenant people harden their hearts. An entire generation of them miss out on experiencing the promised land. Israel's history is a profound demonstrate that this is the great human problem and dilemma. It demonstrates to us an important idea. It is that hardening the heart can happen to the Christian as easily as the non-Christian. This is exactly the point the author to the Hebrews is bringing out through Psalm 95.

The whole experience of the Exodus for Yahweh is described in interesting emotional terms. It is important that we understand and guard against being as the Israelites were if we wish to have a full experience of Yahweh.

The author of Hebrews uses Psalm 95 to show that the events in the wilderness were a season of time in which Israel "provoked" Yahweh. The text in the original language is strong in 3:8 and 3:15, where the entire string of incidences is referred to as "the provocation." From the point of view of the author, whose choice of words is being orchestrated by the Holy Spirit, the period we refer to as "the Exodus," God refers to as "the provocation." The idea of the word rendered provocation is to be in the company of and so repeatedly experience that which prods and irritates.

The Exodus is also referred to here as "the day of testing." The testimony of Moses regarding the entire period spent in the wilderness is that it involved a series of tests Yahweh allowed to strengthen the trust of Israel in him. The purpose of these can be illustrated by the routine a personal trainer might prescribe for a person whose goal was participation in a marathon or a triathlon. These were experiences God provided so that they could experience his saving intervention and have a memory that would strengthen them for the greater things he had. At times he revealed the terror of his presence so that Israel would develop reverence for his power (Exodus 20:18-20). They could trust it above all other powers. At other times he tested them to reveal to them what was in their own hearts (Exodus 16:4; Deuteronomy 8:2). His tests were meant as a means of humbling them and helping them grow in trust in him, and from there grow in character and so inherit blessing (Deuteronomy 8:16; 13:3).

Their distrust overwhelmed them in these tests. Rather than forging ahead and believing Yahweh would intervene and provide they wished to turn back to Egypt and slavery. The generation that had been rescued from Egypt was not allowed to enter the good land because of this (Numbers 14:20-25). But Israel's history proved that such unbelief was not the unique to that generation. It resided in subsequent generations. It became characteristic of the nation.

To study the history of Israel once they were in the land is to see only short periods of time when the worship of Yahweh was vibrant. Their hearts tracked best under David's rule. Under David the nation was not without its troubles, but Yahweh speaks well of David despite his various lapses. In fact, the promised place where Yahweh "put his name" was revealed to David in the wake of one of his lapses (1 Chronicles 21:1-22:16). He prepared plans for the house of Yahweh and gathered materials (1 Chronicles 28:19). He likely wrote an entire liturgy for the worship of Israel in this house (the first of the five books of Psalms may be this). This was all done as the forty-year period that David was Israel's king was coming to an end.

When David died, Solomon his son became king. Solomon accomplished the agenda his father had established for building the temple. He too reigned for forty years. It

took twenty years to build the temple and establish the worship routines for Israel. At some time toward the end of the last twenty years of Solomon's reign it is said that his foreign wives turned his heart from Yahweh, and he built shrines and worshipped false gods (1 Kings 11:1-13). The nation never recovered from Solomon's sin. That means that the glory of Israel when Yahweh was held high and the place where he had put his name was exclusively revered lasted from ten to twenty years! The history of Israel demonstrates humanity's propensity to trust in all that is false, even when Yahweh's presence is remarkably present. It demonstrates that to harden their hearts and suppress truth is what makes salvation impossible for us to accomplish on our own.

Hardness of heart, the inner choice to resist truth because it speaks against a preferred course of action, is different from what could be called legitimate unbelief. Legitimate unbelief occurs where there is no knowledge of the truth, a genuine lack of information. This situation is not as common as might be thought, but it does exist. Hardness of heart occurs when the information is available, absorbed and understood and a deliberate choice is made not to implement it. That choice is usually due to truth's implications, not its actual content.

This is the great root of evil present in all of us that we must resist through the Holy Spirit. It is the force that all the information in revelation and all the activity of the Spirit and the Angels is equipping us to overcome. The authors of scripture appeal for this work in us. We are fully supported in it by all the effort expended by heaven since the fall.

