

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

(Notes by G. Batson)

INTRODUCTION

CHRIST AS THE GREAT HIGH PRIEST AND MINISTER OF THE NEW COVENANT is the central Person and theme of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Here the ritualistic Levitical system of the Old Covenant, with its various ordinances, sacrifices and ceremonies, is seen as being foundational and symbolic of the enduring reality of the New and better Covenant to which it pointed and by which it has been superseded (9:13-14).

While those to whom the epistle was originally addressed were members of God's earthly people, the Jews, they had come under the influence of the teaching of the New Covenant. Some had been truly converted although they were in need of being established in the then new Christian faith, but others were in danger of regressing to the doctrine of Judaism for various reasons, aligning themselves once again with the national guilt of the crucifixion of Christ, and missing out on the blessings of the New Covenant. The epistle was written to meet both the needs of the true Hebrew believer and those who were attracted but not converted. It does so by showing the complete superiority of the Person and priesthood of Christ over the old Levitical priesthood (which is seen as having become redundant) and, consequentially, the superiority of the New Covenant of which He is the "author and finisher" (AV) or "perfector" (NIV). It emphasises His deity as well as His humanity, His essential glories, His finished and complete sacrifice and His present ministry as Great High Priest and Minister of the New Covenant. He is presented as not only the One who has ascended on High in order to dispense the blessings of redemption which He secured by His own precious blood, but also as the One who is coming in glory. The epistle is therefore a wealth of truth and spiritual sustenance for all believers throughout the Church age.

In the light of all that is presented of God's accomplishments in Christ on behalf of His people, the epistle culminates in some extremely practical exhortations in order that those who have entered into the blessings of the New Covenant may be equipped with every good thing for doing His will (13:21).

Wuest points out that Hebrews was written before AD 70, but after the ascension of our Lord in AD 33. The temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70, so at the time of writing it was still standing and the Jewish priests were still offering the sacrifices pertaining to the Old Covenant (Heb. 10:11, 12) even although, in reality, along with this covenant, they had become redundant. Our Lord is presented as seated in Heaven as Mediator of the New Covenant, after His ascension.

CHAPTER 1

As stated in the introduction, the main thrust of the letter to the Hebrews is to show that the New Covenant (or Testament) is better than the Old and has superseded it. The Old Levitical Covenant is seen as the type of which the New is the reality. It reveals this superiority by showing that its Founder, Christ (the Messiah), is superior to the prophets, the angels, Moses (God's first appointed leader of the nation of Israel), and Aaron (the first high priest under the Old Covenant). This first chapter deals with the first two of these, showing Him superior to the prophets and the angels and, at the same time, sets forth His deity.

He is further presented as Redeemer (verse 3), as the unique Son of God (verse 5), as the One who commands the worship of angels (verse 6), as everlasting King (verses 8-9), as Creator (verses 10-12), and finally as the ultimate Victor who sits enthroned at the right hand of the Father, equally associated with Him in royal authority and dignity.

VERSES 1-2: The epistle opens by declaring the fact that God has spoken. Despite human sin and rebellion, God has not distanced Himself from us, but rather has made His mind and purposes known. In His grace and mercy He has not withheld communication. Verse 1 deals with His mode of communication under the Old Covenant, and verse 2 with His mode of communication under the New. An important aspect of God's communication is that under the Old He reveals human sin and thus the need for His grace, while under the New He demonstrates His grace and shows the remedy for sin through the completed redemptive work of Christ.

The Old Testament revelation was given through different prophets, who were the "mouthpieces" of God. They were moved to deliver their portions at different times and in different ways. Old Testament revelation was given in the form of law, prophecy, history, song, etc, and was fragmentary and progressive — some here and some there, through the different "channels" used, but each combining to make up the sum of Old Testament revelation according to God's overall plan.

The term "in these last days" (verse 2) is more correctly rendered from the Greek text, "in the last of these days". The word "last" is *eschatos* which means the "outermost" or "extreme". Thus, in the very extremity of the days in which He spoke through the prophets, God has spoken to us in the Person of His Son, through whom He has established the New Covenant. The greatest difference between divine communication under the Old Covenant and that under the New is that while God employed human mouthpieces under the Old, under the New He Himself in the Person of the Son is the very means of divine communication. More than this, communication under the New Covenant did not consist just of the words spoken, but in what the Son is and does. Through Him, as the Word of God (the Logos — John 1:1) God is revealed. Such revelation, rather than being fragmentary as it was in the Old Covenant, is complete.

VERSE 2 also enlarges upon the glory and superiorities of the Son over the prophets. God has "appointed Him heir of all things". As the "second Adam", through His victorious work of redemption He has regained the dominion lost through the fall of the "first Adam". However, He is heir of all things not only by virtue of His work of redemption, but also by virtue of the fact that He is the Divine Agent of Creation. He is its origin and effective Cause. "Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3). All things, therefore, rightfully belong to Him as Creator.

VERSE 3: The Son's perfect work of redemption is referred to here. In verse 2 we see Him as Creator; in this verse we see Him as Redeemer. Four more superiorities pertaining to the Son by whom God communicates are outlined as well. He is --

The radiance of God's glory: The Son is the outshining or the "out-raying" (Vincent) of God's glory, exhibiting in Himself the glory and majesty of the divine Being. As its light is an intrinsic part of the sun and of the same substance, so is Christ an intrinsic part of the Godhead and of the same

substance. And as we can only know the sun by the light that shines from it, so is Christ the outshining or the revelation, of all that God is. By its light the sun communicates its benefits to earth. Through the Son God communicates, not only Himself, but also His blessings to earth. Its light also conveys the characteristics of the sun to earth and so Christ is also —

The exact representation of His being (NIV) or the express image of His Person (KJV): He is the exact representation of all that God is. In His reply to Philip's request to see the Father He could say, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). The words "exact representation" or "express image" are a translation of the Greek word *charakter*. Among its various meanings was that of "the type or character regarded as shared with others. It also meant an impress or an image" (Wuest). Thus, not only is Christ the exact image of all that God is but, as already shown, He is essentially of the same character or substance.

The Sustainer of all things: He "upholds all things by the word of His power" (KJV). The words "sustaining" or "upholding" are translated from *phero* which, according to Vincent, is better translated "maintaining". It is by Him that "all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). The Lord Jesus holds all things together and in their proper working relationship to each other by the word (or the communication) of His power. Thus, He is not only the Creator, He is also the One who keeps everything in its correct functioning order as Sustainer.

The Provider of purification for sins: As great as the miracle of creation and its maintenance is, we now come to an even greater miracle — that of redemption. There are two parts to Christ's redemptive ministry: --

(1) *His provision of purification for sins:* "After He had provided purification for sins" refers to the earthly aspect of His ministry in which He Himself as Priest laid the foundation and willingly became the complete and perfect sacrifice for sins. In this we have the first major subject of God's communication to humanity: Simply put it is that sin must be dealt with and cleansed away. Without this there can be no redemption nor fellowship with God and no experience of the Heavenly life He desires us to enter into.

(2) *His application of purification:* ". . . He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in Heaven" refers to the Heavenly aspect of His ministry as Priest-King in which He applies His work and dispenses its blessings. In this further communication, God tells us that the way is opened into the Holiest of all and because of Christ's complete and all-sufficient sacrifice we can enter in and live in the good of all He has acquired thereby.

VERSE 4: Having shown His superiority over the prophets, attention is now drawn to Christ's superiority over angels. Angels were involved in the communication of the message of the Old Covenant (Heb. 2:2, Acts 7:38, 53, Galatians 3:19b). While it declared God's righteous standard as seen in the Law and subsequently revealed human sin, it had no power to deal with sin. But the message of the New Covenant, revealed by all that the Son is, has done and is doing, not only has the power to cleanse away all sin, but to place the very Law and life of God within the human heart and soul. This is the reason the New Covenant has superseded the Old.

In regard to "the name He has inherited" (or the name that is rightfully His), this verse does not suggest that He was at some stage inferior to the angels. But it refers specifically to His glorification and exaltation *after* He "was made a little lower than the angels" (2:9) for the suffering of death. Because of His human experience, His passion and humiliation, His victory and completion of the redemptive work He willingly undertook, He has now been exalted to the highest place "and given *THE NAME* that is above every name" (Philippians 2:9) including that of the angels.

VERSE 5: THE UNIQUE SON OF GOD: Christ is superior to angels by way of **relationship to the Father**. His is the relationship of unique Sonship. Two Old Testament quotations are used in order to support this truth (Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14). They are incorporated in two different questions which imply that none of the angels have ever experienced such a relationship with God.

The first of these quotations (from Psalm 2:7, one of the Messianic psalms) appears to refer to His resurrection (compare with Acts 13:30-39). A more accurate translation is, "Son of mine you are, I this day have begotten you." This psalm was written to celebrate the accession of a king, and "the king . . . is said to be 'begotten' on the day on which he is publicly recognised as king" (Vincent), the Holy Spirit ultimately having in mind the King of kings, the Lord Jesus Christ. Wuest points out that the reference is not to entrance into life, but to entrance to an office. He concludes that it refers to the Son's resurrection, and to the declaration of the Father concerning the Lord Jesus Christ as Son of God, this declaration being substantiated by His resurrection. (See also Romans 1:4). The point being made is that such a declaration was never made of angels.

The second quotation is taken from 2 Samuel 7:14 and was originally spoken to David concerning a son God should give him. But its meaning reached far beyond what any mere man could ever be, and it is here applied directly to the Lord Jesus Christ. Again, such a statement was never applied to angels. They, collectively, are referred to as sons of God (Job 1:6), but this is by virtue of creation. Christ is the Son of God "by eternal generation, Son of God in His incarnation, and Son of God in an official relationship as Messiah consequent upon His resurrection" (Wuest).

VERSE 6: Christ's superiority over angels is seen by the fact that **angels worship Him**. A more accurate translation of the first part of this verse is, "And when God again brings His first-born into the world . . ." and has reference to Christ's second advent. At this tremendous time, when He comes in power and great glory, He will not only be accompanied by thousands upon thousand of His saints (Jude 14), but also by hosts of worshipping angels.

The word "first-born" is the translation of *prototokos* and is also used by Paul in Colossians 1:15 referring to Christ in his superiority. "The term speaks of priority to all creation and sovereignty over all creation" (Wuest).

VERSE 7: In contrast to the priority and sovereignty of the Son, we have here the servanthood of angels. The quotation used for this purpose is Psalm 104:4, a psalm which reveals the glories of God in creation and how that everything is subject to Him. This is also the case with the angels. They too are subject to Him as agents or messengers ready to carry out His will, and He makes or adapts them to whatever form is appropriate according to the needs of the service to which they are assigned.

VERSE 8: EVERLASTING KING: The contrast between the Son and angels is further emphasised. The words quoted from Psalm 45:6-7 are words spoken by the Father regarding the Son. This verse makes a very strong statement concerning the deity of Christ and, as such, He has a throne which is not only the centre of absolute authority but is characterised by righteousness (uprightness, justice, equality) which will last forever and ever and will never change.

VERSE 9: The first part of this verse describes an important aspect of the Son's character, and because the past tense is used probably has specific reference to His time on earth. His goal was ever to please the Father and He expressed it in the words of John 4:34, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work". (The word "wickedness" is more accurately translated "lawlessness" and signifies everything that is contrary to the will and law of God). The latter part of the verse shows that as a result of His intrinsic righteousness and abhorrence of wickedness He is God's rightfully anointed King, far above everyone else, whether angel or human.

VERSE 10-12: CREATOR: Not only is the Son superior to the angels because of His sovereignty as everlasting King, but also because of His creatorial power (Psalm 102:25-27, also verse 2). This power is further mentioned in John 1:3, "Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made." He is superior to angels by virtue of the fact that He is the Creator and they are created beings. As we compare these verses with verse 3, we are again reminded that the One who has provided redemption is also Creator.

While the earth and the heavens are temporary and subject to change as indicated by the words, “they will all wear out as a garment”, the Creator will never change and will never cease to exist. Here He is seen not only as Creator of the earth and the heavens, but also as the One who disposes of them when they have served their purpose. All this is indicative of His complete authority and control, and further establishes His superiority.

VERSE 13: ULTIMATE VICTOR: The question posed in this verse is a quotation from Psalm 110:1 and is designed to emphasise still further the tremendous gulf which exists between the angels and the eternal Son of God. In this first chapter our Lord Jesus Christ is presented as Redeemer (verse 3), as the unique Son of God (verse 5), as the One who commands the worship of angels (verse 6), as everlasting King (verses 8-9), as Creator (verses 10-12), and now as the ultimate Victor who sits enthroned at the right hand of the Father, equally associated with Him in royal authority and majesty. Such a position could never be the case with angels. He is the One who, according to Philippians 2:9-11, has been exalted to the highest place, given *the name* that is above every name, and the One to whom “every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” — including His enemies, as indicated by the metaphor of His footstool.

It is through this One that God has spoken and thus communicated Himself to us in a way not possible under the Old Covenant which was administered by angels. In displaying the superiority of the Son over angels, the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old is clearly implied.

VERSE 14: Another question concludes the chapter and again compares the position and function of angels with the Son. By nature they are spirit beings and as such they are His servants, continually ready to do His bidding, with the particular mission of ministering to those who inherit salvation. They are servants -- He is Sovereign.

CHAPTER TWO

Having established the fact of the superiority of Christ over prophets and angels and, by implication, the superiority of the New Covenant of which He is the Founder, this chapter begins with a strong warning against neglecting or drifting away from its truth.

Chapter 1 has presented clearly the deity of Christ. This chapter shows the humanity of Christ. He took upon Himself the human form in order that He might suffer and pass through death and thereby “make atonement for the sins of the people”, establish the New Covenant (which does what the Old Covenant could never do), become the great Leader or Captain of our salvation, destroy the one who has the power of death and also become our “merciful and faithful high priest”.

This chapter can be divided as follows: The importance of the message of the New Covenant and the danger of ignoring it (verses 1-4). Restoration by Christ of all that man lost through sin (verses 5-9). The family relationship of the Redeemer and the redeemed (verses 10-13). Complete sufficiency in Christ (verses 14-18).

The Importance of the Message of the New Covenant

VERSE 1: In the light of the superiority of the message of the New Covenant (embodied in the Gospel of Christ) the writer exhorts his readers to “pay more careful attention”. The implication is that they had heard the message and, although the message of the Old Covenant was important, they were to give greater attention to the message of the New Covenant. God has gone to so much greater effort in speaking to us in the Person of His Son, that He can therefore rightly expect us to give our full attention to what He is saying. If we fail to do so we are in danger of letting what He is saying to us “flow by” without it taking any effect on us and we will drift away to be caught up in the world’s philosophy and religion and, ultimately, the consequences thereof. Many of the Hebrews to whom the epistle was addressed were in particular danger of doing this by returning to the futility of Judaism under the Old Covenant (see 10:11).

VERSES 2-3: “The message spoken by angels” was the Old Covenant embodied in the Law given to Moses at Mt Sinai (Acts 7:53, Galatians 3:19). Although being inferior to the New Covenant, its demands were nevertheless unyielding and every violation received its “just punishment”.

In the light of this, how much more serious and inescapable are the consequences of neglecting or ignoring the message of the New Covenant, put in place and communicated not by angels, but by the Son of God Himself? Therefore, the question posed in verse 3 is unanswerable, for there is no way of escaping the awful consequences if we ignore or neglect “such a great salvation”. The consequences of ignoring are compatible with the greatness of the salvation offered. It is a great salvation because of what it accomplishes. It can do what the Old Covenant could never do — reverse the tragic effects of sin and bring us into a right relationship with God (see Romans 8:3-4). It is a great salvation because of its cost — the precious blood of Christ. It is a great salvation because of the greatness of the Person who brought it about.

Christ was not only the One who accomplished salvation, He was also the first to announce it, and it was “confirmed to us” by those who actually listened to His voice. Thus the message of the Old Covenant was spoken by angels, but that of the New Covenant was “first announced by the Lord” Himself -- again showing its superiority.

VERSE 4: Not only was the message of the New Covenant confirmed by those who personally heard, saw and lived with Christ during His earthly ministry, God also authenticated it “by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit”. As pointed out by Wuest, the primary purpose of miracles in the first century was not to alleviate distress and suffering, but to prove that the one performing the miracles, spoke or wrote from God (Matt. 11:2-5, John 3:2). These various signs,

wonders and miracles authenticated not only the message of the New Covenant, as announced by Christ and those who immediately heard Him, but also the claims of Christ as to who He was. They attested to His deity, His mission and sacrifice, and also to the fact that He had indeed been sent by the Father (John 20:30-31).

Restoration by Christ of all that man lost through sin

VERSE 5: Incorporated in God's great plan of redemption under the New Covenant is the future restoration and domination of the world to come. Here we see that, although angels had a special part in the giving of the Old Covenant, and are sent forth to minister to "those who will inherit salvation" under the New Covenant, "the world to come" is not to be subjected to them. Rather, the implication here is that it is to be subjected primarily to Christ Himself (1:13), who is both Son of God and Son of Man (as seen in these first two chapters). This is yet another indication of the superiority of Christ over angels.

VERSES 6-8: These verses (which are a quotation from Psalm 8) show that God originally placed the world under the authority and dominion of man. This was part of the high and privileged place for which man was created when he was made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-28), and which he enjoyed before his communion with God was broken by the tragedy of sin. As such he was ranked "a little lower than the angels".

VERSE 8: But when mankind fell into sin he forfeited his privileged position, lost his dominion and became subservient to Satan. As we look at mankind today it is indeed true that "at present we do not see everything subject to him". What we see instead is that man has lost the dominion God originally gave him, has become entrapped in his own sinfulness and is unable to overcome the subsequent devastating social and moral upheaval he is faced with.

VERSE 9: With regard to man the scene is indeed distressing. But, just at this point, our attention is diverted from that scene of defeat and focussed on Jesus Christ Himself. Here we see Jesus — the One "who, for a while, was [Himself] made a little lower than the angels" (by entering into sinless humanity) in order that He might suffer death (to procure freedom and cleansing from sin which, by God's grace, is made available to everyone) "now crowned with glory and honour." Thus God's plan concerning mankind was not frustrated through the entrance of sin, for He Himself provided the answer in Christ.

The Greek word for "crowned", *stephanoo*, refers to the act of placing a victor's crown upon the head of a victor. Through His death, the shedding of His precious blood and His glorious resurrection, Christ has gained the victory over sin and Satan, and man can now experience salvation and restoration from his fallen state in Him. More than this, all those "in Christ" will one day reign with Him over a fully restored earth where the curse of sin has been removed — referred to as "the world to come" (verse 5). Thus, through His work of redemption, Christ has regained that which man lost through his fall into sin.

Wuest points out that "the Last Adam (Christ) gained the victory through the blood of His cross over the Serpent under whose attack the First Adam had gone down in defeat, dragging down with him, the entire human race of which he was the federal head. But the Last Adam, raising Himself out from under that awful thing called death, brings with Him from that sphere into which He vicariously descended, the saints of all ages, to some day share His glory and honour on His throne."

The Family Relationship of the Redeemer and the Redeemed

VERSE 10: Christ's being made "perfect through suffering" or His vicarious suffering in death in order to bring "many sons to glory" was the appropriate course of action for God to take, considering the nature of His character. His holiness and righteousness demanded that man's violation of His

holy laws be fully punished, but His love provided the very payment which His law demanded. Therefore, in the perfect redemptive work of Christ we see both God's righteous demands being met, and the fullness of His love expressed.