# APPENDIX 2

(Use of the phrase “Most High” in account of Melchizedek and beyond)

When we arrive at the story of Melchizedek in Genesis 14, this much has happened. Yahweh has blessed humanity at creation with a special position—to rule over creation for Yahweh according to his direction. Humanity walked away from that blessing, but Yahweh has shown he will save and will restore that blessing to humanity.

He picks one man, Abram, and tells him that it is through him that all nations will be blessed. The original blessing, lost through the fall of Adam and Eve was to be restored through Abraham’s offspring. However, Abram was a herdsman. He owned no land, he had no offspring, and he certainly was not a king or ruler even among local rulers in the land of Palestine when the events of Genesis 14 occur.

Then there is a series of incidences in which four ancient kings form a coalition of sorts and begin to expand their territory. They wreak havoc among the people living in the land promised to Abraham. Eventually these coalition forces attack another coalition of five kings, and specifically the town Abram’s nephew was living in, Sodom. The four kings win the battle, loot Sodom, and carry off as captives several of the citizens. including Abram’s nephew, Lot.

Word of this battle and the plight of the captives come to Abraham. It is a pivotal moment for him. What is he to do? He is not a king. But by this time he does have several servants. He decides to intervene and so sets out with his own servants to rescue his nephew and the other captives. He attacks the coalition army with his makeshift army of 318. To the surprise of the readers, Abram soundly defeats them. It is a surprise because thus far in the account Yahweh has orchestrated nothing of this sort among his people. So far, the record has left the reader with the impression that their numbers and influence have been steadily dwindling. Not this time, however. Abram rescues the captives and recovers all the goods that had been carried off. In a moment the four-king confederacy that had terrorized the region of Canaan was eliminated.

As Abram is returning from this remarkable event, taking the captives and the goods back to the king of Sodom there comes a moment when they meet. But at this point a third person abruptly enters the narrative of Moses. It is another king. Moses introduces him as Melchizedek king of Salem. That was a town that would grow to a city and be called Jerusalem. Salem means peace. The name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness.” So the town of peace was reigned by the king of righteousness.

There is one more thing Moses tells us that is important. Melchizedek is “priest of God most high.” So this mysterious figure we know nothing about, except that he was both

a priest and a king, comes bringing “bread and wine.” This was likely a gift of gratitude for Abram who in defeating the coalition had rid the entire region of a reign of terror.

The use of the phrase “most high God” is of interest in the passage. It will occur four times in five verses.

It occurs quite rarely in the Old Testament. Its equivalent, Most High, is more frequent primarily in the Psalms. This title seems to be reserved for those occasions when the absolute sovereignty of Yahweh over creation and the dependence of humanity on him are being stressed. So it is an expression that describes his transcendence with respect to all his creation, humanity included, and all authorities human or otherwise, included. It is also an expression of the infinite worth of God on a more subjective level as well. If one were to somehow analyze and search to uncover the underlying essential element for physical, emotional and spiritual life and health, they would find that to be a person, Yahweh. This expression adds loftiness to Melchizedek’s position and that of Abram. Used by these two men it is a very personal affirmation of God’s authority over both and his felt value to them on a relational level. The use of the phrase by Abram later in the passage will minimize the significance of the third party at this meeting, the king of Sodom.

When Melchizedek addresses Abram he does so by first conferring a blessing on him. So we have in the story a King who is also a priest of the Most High God, and that before any order of priests had been established by Yahweh. This priest-king conveys this specific blessing on Abram: “Blessed be Abram by God most high, possessor of heaven and earth.” So as priest-king of God most high he is declaring Abram blessed by this most high God. Melchizedek is recognizing Abram’s position in Yahweh’s eyes even as he is acknowledging Yahweh’s sovereignty over himself.

Then Melchizedek says, “Blessed be God most high who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” This is a declaration by the priest-king that a kingdom kind of act had been brought about by Yahweh through the man of his own choosing. He affirms that God had partnered with a person in a military action to establish his will in the land Abram’s family would eventually possess. This act of God was the first visible sign a kingdom was being built of Yahweh’s chosen one. So the phrase “most high God” has been used two more times. The repeated use of this term in such proximity highlights the event in the mind of the reader, though its actual significance cannot be clearly seen in Genesis 14 alone. There is something significant the reader is meant to catch a glimpse of in Moses book. David himself did not miss its significance (Psalm 110).

What happens next is significant. Abram does not slip into a swagger upon hearing the blessing of Melchizedek. The opposite happens. Abram defers to Melchizedek by giving to him a tenth of all he had. In that act Abram was acknowledging a certain presence of Yahweh in Melchizedek and honors him as such. He had experienced the blessing of partnership with Yahweh, now he was acknowledging that his blessing was

a gift of Yahweh. All this is a sign of growing faith and trust in Abram, who would not be declared justified until the next chapter.

At this point the vanquished king of Sodom steps into this scene where honor and blessing are being exchanged. He says to Abram words to this effect, "You keep all the loot and just return the captives to me." To this Abram replies, "I have lifted my hand to Yahweh most high, possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take anything from you lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.'" So Abram is realizing that to Yahweh all things belonged—he was indeed God most high. That phrase occurs for the fourth time here. He has joined himself to Melchizedek by using this expression. This action expressed a growing belief in Abram that there was nothing that did not fall under the command and control of Yahweh. Abram was embracing Yahweh exclusively more. He was becoming more determined not to do anything that would cause the truth and principle that Yahweh was the sovereign of the universe to be distorted and abused.

Abram saw something in this priest-king. It motivated him to give Melchizedek a tenth of all he had to him. Later writers saw something as well. David saw in Melchizedek a kind of leader pictured, one whom he himself would be subject to even as Abram was (Psalm 110). He saw a future ruler who would be a king, but also "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." The writer of Hebrews saw the same thing (Hebrews 7). Christ would be a better priest than all the priests that had served Israel, all of whom were after the order of Aaron and the Levites. Christ would be better because he was a Son of the Most High (Luke 1:32), a priest and a king. In other words Christ was like Melchizedek, of that same order. That order had disappeared but now had resurfaced. The new covenant necessitated a new order of the priesthood. It is as if humanity was given a glimpse of this order, then it was reserved by Yahweh as the one that would be taken up and perpetuated by his son eternally.

From our perspective with the benefit of David's words and those of the writer to Hebrews we see Melchizedek's appearance in Moses' narrative as being of great significance. Melchizedek's actions, his visit with Abram and his blessing of Abram, was a picture of one greater than Abram that was the source of Abram's blessing. This One whom Melchizedek pictured was the source of blessing through Abram to all people. How much Abram knew in the moment of all this is impossible to determine for sure. But there is no doubt that he was through Melchizedek seeing far into the future a picture of his seed (singular) who would be Yahweh's salvation incarnate, his Christ. It is likely this incident that led Jesus to speak his mysterious statement that Abraham had seen his (Christ's) day and rejoiced (John 8:56-58).

Interestingly after Abram's growing faith has been displayed in this exchange, after Yahweh's blessing of him had lifted him to a new level of influence, and after Abram had refused any reward from the king of Sodom, the account goes on to report Yahweh appearing to Abraham. Yahweh says, "Fear not Abram, I am your shield; your

reward shall be very great." Moses' words report that on this occasion Abram is counted as righteous, and Yahweh's earlier promise is given as a covenant to him.

Why did Moses highlight this incident through the frequent use of the title "God most high"? The incident spoke of the central figure, the King God would raise up from the seed of Abraham to restore the peace forfeited by humanity in the fall. A king of righteousness would emerge in Jerusalem, a priest/king of God most high.

David affirmed this linkage of his own descendant that would rule the world to Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4)—the priest of the Most High God. When the Angel Gabriel announced to Mary that her son would be recognized as "the son of the Most High," and when Gabriel said that the son would be conceived as the "power of the most high" overshadowed Mary, it was a clear statement that Jesus was the fulfillment of the promise of the Messiah. It is also linkage to the earliest writings of Scripture to show that the promise of God to save humanity from the curse and to bring that blessing that had been theirs back through the offspring of Abraham clearly was on course. The King of the kingdom was born.