The word "author" (NIV) or "captain" (KJV) is translated from the Greek *archegos*, and has the connotation of "leader — one who goes before". Christ is the One who went before and both prepared and led the way through death, into resurrection and then on into glory. He is truly "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6). There is no other way for sin to be dealt with and no other way into the presence of the Father. In Christ believers are "sons of God" by a relationship of grace with the Son, having passed through death, into resurrection life with Him (Romans 6:3-5) and ultimately in a day to come into glory to abide in His presence eternally.

The word "perfect" in reference to Christ here does not refer to His character, but rather to His vocation. He always was and always will be perfect in His character, but He could never have become the perfect Saviour for sinners without the suffering of death. Through His suffering He is now the perfect and only Saviour from sin, and the Captain or Author of our salvation.

VERSES 11-13: There is now a close family relationship between Christ the Redeemer and His redeemed people in answer to His prayer in John 17:19-21. The Sanctifier (the One who makes holy) and the sanctified (those made holy) are one, the sanctified having been derived from the Sanctifier. As such, both have come up out of death into resurrection life, through the power of God, Christ Himself being "the first-born among many brothers" (Romans 8:29). The completeness of Christ's work of redemption and reconciliation is seen in the fact that, in reference to His people, He "is not ashamed to call them brothers".

VERSE 12: In support of the last statement of the previous verse the words of Psalm 22:22 are quoted and are shown to be the words of Christ Himself. The first part of this psalm (verses 1-21) describe the sufferings of Christ. Verse 22 begins the second part, and refers to the subsequent victory of His suffering. (See also Isaiah 53:11, "He will see the result of the suffering of His soul, and be satisfied" -- *NIV margin*).

VERSE 13: These words quoted from Isaiah 8:17 and 18, which come out of the prophet's own experience, are used to express, first of all, the Son's confidence and trust in the Father during the days of His flesh and then, as a result of His completed redemptive work, His gracious identification with those who through that work would be redeemed and made His possession.

Complete Sufficiency in Christ

Within this chapter there are three reasons as to why Christ took upon Himself humanity. They give us three different aspects of the great salvation which Christ has purchased for us with His precious blood.

- 1. That He might become the great Leader (Captain or Author) of salvation and "bring many sons to glory" through opening the way to the Father and into a life of holiness and nearness to Himself (verses 9-10).*
- 2. That He might deliver us from the power of death and Satan (verses 14-15).*
- 3. That in all His work for us and, subsequently, in us, He might be a merciful High Priest, able to understand and sympathise with us, to intercede on our behalf, and to sustain and succour us (verses 17-18).*

VERSES 14-15: These two verses deal in particular with the second of these three aspects (above) — that He might deliver us from the power of death and of Satan. In order for Him to do this it was necessary for Him to take upon Himself human nature (sin apart 4:15). In that nature He did all that was necessary to release us from the power of Satan and pay the full price of sin which was death (for us it would have meant complete and eternal separation from God — Romans 6:23). Jesus

entered into all the conditions of our humanity, including death as sin's penalty, and in doing so satisfied God's holy Law. Thus He broke the power of sin and Satan over us, and took away the fear of death for the believer (1 Corinthians 15:54-57, Philippians 1:21-23). Physical death for the believer, rather than being something to be feared because of eternal condemnation, is now the entrance to glory and His immediate presence.

VERSE 16: An alternative translation of this verse is: “. . . He does not take hold of angels for the purpose of helping them, but of the seed of Abraham He takes hold.” In taking upon Himself humanity and in His subsequent work of redemption, it was not fallen angels He came to help, but fallen humanity. It is worth noting that neither was it the seed of Adam that He came to help, but rather “the seed of Abraham”. Only those who believe on Him -- having the same faith as Abraham and thus being made righteous on the basis of faith -- benefit from His redemptive work (Romans 4:3, 13) whether Jew or Gentile.

VERSES 17-18: These two verses deal with the third aspect of salvation mentioned above, namely, that He might become “a merciful and faithful High Priest”. In order for Him to do so He had to “be made like His brothers in every way”, or, He had to become completely human and be subjected to humanity's various trials and stresses. This, of course, was apart from sin (4:15). The Greek word rendered “merciful” has the thought of one who sympathises with the misery of another and is motivated to act on his behalf to relieve that misery. “The idea is that of a compassionate heart leading one to acts of mercy, the purpose of which is to relieve the suffering and misery of the object of that compassion” (Wuest). This is something which did not characterise the priests of the old covenant, especially as the nation fell more and more into apostacy.

From these first two chapters we learn that beside the attributes of mercy and faithfulness, His priesthood is characterised by essential Deity and perfect Manhood, and all who receive Him come into the benefit of His mercy and faithfulness. We can rest upon His completed redemptive work which is the evidence of His mercy, and totally rely upon His faithfulness in all that He has promised in His Word. His faithfulness extends both to His people in dealing with their sin and meeting their every need, and also to His Father in fulfilling His will in its entirety and thereby perfectly fulfilling the demands of His righteousness.

VERSE 18: Here is one of the reasons our great High Priest “is able to help those who are being tempted”: Because He Himself was subjected to temptation. He was tempted directly by Satan in Matthew 4:1-11, and He countered this temptation with the Word of God. He was tempted indirectly by Satan through Peter in Matthew 16:22-23. Recognising the source of the temptation, He rebuked Satan and chose the way of His Father's will. Perhaps His greatest temptation to sidestep the will of His Father was in the Garden of Gethsemane, under the very shadow of the cross, where He contemplated the awful reality and burden of becoming sin and being forsaken of the Father. His prayer on that occasion was, “My Father, if it be possible, may this cup be taken from Me. *Yet, not as I will, but as You will*”. Under the pressure of such temptation He never wavered, but continued on steadfastly and finished the work the Father had given Him to do. It is a tremendous encouragement to know that now He is ready and able to respond to the cry of those who are being tempted and bring them aid.

CHAPTER 3

We need to continually bear in mind that the writer had among his Hebrew readers those who had had a true conversion experience, and others who, while having been made aware of the truths concerning Christ, had not committed themselves to Him. Having previously shown the superiority of Christ over the prophets and over angels, and the superiority of the New Covenant put in place through Him, this chapter begins by showing His superiority over Moses. In the tradition of the Hebrews, no one was greater than Moses, but they needed to come to an understanding of the superiority of Christ. While the Law came through Moses, it could never bring salvation and a right relationship with God. Through Christ came grace and truth (John 1:17) and only through Him could salvation be achieved. Unbelief is seen as the reason the people under the Old Covenant forfeited the blessings God had for them, and the same reason is given for people missing out on God's blessings under the New Covenant.

VERSE 1: It is indeed appropriate in the light of what has gone before (and of what is to come) that we should be exhorted to “consider” or “fix our thoughts on Jesus”. The implication here is that we are to contemplate Him with earnest attention, diligently and without distraction. This will give conviction and power to our confession and enable us to “hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast” (verse 6).

The readers are addressed as “holy brothers”, a description which refers to believers as having been sanctified or set apart for God through the completed redemptive work of Christ. Further, in the previous chapter Christ is not ashamed to call us “brothers” showing that we are part of the same family with Him. The term “holy brothers” also implies that practical holiness is an essential characteristic of the members of that family. The calling is a “Heavenly calling” as distinct from their earthly calling under the Old Covenant. It is that calling which binds both Jew and Gentile into the one Body in Christ (see Ephesians 2:13-19) to become a Heavenly people.

Jesus is referred to as Apostle and High Priest. Having completed His mission on earth as the Apostle or “the Sent One” and thereby having become our Saviour, He has gone back into Heaven as our Great High Priest. Fixing the eye of faith upon Him is the answer to all our weaknesses. As Apostle He is the One sent as God's representative with us, fulfilling His purposes and revealing God to us. As High Priest He is our representative with God, sustaining us and bringing us into His blessings and presence.

VERSE 2: The point being made here in preparation for what is to come is that Christ was at least as faithful in His appointment as Moses was in his. In this verse “God's house” refers to the nation of Israel of whom Moses was appointed its first and greatest leader.

VERSES 3-4: And now the infinite superiority of Christ is shown. While Moses was worthy of honour, Jesus is worthy of far more. Moses was part of “God's house” but, as shown in chapter 1, Christ is God, and as such is the builder of the house -- the One who called the Nation of Israel into being -- as well as the Creator of all things (John 1:3).

VERSE 5: Moses was faithful in his capacity as a servant within God's house, and through the faithful execution of his ministry he testified to the coming work of redemption to be put in place by Christ. The worship and sacrifices of the Levitical system given by God under the leadership of Moses pointed forward to all that God would accomplish through Christ. Vine points out that the Greek word from which “servant” is translated in this verse (*therapon*) is indicative of a lofty position — a servant with high responsibilities. Such was indeed the case with Moses. The Hebrews were therefore correct in esteeming Moses very highly, but they needed to realise that a greater than Moses had come.

VERSE 6: Moses was a servant of lofty position and responsibility within God's house, but Christ as Son over God's house is the heir or the rightful owner (1:2). As with Moses, in His capacity, He too is faithful (verse 2). Just as we see Him faithful to the One who appointed Him, we can be assured that He will be faithful in fulfilling all God's promises to us and in us.

In the second part of the verse there is a transaction from Israel under the Old Covenant to the Church under the New. It too is described as "God's house", or perhaps more accurately, "God's household" (see 1 Tim. 3:15, Eph. 2:19-22, 1 Peter 2:5). Referring to true believers, the verse makes it clear that they constitute that household, and they are characterised by faithfulness in that they hold on to their courage and the hope of which they boast. This hope rests in the resurrected Christ Himself, whose redemptive work has fully accomplished our salvation (Acts 26:6-8, Romans 4:25 - 5:2). Wuest points out that the eternal security of the believer is not the issue here. Rather, the writer to the Hebrews is mindful of the fact that, among his readers, some were true believers while others were only making a profession of salvation. True believers are designated as those who hold on to the hope of which they boast. It is not the retention of salvation which is in question here, but its possession.

Having established the superiority of Christ over Moses and the fact that He is the rightful owner and Head over God's household, this next section deals with the appropriate response to Him. The wrong response of the people under the leadership of Moses, under the Old Covenant, is used as a warning for us today.

VERSES 7-9: The people of old had heard the Lord's voice through Moses, and their response had been to harden their hearts. The Hebrews addressed in this epistle are exhorted not to make the same mistake that their ancestors made as they hear the voice of the Lord through the Son (1:2) and this epistle. Rather, they are to respond positively, and to do so "Today" or while there is opportunity to do so.

The quotation is taken from Psalm 95 and refers in particular to the time when the nation came to the waters of Marah. There they complained against Moses and against God because of the bitterness of the water. They had just witnessed the power of God in their deliverance from Egypt, but they found themselves unable to trust Him in this relatively small matter. Thus began the grumbling that characterised their attitude every time they came up against difficulty throughout their wilderness journey. Such was the case despite their witnessing the power of God working for them time after time, and thus they ultimately missed out on the blessings God had for them.

VERSES 10-11: Blatant unbelief is an affront to God and always evokes His anger. Because of their unbelief and failure to trust God the people of old were continually going astray and finding themselves in evil situations outside the will of God. Related to this was the fact that, although they had witnessed God's power and had been recipients of His blessings, they did not really know Him. Consequently, God declared that they would never enter his rest, and that whole generation with the exception of Joshua and Caleb passed away in the wilderness without ever seeing the land God had prepared for them. They never entered into the good of their salvation. Although they had experienced deliverance from Egypt they never knew the fullness of God's blessings and victory in the land. (See also 1 Cor. 10:1-13).

VERSE 12: The writer to the Hebrews now returns to the present situation. He is constantly aware that among his readers are those who, while giving mental assent to the truth of the New Covenant, had not committed themselves to Christ, and as such were still unbelievers. (The term "brothers" in this case refers to their national relationship rather than the relationship in Christ which exists between true believers as in verse 1 where the term is "holy brothers"). In the light of God's dealings with the unbelieving people of old, the writer exhorts his readers not to allow their hearts to become hardened or controlled by the sin of unbelief which would result in them turning away from the living God and the truth of the New Covenant. Such a sin would amount to apostacy. The Greek text indicates need

for a constant guard against such an inclination. If those who were still not truly converted allowed this to happen they would be in danger being eternally lost.

VERSE 13: Rather than allowing their hearts to become hardened by the deceitful nature of sinful unbelief the Hebrews are here exhorted to encourage one another not to go back to the old Levitical system, but rather to fully embrace the truth of the New Covenant and receive Christ as their own personal Saviour. They were to exhort each other constantly, “as long as it is called Today” or as long as the day of grace existed. This implies that salvation will not always be available. The exhortation of this verse would apply particularly to those among them who were true believers. They were to have an on-going concern for the salvation of their fellow Hebrews.

VERSE 14: The evidence that people have become participators in Christ and His salvation is seen in the steadfastness of their faith, and it is this faith the writer is encouraging his readers to ensure that they possess. “Again as in verse 6, the question is not one of retention of salvation based upon a persistence of faith, but of the possession of salvation as evidenced by a continuation of faith” (Wuest).

VERSE 15: Once more, the exhortation comes to those who do not possess saving faith as described in the previous verse, not to harden their hearts as did the generation in the wilderness who did so right up to the borders of Canaan and forfeited the blessing of the Promised Land, but rather to embrace Christ and the salvation He offers while opportunity is there to do so.

The final section of the chapter consists of a series of questions designed to further emphasise Israel’s evil heart of unbelief, and by way of implication issue warning for those to whom the epistle is addressed.

VERSE 16: Vine points out that the “all” in this verse is not to be taken in a strictly numerical sense. All the people who were led by Moses out of Egypt heard the Word of God, and the vast majority of the adult population rebelled. Certainly, all who rebelled had heard the Word of God. But the point is that because a great majority of people embrace error, this in no way sanctions it, nor does it minimise the seriousness of the error. The fact that because a great majority of the present generation to whom the writer is addressing this letter, were rejecting the truth of the New Covenant, did not provide an adequate reason for apostasy to Judaism.

VERSE 17: It was this same majority who, through their sin of unbelief and subsequent rebellion, became the subjects of God’s anger and, as a result, came far short of God’s intended blessings for them. For forty years God was angry with them because of their failure to trust Him, and for every day they spent in the monotony and barrenness of the wilderness, they could have been enjoying the blessings and productivity of the land God had for them.

VERSES 18-19: Their unbelief and disobedience finally brought them to the place where God acted in judgment against them and forbade them to enter the land.

The point is emphasised that it was their refusal to take God at His word which led to them being unable to enter in to all that God had for them and instead they perished in the wilderness.

The reference to the Promised Land as “His rest” prepares the way for the spiritual instruction to follow which will clarify that it was a type of the rest God has provided in Christ.

CHAPTER 4

In the first eleven verses of this chapter the application is made from the last section of the previous chapter. It is only through faith (trust and obedience) that we can enter into God's rest. There were two main stages in God's purpose for the people of Israel — deliverance from Egypt and rest (or victory) in Canaan. Faith is the key not only to the possession of salvation, but also to the enjoyment of its blessings and victory (Col.2:6). In verses 12-13 God's Word is revealed as the means of dealing with our unbelief as it is allowed to penetrate our inner beings, and God Himself is seen to be the Judge and discerner of everything — including every deed and motive of every created being.

The chapter also introduces us to the main theme of the epistle — Christ exalted in the Heavens as our great High Priest and minister of the New Covenant.

VERSE 1: The provision of God's rest did not apply to Israel of old alone. The writer to the Hebrews makes it clear that God's rest still remains for those, who through faith, will enter in. However, rest is not now found by entering the Land, but by receiving the Messiah, the former being a type of the latter. Not only does the promise of rest remain, but so too does the principle for entering that rest. It is on the basis of faith in what God has done.

In the days of Moses the promise was there, the Land was there, the victory and the abundance were there too, but the people were not there. Through their unbelief they had "fallen short" of God's purposes for them and remained in the wilderness. The warning is given, in this verse, to the present generation, and to us, not to make the same mistake. Lack of faith will leave us in a spiritual wilderness.

VERSE 2: God's purposes, His mercy and His grace, were clearly proclaimed to the people before they left Egypt (see Ex. 6:6-8), and the good news of His mercy and grace was also proclaimed to the Hebrews to whom this epistle was addressed -- and to us as well. "He has spoken to us by His Son" (1:2) and in Him the plan of redemption has been achieved and clearly proclaimed. However, just hearing or even understanding the message is not sufficient, for the people of old who heard the message were left stranded in the wilderness because of their lack of faith. Unless it is combined with faith, the Word of God — with all its potential for power and blessing — will be of no value to us.

VERSES 3-5: Here we have, first of all, a reassurance to those who believe, that they do indeed "enter that rest". Faith is shown as the condition for entering God's rest and, by referring to Creation, enjoyment of completion is here shown as the main characteristic of His rest. The words, "God rested from all His works" do not mean that He was wearied by His work in creation, but that He enjoyed that pleasing contemplation of the completion and perfection of what He had done. It is this type of rest into which faith introduces us. It enables us to enjoy the perfection of what God has done for us in Christ and to rest in its completion. It is ceasing from our own futile efforts in order to obtain salvation and its blessings, and resting in what God has achieved through Christ. But without faith, like the nation of Israel of old, God has decreed that we shall never enter into His rest.

The seventh day or the Sabbath, which has special significance in relation to the completion of God's earthly creation, was given to God's earthly people, the Jews, as a day of physical rest, and in this passage it is seen to be a type of the perfect rest to be found only in Christ.

VERSES 6-7: The opportunity to enter God's rest is still available and there are those who do appropriate it. The faithlessness and disobedience of the people under Moses did not cause God to withdraw His promised rest. Rather, He repeated it again in the days of David (Psalm 95), and ultimately through the perfect and completed work of Christ. But He calls for immediate response, before the process of "heart hardening" begins to take place through rejection of His Word. It is notable that in 3:19 the reason for the people not entering into God's rest was their unbelief. Here it is their disobedience. The one leads to the other, and just as belief and obedience go together to make faith, so unbelief and disobedience go together to make failure.

VERSE 8: If God's ultimate rest had been found under Joshua "God would not have spoken about another day". But it was just another type of the perfect rest to be found in Christ. Thus the superiority of Christ over Joshua is implied here by virtue of the fact that He provides a better rest. "The rest into which Joshua led Israel was a temporal, physical and material rest, whereas Jesus leads us into an eternal and spiritual rest" (Wuest).

In this chapter we have two different types which, together, serve to illustrate the rest which Christ gives and how it is obtained. The rest typified by the seventh day is characterised by perfection and completeness, while the rest typified by the Land of Canaan is appropriated by belief and obedience. The rest found in Christ is characterised by perfection and completion, but it may only be experienced through belief and obedience -- faith.

VERSES 9-11: The writer assures his readers that there is a rest remaining for them, and the implication is that they too need to enter into it. It is the true rest of God which we enter through trust in, and obedience to, Christ as our Saviour and "Leader" (2:10) who ushers us into all that God has for His redeemed.

As soon as God's handiwork in creation had been marred through sin He began to work with a view to human redemption and to the restoration of the enjoyment of the rest of communion with Himself. Hence we have all the prefigurative sacrifices, types and shadows of the Old Testament. When the work of redemption had been fully completed on the cross, God the Father raised His Son from the dead, seated Him at His own right hand and rested once more. We are now called, not to keep a seventh-day rest, appertaining to the old creation, but an abiding rest in Christ, appertaining to the new creation. We are called to share in God's own rest which He Himself has brought about through Christ. This is granted not just one day a week but, as the original word, (*sabbatismos*), implies — a sabbath-keeping every day of the year.

VERSE 10 helps us to understand the nature of this rest. It is the cessation of our own fleshly efforts (which can only ever end in failure) in order to receive through divine grace a right relationship with God and become the recipients of all that God has done for us in Christ.

VERSE 11: In the light of the fact that God's rest is still accessible and that the principle for entering it has not changed, the readers are once again exhorted to "make every effort" (*Gk spoudazo*) that is "to give diligence, to make haste" to enter that rest. To fail to do so is to follow the example of the disobedience of Israel of old and thus to fail. They died a physical death in the wilderness. These to whom this warning is given would die in their sins and be lost forever unless they respond in faith.

THE WORD OF GOD -- THE MEANS OF DEALING WITH UNBELIEF

VERSE 12: Solemn warnings concerning unbelief and disobedience have preceded this verse which reminds us of the power of the Word of God. It is living and active because it comes from the Living God (John 6:63). "The Word of God" here refers to the whole body of revealed truth which includes His declarations concerning His rest and its accessibility. Not only is the Word of God living, but it is life-giving. It has the capacity to give new life to those who receive it. The words "active" or "powerful" are the translation of the Greek, "*energes*", from which we get our English word "energy". It has the capacity to change for the better, it energizes those who take it in and respond to it in obedience.

It is "sharper than any double-edged sword" in that it penetrates far deeper than just the physical body, but it lays bare the inmost being. In this connection Vincents says, "The Word of God has an incisive and penetrating quality. It lays bare self-delusions and moral sophistries". In its penetrating action it passes through the entities of soul and spirit, revealing the emotions and desires of the soul, and the presence or absence of life within the spirit. Vine says, "The Word of God pierces through all that lies deepest in human nature, not actually separating soul from spirit and joints from marrow, but piercing and laying bare the inmost being, cutting through the most secret

recesses of the spirit's life, penetrating the soul and, deeper still, the spirit, as through joints to their very marrow”.

It judges not just the outward actions, but the thoughts and motives of the heart. It makes plain just how a person stands before God. The heart that will yield in trust and obedience to the Word of God will be freed from sin. It will be freed from unbelief and be enabled to enter God's rest.

VERSE 13: Here the writer passes from the living Word to the Living God Himself. His omniscience is emphasised in this verse. “Nothing in all creation is hidden from His sight” includes not only His creatures, but their thoughts, emotions, motives and actions (Psalm 139:1-12). There is no sufficient covering with which we can hide any part of our lives from Him. We may fool others but “everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account”. The implication of the verse is that unbelief cannot be hidden from God regardless of how pious the outward appearance may be, and one day we must give account as to how we have responded to the Word of God — and in particular, truth concerning the Person and work of Christ.

In this next section, which includes verses 14-16 of this chapter and verses 1-10 of chapter 5, we are introduced to the priesthood of Christ. In contrast to the priesthood of the old economy, we find the throne in association with His priesthood, combining His ability to sympathise, save and supply, with His authority and power.

VERSE 14: Having digressed to remind us of the Living Word and the Living God (verses 12-13), the writer now returns to the main theme of the epistle — the Person, work and position of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here in particular he speaks of Him in His capacity as Great High Priest. In the first two chapters he had laid the foundation for this truth in revealing His divinity (chapter 1) and His humanity (chapter 2), and he begins here by stressing the reality of the fact that, under the New Covenant, we do indeed have a Great High Priest. This One is far superior to the high priests of the Old Covenant who passed through an earthly tabernacle (9:24). Our Great High Priest has, in complete victory, passed through the heavens to the immediate habitat of God to take His place “at the right hand of the Majesty on High” (1:3b, Phil. 2:9-11). He Himself and all of His divine resources are available to His people. The high priest of old was no more than a mere man, beset by human weaknesses and sin, but our High Priest is far more than just a man — He is Jesus, the Son of God, the One who is all-powerful, all-knowing and all-sufficient. In the light of this, the writer exhorts his readers to “hold firmly to the faith we profess”. Such an exhortation, coupled with the truth of Christ's intercessory work, was particularly applicable to the believing Jewish readers of this epistle, as many of them were suffering persecution, and much of it at the hands of their fellow countrymen.

VERSE 15: Having set forth the supremacy of our High Priest, the writer hastens to add that such a One is not remote. He is quite approachable and of a sympathetic nature. The reason for this is that He has entered into our human experience with all its weaknesses and trials which often undermine our efforts to resist temptation. He was faced with hardship, sorrow, despair, loneliness, weariness, discouragement and death. He knew what it was to grapple with the will of God as seen in the Garden of Gethsemane. As perfect man He passed through all of these, but none of them resulted in sin. He was “without sin”. Because He has passed through this earthly scene He is able to sympathise: Because He now occupies the Throne of Heaven He is able to supply and sustain. Jesus, our Great High Priest, is able to save, able to sympathise, and able to supply and sustain.

VERSE 16: With such a High Priest, the throne to which we are exhorted to approach is now a throne of grace rather than one of judgment, and we can indeed approach with confidence. We can do so because everything that would stop us from doing so has been removed through the precious shed blood of Christ. We are exhorted to approach the Throne of Grace in order to receive mercy and as a result of this, grace to help us in our time of need. God's mercy provides cleansing for us and His grace is sufficient for all our needs (2 Cor. 12:9).

CHAPTER 5

The truths concerning the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ continue in the first ten verses of this chapter. The Person and work of Christ form the grand central theme of this epistle and now we are to see both the qualifications of a high priest and a comparison of the old Aaronic priesthood with that of Christ's.

VERSE 1: Here we have a statement revealing the first qualification of a high priest and the nature of his work. He is selected from among those he represents — he must be a man. An angel could not fill the position. His work concerns things pertaining to God: He is to represent his fellow human beings in matters related to God and offer gifts and sacrifices on behalf of them because of their sins.

VERSE 2: Being human himself and subject to human weakness and sin, he is able to understand and deal gently with those who, through a lack of the knowledge of God and His will, are ignorant and going astray. The word translated “gently” means to treat with mildness or moderation. It involves a balance between undue severity and undue leniency. The high priest needed to be careful that he did not become irritated and impatient with those he represented and thereby distance himself from them. But at the same time he also needed to realise the seriousness of sin, and not become weakly indulgent and seek to excuse it.

VERSE 3: But because the high priest under the old economy was human and subject to human weakness and sin, he had to offer sacrifices, not only for the sins of the people he represented, but also for his own sins.

As we have seen in chapter two, our Lord Jesus Christ is indeed Man. Although by nature of being He is God (John 1:1), He was made “a little lower than the angels” (2:9). As such, He too was subject to human weakness and was tempted in every way just as we are, but He was completely without sin. Thus He was (and is) as Man, God's perfect representative with us. He too offered for the people, and the sacrifice He made was that of Himself (9:14). Because of all that He is and all He has accomplished He is now the one Mediator between God and men (1 Tim. 2:5), and our Great High Priest.

VERSE 4: Here we have the second qualification of a high priest: He must be called or appointed by God. He could not appoint himself, nor could any other of his fellow men appoint him. Thus a high priest must be acquainted with his fellow men in a practical way, have an adequate knowledge of God, His truth and His will, and be appointed by God.

VERSE 5: The writer is careful to point out to his readers that Christ did not become high priest as a result of personal ambition. Rather, He was called to that position by the Father. The implication in this verse is that the Father who said to Him, “You are My Son; today I have become your Father” (Psalm 2:7) is the One who constituted Him High Priest and, further, in verse 6, he quotes Psalm 110:4 showing the order of His Priesthood as a direct reference by the Father to Christ.

The proclamation, “You are My Son; today I have become your Father” also reveals the superiority of Christ's priesthood. Although similar to Aaron's in its ability to relate to human weakness and need as well as its divine appointment, it is vastly superior in that its basis is the fact that Christ is the one unique uncreated, eternal Son of God (1:2-3).

VERSE 6: This verse states both the superior order of Christ's priesthood and another of its distinguishing characteristics. In contrast to the high priests under the old economy, Christ's priesthood is an eternal one as depicted by the word “forever”. Not only so but, as with Melchizedek, Christ's office is the combination of both priest and king. (The subject will be dealt with more fully in chapter 7. See, in particular, verses 23-25 of that chapter).

This next section, verses 7-10, shows the process by which Christ was designated high priest in the order of Melchizedek and also the complete efficacy of His sacrifice.

VERSE 7: Christ's humanity and subsequent suffering is plainly implied in this verse. His suffering here was particularly because of the prospect of Calvary and all it would mean to Him — being made sin, being forsaken of the Father. His prayers, involving loud cries and tears, were made to the One who was able to deliver Him from death. The word "from" is translated from the Greek "ek" and means "out from within" (Wuest). Thus Christ's prayer was that He might be delivered "*out from within death*", a clear reference to resurrection. This prayer was indeed answered because of His "reverent submission" or His devotion to the Father and the completion of His will in every detail. He was divinely sustained through all the bitter suffering and agony of Calvary and then raised from the dead in complete victory. When we consider His suffering, we realise He is well able to sympathise with us in all our weaknesses. More than this, He knows the need for us to be upheld by divine power and in His victorious High Priestly capacity He is able to meet this need.

VERSE 8: Wuest points out that the first part of this verse should read "Though He was Son by nature . . ." and is a direct reference to the deity of Christ. "Although He was God the Son, yet He learned obedience by the things He suffered." Christ never had to learn to obey. In other words, He did not have to pass from a state of disobedience to one of obedience as we need to. Rather, He voluntarily entered into the state of submission and obedience. As perfect man he placed Himself under the total authority of the Father and was submissive to His will. In eternity, with the Father, He was and is in perfect equality, but during His time on earth He relinquished that state and entered one of perfect submission. It was in His suffering that His perfect submission was most evident.

VERSE 9: The words "made perfect" do not refer to His character, but rather to His vocation or His mission -- the purpose for which He came. Thus, through His submission to the Father's will and His subsequent suffering He attained the goal or He fulfilled the whole divine purpose for His coming to earth and as a result of this became both the perfect and complete cause and source of eternal salvation for all who exercise the obedience of faith.

VERSE 10: Because He has passed through the process here described and has thus fulfilled in every detail the divine purpose and will of the Father, He qualified for the higher and unique order of priesthood -- the Melchizedek priesthood -- and was so designated by God the Father.

THE HINDRANCE OF SPIRITUAL SLUGGARDNESS

VERSE 11: Having embarked on this glorious subject (the all-sufficient Priesthood of Christ) the writer realises a very real difficulty — the spiritual condition of those to whom he was writing. Although these Hebrews had gained a basic understanding of New Testament truth, many of them had never applied it to themselves and therefore had become "slow to learn". As a result they could not appreciate the great truths the writer desired to share with them. They had become similar to the people of old mentioned in chapter 3 who could not enter into the good of their inheritance because of unbelief and they remained in the wilderness. Because of their failure to appropriate the truth of God these Hebrews had stagnated in their faith and were in a spiritual wilderness.

VERSE 12: There was no excuse for their condition, for the truth of the New Covenant had been continually and fully presented to them and they had had time not only to exercise the obedience of faith and to exhibit spiritual growth, but also to have become teachers themselves, leading others to receive and become mature in Christ. Instead of this they needed to be taught the basic facts of the Christian faith all over again in order that from this point they might appropriate the truth and begin to mature in it. They needed to be fed the "milk" of the Word — the truths which belong to the infancy

period of Christian experience (1 Cor. 3:1-3), whereas they should have been able to cope with the “meat” or “solid food” of the Word.

VERSES 13 AND 14: The person who constantly lives on “milk” does so because he is still an infant, and is immature. He has no perception of “the word of righteousness” — “the teaching concerning righteousness”. He does not understand the deeper teaching of the Word of God which reveals the need not only for imputed righteousness through Christ, but also practical righteousness which is the expression of new life in Him and relationship with Him.

VERSE 14: But the solid food of the Word is for those who are spiritually mature, and they have become so by constant use or application and discipline in the Word whereby they are able to perceive that which is good -- that which is beneficial -- from that which is evil, or derogative to spiritual growth.

CHAPTER 6

Here the writer continues to address in particular those Hebrews who had received the teaching of the New Covenant, and who had been swayed favourably, but had never been truly converted. They were in danger of regressing to the doctrine of Judaism and aligning themselves once more with the national guilt of the crucifixion of Christ.

The first section of this chapter (verses 1-8) continues the theme commenced in chapter 5, verse 11 — spiritual laziness and subsequent inability to understand the deeper truths of Christ, making it difficult for the writer to develop the truths he wanted to share. He, therefore, exhorts his readers to go on to maturity in Christ and leave behind basic teachings which concern the Old Covenant in order for them to be able to comprehend what he has to set before them. Having done so, the writer then returns to the great theme of the epistle — the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. As he does so he first offers words of comfort and encouragement (verses 9-12).

VERSE 1: The great problem with so many of the Hebrews was their refusal to leave behind the teachings of the Old Covenant and trust Jesus Christ completely. The sacrificial and symbolic system under the Old Covenant was indeed foundational to the reality of the New Covenant, but now that the New Covenant had been put in place through the completed work of Christ, the Old had become redundant and was to be left behind. “The elementary teachings about Christ” refer to the teachings of the Old Covenant which formed the basis for the New.

It should be noted that there is a difference between “the elementary truths of God’s Word” (5:12) which they needed to learn all over again, and “the elementary teachings about Christ” (in this verse) which they needed to leave behind. The former refers to the basics of the New Covenant to which they needed to commit themselves, the latter to the teachings of the Old Covenant which were foundational to the New, and which they needed to leave behind in order to go on or to be “borne along” with the New and to become spiritually mature.

Therefore, as the words “the elementary teachings about Christ” refer to the Old Covenant, the word “maturity” or “perfection”, in this context, must refer to the New. “Maturity” can also be translated as “completeness” (Vincent), and “completeness” could never be achieved through the Old Covenant (see 7:11, 19). It is only in Christ that God’s purposes can be fully realised and His work of redemption fully accomplished. It is only in Christ that we can know complete salvation, and be brought to full spiritual maturity.

They are exhorted not to lay again that which is foundational, and these Hebrews who were seriously considering returning to Judaism would be doing just this if they did so. The various components of this foundation they were not to relay are outlined following the exhortation and, according to Wuest, apply to the Old Covenant. Repentance from dead works and faith toward God were two truths taught under the Old Economy, but fully developed under the New. The people under the Old Economy could indeed show repentance and exercise faith in God through the appointed sacrifices and a sincere heart condition, but those sacrifices only pointed towards the one complete sacrifice of Christ and were only efficient in view of His sacrifice. Now that the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ had been made, rendering the old Levitical system redundant, to exercise repentance and faith in God from which His complete and ultimate sacrifice was excluded was absolutely futile.

VERSE 2: Instruction about baptisms or “washings” refers to the ceremonial washings of Judaism (9:10) which again were symbolic of New Testament truth. The laying on of hands refers to the placing of the offerer’s hand upon the sacrifices of the Levitical system by way of identification with them (Lev. 1:4) and is symbolic of identification with the Lord Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God, our sin-bearer. Under the Old Economy the truths of resurrection and eternal judgment were also held, but once again they are fully developed under the New. The fact of resurrection is now a glorious prospect for the believer because of the victorious resurrection of Christ. Eternal judgment is no

longer the portion of the believer because “there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus”, and the establishment of the New Covenant through the perfect and complete sacrifice of Christ has achieved this.

VERSE 3: Regarding this verse Vincent points out that “an ominous hint is conveyed that the spiritual dullness of the readers may prevent the writer from developing his theme and them from receiving the higher instruction”. Leaving “the elementary teachings about Christ” and going on to the maturity of the New Covenant depended not only upon the readiness of the readers to do so, but also upon the grace of God to enlighten them and enable them to overcome their condition in order to bring about true conversion. While it is God’s will that none should perish, there is an implication here that we should not presume on His grace.

VERSES 4-5: These verses reveal how close these people had come to true conversion and the danger they were in because of their position. They had once been enlightened. They had had the truths of the New Covenant fully explained to them and, through the pre-salvation ministry of the Holy Spirit, they had clearly understood what they needed to do (John 16:8). But understanding the Gospel, or even being convicted of sin, is not the equivalent of regeneration. “They had ‘tasted the Heavenly gift’ in such a way as to give them a distinct impression of its character and quality” (Wuest). They were similar to the spies at Kadesh-Barnea who not only saw the land, but who had its very fruit in their hands, and yet turned back.

Furthermore, they had shared in or been made partakers of the Holy Spirit. Wuest points out that the Greek word translated “share” or “partakers” does not mean “possessors” of the Holy Spirit in the sense that He had come to take up permanent residence in their hearts. Rather, they had experienced the Holy Spirit’s pre-salvation ministry -- that of leading them on step by step towards saving faith. It was right at the point of either acceptance or rejection that they were in danger of turning back to the old Levitical system.

VERSE 5: In being enlightened they had indeed tasted the goodness of the Word of God or the “good Word of God” (Vincent). This has particular reference to the Gospel of Christ -- the teaching of the New Covenant. The Word had also been confirmed to them by signs and miracles (2:4) which attested, not only to the truth of the Word but also to the coming age of righteousness under the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ.

VERSE 6: If these Hebrews who had experienced the enlightenment and advantages here described were to “fall away” or “turn aside” (3:12) and return to their earlier position under the Old Covenant it would be impossible to renew them to repentance. In occupying such a position, true repentance and subsequent regeneration were impossible. The reason being that by such action they would be declaring the sacrificial work of Christ valueless and they would once again be taking their stand with those who had perpetrated the national crime of His crucifixion, agreeing with them that He was not who He claimed to be and therefore deserved to be crucified, subjecting Him to “an open shame” (NKJ) or “public disgrace” (NIV). The enormity of such contemptuous action is emphasised by stating the fact that they would not be disparaging some other human being, but they would be setting at nought the Son of God Himself along with His all-sufficient vicarious sacrifice, and doing so to their eternal loss.

VERSES 7-8: In view of what has been said, these two verses contain an illustration from nature of those who receive the message of the New Covenant and those who reject it. Those who receive the message of the Gospel of Christ and respond to it in saving faith are likened to the ground which often receives the refreshing rain and produces a crop pleasing to those who farm it. Those who finally reject the message of the Gospel are likened to the ground that receives the same rain but brings forth a worthless crop. Their certain judgment is indicated by the fact that such ground is in danger of being cursed and will ultimately be burned.

It is noteworthy that the passage speaks of ground that has been subjected to “rain *often* falling on it”. The implication is that these people had repeatedly been exposed to the truth of the New Covenant. Some had received it and had been blessed with salvation; others had finally rejected it and would ultimately suffer judgment.

VERSES 9-12: In concluding this section, setting forth the danger of finally rejecting the message of the New Covenant, the writer addresses his remarks firstly to the saved among his readers, and uses them as examples for the rest.

VERSE 9: He begins by addressing them as “divinely loved ones” (Wuest) and because the Greek word from which this is translated occurs only here in the epistle, it is an indication he is differentiating between the saved and the unsaved. He does this in order to hold them up as examples (as verse 12 shows) to those who as yet were not true believers. As he considers their lives he is confident of “better things” in their case — better things than falling away from the truth of the New Covenant and ultimately suffering judgment. Rather, the qualities he sees in their lives are proof of the fact that they had indeed obtained salvation.

VERSE 10: In these encouraging words to the saved, the writer alludes to the “things that accompany salvation”. Their genuine love for the Lord was expressed in their ongoing ministry to His people. This is indeed one of the signs of the new birth, as John declares in his first epistle, “We know we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers” (3:14). These believers are reminded of the righteous and faithfulness of God, and because of this are assured that their efforts on behalf of their fellow believers would not go unrewarded by Him.

VERSES 11-12: But the writer is desirous that all of his readers exhibit the same on-going qualities in their lives through accepting Christ, and here he directs his remarks to those who were still unbelievers. Rather than going back to the teachings of the Old Covenant, they should go on to genuine saving faith in Christ and thereby exhibit the same diligence as those who were saved. In this way they would fully develop the hope which accompanies salvation to its ultimate conclusion (1 John 3:2-3).

Unless they did actually take the step of saving faith there was a very real danger they would become spiritually “lazy” or dull and unable to respond to the challenge of the Gospel. Therefore they should imitate those who were truly saved among them and through faith and perseverance inherit, or enter into (with them) the good of what God has promised.

THE DEPENDENCY OF GOD’S PROMISE

In this section the writer further encourages his readers to enter into true saving faith by demonstrating the fact that when God makes a promise it can be fully depended upon. Throughout this epistle God has promised eternal salvation, not to those who adhere to the Old Covenant, but to those who recognise and receive by faith Jesus Christ as Saviour and consequently as their Great High Priest and who thereby enter into the blessings of the New Covenant.

VERSES 13-15: The example of Abraham is used here, first to demonstrate God’s faithfulness, and secondly because, embodied in God’s covenant with Abraham, was the whole of His redemptive purpose. In making a promise or covenant with Abraham concerning the blessing of his decendency, God pledged Himself as to its fulfilment.

It should also be noted that Abraham’s decendency extended far wider than just natural Israel for God’s promise of blessing was aimed at all who would exercise true saving faith (Romans 4:9-15, 9:6-9). His promise was therefore made on the basis of His grace, becoming operative in the life of the individual by personal faith (as Romans 4 clearly sets out).

The full effect of salvation is implied in verse 15 where it refers to Abraham as “waiting patiently” before receiving what was promised. The full effect of salvation will take place when Christ returns for His Church and believers are glorified to be with Him forever. At the time this epistle was written, this was of particular significance to those believing Jews who were suffering persecution because of their faith in Christ (verse 12). The writer wanted these readers to understand that their time of suffering would end, and that just as Abraham received what was promised (in the birth of Isaac), so would they (along with every other believer) in their full deliverance and glorification.

VERSE 16: By way of illustrating the security of God’s promise, he uses as an example the human practice of taking “the oath” where a person or persons solemnly swear before God to tell the truth. He declares that, even in the human situation such an oath puts an end to all argument and settles the matter.

VERSES 17-18: Here is the point of the illustration. Because God wanted the recipients of His promise to be absolutely certain of its fulfilment and to rest upon His Word, despite the fact that He cannot lie, He condescended to confirm it with an oath. His redemptive purpose, therefore is founded upon two unchangeable things – His promise and, as to its fulfilment, His oath.

He has given such an absolute guarantee so that the believer who, like the manslayer of Deut. 4:42, fled to the city of refuge for safety from the avenger, has fled to the Lord Jesus Christ, might be greatly encouraged in the absolute assurance of salvation and the hope of eternal life. The basis for such assurance is the perfect redemptive and High Priestly ministry of Christ.

VERSES 19-20: The word hope as it is used in Scripture in this context, has a much stronger meaning than the everyday meaning we are accustomed to. It means to be living in the good of all that God has promised, being assured that He cannot lie and that all that He has promised will be fulfilled. It is this hope in the fulfilment of the redemptive purposes of God, which is an anchor for the soul. It is centred in Christ Himself who, having completed the work of redemption on earth and thereby having fully satisfied the righteous demands of God against our sin, has entered into the heavenly “inner sanctuary” on our behalf. He is there in the presence of God for us, and we are fully accepted in Him. Because of His obedience to and completion of the Father’s perfect will, in His intercessory work on our behalf, He is now “High Priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek”.

CHAPTER 7

Having mentioned the Priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ in the previous chapter, we now enter into a fuller discussion of this important subject using two Old Testament references (Genesis 14:18-20 and Psalm 110:4). The chapter shows in detail the contrast between the redundant Levitical priesthood and the superior, eternal Priesthood of Christ, making it the focal point of the whole epistle.

The account of Melchizedek as recorded in Genesis 14 is unique in Scripture and shows, once again, its divine inspiration. The details of his history were so chosen for the divine record so that he might pre-figure the Lord Jesus Christ in His superior Priesthood. This is implied in verse 3 where it says that he (Melchizedek) was “made like the Son of God. . .”. If the Genesis writer (Moses) were not writing under divine inspiration, considering the significance of Melchizedek, he would naturally have recorded something of his genealogy or background. But for His divine purposes God caused only the relevant details of his history and priesthood to be recorded, and these details become the seed from which the Epistle to the Hebrews is developed.

VERSE 1: This verse introduces us to the person of Melchizedek. He was both a king and a priest, which immediately sets him apart from the Levitical priesthood where it was never God’s intention that these two roles should be combined in the one person. In fact there were serious consequences for those who attempted to do so (see 1 Samuel 13:5-14, 2 Chronicles 26:16-21). He was king of Salem (which was later to become Jerusalem) and also priest of God Most High.

He met Abraham in a crucial time of need, and brought forth “bread and wine” (Genesis 14:18). It is significant that these are the very elements chosen by our Lord to remind us of His great sacrifice whereby we have eternal redemption. Based on the completed redemptive work of Christ they are emblematic of the true sustenance and joy that He alone can give as our Great High Priest. After Abraham’s victory of King Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the ministry of Melchizedek prepared Abraham for the more subtle onslaught and temptation of the evil king of Sodom (Genesis 14:18-24). So it is with our Great High Priest. A vital part of His ministry is to prepare and equip His people for the onslaught and temptation of our enemy, Satan.

VERSE 2: Although Abraham was already recognised as a great man, his paying tithes to Melchizedek was an acknowledgement that he (Melchizedek) was the greater and was recognition of his divinely appointed position and ministry.

And now follows further detail concerning this mysterious person. First, the meaning of his name “king of righteousness” and then the meaning of the place where he was king “Salem” which is “peace” set him forth as a type of the sovereignty, power and ministry of Christ. Christ is indeed King, and He is the very embodiment of righteousness. He came to earth with the express purpose that through His sacrificial and vicarious death there might be peace — peace between sinful human beings and God who is absolutely holy. His death was necessary because such peace could only be secured on a righteous basis. Redemption having been completed through His death, both peace and imputed righteousness become the possession of all who by faith accept God’s offer of salvation (Romans 5:1).

VERSE 3: This verse shows that there is no record of his parentage or genealogy. He appears suddenly on the scene and just as suddenly the account concerning him ceases. The significance of this is that it reveals even further a different type of priesthood from the Levitical where a person’s genealogy was of first importance. He is presented as having neither beginning of days nor end of life, and this makes him “like the Son of God” in this respect, who has an eternal priesthood.

VERSES 4-10: This section establishes the superiority of Melchizedek over Abraham in order to lay a basis for revealing the superiority of Christ’s priesthood over the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood.

There are three main points that show this superiority:-

(1) **VERSE 4:** Abraham paid him tithes. Abraham's importance is first alluded to in this verse. He is referred to as "Abraham the patriarch" — the father of the Jewish nation. But he acknowledged that Melchizedek was greater in that he paid him "a tenth of the plunder" or "spoils". According to Wuest, the Greek text shows that Abraham gave to Melchizedek the tenth part of the pick of the spoils. After a victory the Greeks gathered up the spoils in a heap and the best part of the heap was presented to the gods. The fact that Abraham gave a tenth of the pick of the spoils to Melchizedek, would emphasise the latter's greatness in the eyes of the readers of this epistle.

Again, while the priests of the Levitical order were commanded to receive tithes from their fellow Israelites who had descended from Abraham, Abraham himself paid tithes to Melchizedek, showing not only the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood, but that it was completely apart from the Levitical and was of a different order.

(2) **VERSE 7:** Melchizedek blessed Abraham. Melchizedek not only received a tithe from Abraham, he blessed him. This was in accordance with the principle that declares "the lesser is blessed by the greater" or "inferiority is blessed by superiority". Vine points out that "the lesser" does not refer to moral or even religious character, but to rank or office. Abraham is called a prophet (Genesis 20:7), but he was neither king nor priest.

These first two points set before us two characteristics of our relationship to Christ as believers. We receive blessing from Him; He receives tithes from us. The paying of the tithe was an indication that the whole belonged to God, and the more unreservedly we place all that we have and are at His disposal, the richer will be our experience of the power and presence of our Great High Priest.

(3) **VERSE 8:** Melchizedek is declared to be living. Thus his priesthood is perpetual since the record concerning him does not record his death. On the one hand the tenth is collected by men who die (the Levitical priesthood, which passes from one generation to another because of death), on the other hand the tenth is collected by him who is declared to be living (the perpetual priesthood of Melchizedek pre-figuring that of Christ's).

VERSES 9-10: These two verses bring to a conclusion this passage establishing the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood. Wuest points out that the tendency in Jewish theology was to view heredity in this realistic manner. Levi was in the body or "in the loins" of Abraham in that he was descended from him. When Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek Levi, by the intermediate agency of Abraham, also paid him tithes. Thus Melchizedek was superior to Levi. It therefore follows that since Melchizedek is superior to Levi, Christ is superior to Levi, for He belongs to that superior order of priesthood (see Psalm 110:4, Heb. 6:20b). This makes the New Covenant superior to the Old Covenant, which is the basic argument of this epistle.

Having established the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood over the Aaronic or the Levitical, the writer now proceeds to show this is the order of Christ's priesthood. The Levitical priesthood is shown to have become redundant, and superseded by the perfect, eternal, non-transferable priesthood of Christ.

VERSE 11: "Perfection" here refers to God's purpose in fully dealing with sin and bringing about complete reconciliation. The question of this verse is not answered until verses 18-19 and the passage proceeds to establish the fact that Christ's priesthood was of a different order to the Levitical — the superior order of Melchizedek. However the question does imply that because there was "need for another priest to come" that such perfection could not be attained under the Levitical priesthood. It could only typify the accomplishment of God's purpose, but could not actually bring it about. Under it the Law was given, and it was that which fully revealed the problem — sin. The Levitical order, however, did not have the capacity to deal with it.

The word “another” is the translation of the Greek word “heteros”, meaning “of another kind”. Because the Levitical priesthood could not accomplish perfection there was need, not just of another priest, but one of a different order with the necessary capacity.

VERSES 12-14: Here we have reference to the fact that there has been a “change”, a “transfer” or a “replacement” of the priesthood — from the old order to the new and that, in order for this to take place, there also needed to be a change of the law governing priesthood.

The Law, as given to Moses, required that priests should come only from the tribe of Levi. But in order to make way for the superior priesthood of Christ, this law had to be set aside. He did not come from the tribe of Levi but from the tribe of Judah, a tribe which had no priestly function under the old order.

It is noteworthy that in referring to Christ in verse 14, the writer uses the term “our Lord”, “Lord” being the translation of “Kurios” which is used in the LXX to translate the title of God, Jehovah. In the setting of this epistle, written primarily to Jews, this has special significance. He ascribes deity to Jesus of Nazareth, and calls Him our “Jehovah”, the One whom the Jews recognised as their God.

VERSES 15-17: That which verse 15 refers to as being “even more obvious” is the general proposition of the passage, namely, that there needed to be a change in the priesthood and that God has provided another Priest. The Priest of God’s providing became so not on the basis of a law as to His ancestry as required under the old economy, “but on the basis of the power of an indestructible (or endless) life” as typified in Melchizedek whose order of priesthood was that of Christ’s (hence the quotation from Psalm 110:4).

“The word ‘*dunamis*’ (translated ‘power’) conveys the idea of authority, and denotes that which cannot be broken down or destroyed. It is imperishable and indissoluble. All speaks of the authority and perpetuity of Christ’s priesthood; it never changes, never ceases” (Vine).

Wuest further points out that “in the case of the Levitical priest, no matter how ill-suited he was and reluctant to take office, the law made him a priest because of his pedigree. He did what he did so far as his official duties were concerned by reason of an outside compulsion. In the case of the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, He performed His duties as High Priest, not by reason of the fact that any official necessity was laid upon Him, but by virtue of a power in His own nature compelling and enabling Him, the power of a life that even death could not dissolve, for He raised Himself from the dead.” (John 10:18).

VERSES 18-19: Here is the answer to the question posed in verse 11. “The former regulation” or “the law by which the Levitical priesthood was appointed” was set aside because it did not have the capacity to accomplish “perfection”. When it came to dealing with sin and bringing about reconciliation to God the Levitical priesthood was “weak and useless”. It revealed sin (because under it the Law was given) but it could not deal with it. In itself there was nothing inherently imperfect (as Romans 7:12 makes clear), for it achieved the purpose for which it was designed in that it “diagnosed” sin and pointed to that which would accomplish “perfection”, but that was all it could do.

Having completed its purpose, the former was set aside to make way for “a better hope” — the new order with the capacity to completely deal with sin and by which we can “draw near to God”, something which was impossible under the old order.

(It should be noted that the word “hope” here has the meaning of “expectation” and when related to salvation is the “expectation of all that God has promised”. All that God promised in the Old Testament through the various types is fulfilled in Christ, and all that God has promised for the future will also be fulfilled in Christ. See also 6:18).

VERSES 20-22: Here is another contrast between the old order and the new. When the Levitical priests were inducted into office it was without an oath, because theirs was not a permanent priest-

hood. But when our Lord Jesus Christ was made priest God guaranteed both the effectiveness and the permanence of His priesthood. Thus the words, “The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind: ‘You are a priest forever’” and His priesthood is according to the order of Melchizedek.

On the basis of this oath, Jesus Himself is the pledge or the guarantee of the better covenant which, because it fully meets God’s requirements in dealing with sin and bringing about reconciliation with Himself, has replaced the old.

VERSES 23-25: Another major difference which makes the new order better than the old is the “deathlessness” of the High Priest of the new order. Under the Levitical order there was a succession of priests simply because death prevented them from continuing in their ministry. But our Lord Jesus, having past through death in which He was the complete sacrifice for our sin, lives forever, and thus His priesthood is non-transferrable. It is permanent and does not pass from one generation to the other because of death. The priesthood pre-figured by Melchizedek is uniquely Christ’s priesthood and no other person can step into it.

This means that His ministry continues without fluctuation and His capacity to save does not change. The word “completely” or “uttermost” (verse 25) is translated from the Greek “*panteles*” which, according to Wuest, is made up of “*pas*” — “all”, and “*telos*” — “end, termination”. By reason of His eternal ministry as High Priest, Christ is able to save the believer in totality of being — body, soul and spirit — and to do so to the point of termination — which implies an unending state of salvation in eternity.

According to Vincent the word translated “intercession” (“intercede” NIV) also involves “intervention” and “includes every form of Christ’s identifying himself with human interests”. Without His intervention we would have no salvation and could only continue on in sin towards its final consequence — eternal condemnation (see 9:27). Now on the basis of His complete sacrifice, and because “He always lives”, in His resurrected high priestly capacity He continually intercedes for us.

VERSE 26: Having described the High Priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is here declared that such a high priest, with the eternal capacity that He possesses, meets our need; the inference being that the priests under the old order could not. Such a High Priest — who is holy, blameless, pure or undefiled, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens — meets our need in dealing with our sin, reconciling us to God, interceding for us and sustaining us in our Christian pathway.

In summarising the perfections of our High Priest, He is described first of all as “holy”. The word is translated from “*hosios*” rather than “*hagios*” and refers to personal holiness rather than holiness as a state of separation to God. He is blameless — free from malice, guile or craft. Pure or undefiled, according to Wuest, is defined as “free from that by which the nature of a thing is deformed or debased, or its force or vigour impaired”. He is set apart or separated from sinners. Vine points out that what is here described is an action rather than a condition. It is true that during His earthly ministry He was separate from sinners, not that He did not mingle with them, but that in respect of sin He was ever distinct from them, for in Him was no sin. But the thought here is that in His resurrection and exaltation He was forever separated from sinful men. “He is separated from sinners in that in His service as High Priest, He is void of all contact and commerce with sinners, removed far away in His glorified state and body, into God’s Holy of Holies” (Wuest). He is separated from sinners by virtue of the fact that He is “exalted above the heavens” or “made higher than the heavens”. When He ascended, after His victorious resurrection, He passed through the heavens (4:14) to take up His rightful place as being higher or above all creation. He is now at “the right hand of the Majesty on high” (1:3). “Such a High Priest meets our need” as lost and helpless sinners needing salvation, and also as redeemed children of the living God needing intercession and sustenance.

VERSE 27: Yet another contrast between the old and the new orders is here mentioned. Under the old

there was need for repetitive sacrifice because those sacrifices could never take away sins. But under the new, Christ's sacrifice is a once-for all sacrifice which is sufficient in that it meets all the Divine requirements and therefore does not need to be repeated. The priests under the old order not only had a continuing sacrificial system, they first had to sacrifice for their own sins, and then for the sins of the people. Not so with our Lord Jesus Christ. He was without sin, and therefore was able to stand in the sinner's place "the just for the unjust that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

VERSE 28: In drawing this passage to a close this verse states that the Law constituted as high priests men who were "weak" — that is, by nature they were sinful and thus subject to death. But the oath — that declaration by God, which guarantees the continuity and effectiveness of Christ's priesthood — has constituted the Son High Priest. He has always possessed personal perfection, but now in His role as High Priest of the New Covenant, by virtue of His total obedience to the Father including His complete vicarious sacrifice, He is made perfect in this role forever. Thus He is totally suited to meet our need.

CHAPTER 8

Here, in this chapter, the writer to the Hebrews clarifies the main point of the epistle and in doing so stresses even further the superiority of the Person and Priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ over the Levitical priests and priesthood. The establishment of the promised New Covenant together with its superiority over the old, which is shown as having become obsolete, is also dealt with. Thus not only has the old order of priesthood been replaced, so too has the old covenant.

VERSE 1: The chief point of what has been said so far and of what is yet to come in this epistle is the fact that in our Lord Jesus Christ “we do have such a High Priest . . .” (present tense) as has been described. One who, in His person is superior, and embodies in Himself all the glories of Deity (chapter 1) and all the perfections of sinless humanity (chapter 2). In His all-sufficient non-transferable priesthood as it has also been presented, the words “we do have such a great High Priest” emphasise the fact of such a reality, and all that is about to be said regarding Him is also related to this statement.

“Who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in Heaven” shows that He is in the place of sovereign power as the Father’s co-equal (1:3), having completed the work of redemption — a place and position that the high priests under the old economy could never occupy. Here we are reminded of the fact that Jesus is not only Priest, but He is also King. As Priest He saves and sustains us; as King He rules us. Again, all these truths are emphasised by the statement, “We do have such a High Priest . . .”

VERSE 2: Furthermore, having paid for our sins at the cross by His perfect once-for-all sacrifice, Christ now serves in the “sanctuary” (NIV) or “holy places” (*Greek J.F.B.*) of Heaven itself, the immediate presence of God (1:3), as minister of the true or genuine abiding tabernacle which is set up by the Lord Himself, as opposed to the earthly tabernacle which, although constructed according to divine instruction, was set up by man and was temporary and figurative (see also 9:11).

VERSE 3: Much of the ministry of a high priest involved the offering of gifts and sacrifices, and thus it was necessary that Christ also have something to offer. He offered Himself “unblemished” or “without spot” to God (9:14), and this once-for-all sacrifice for our sins was shown to be fully acceptable in that He was raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high. Just as the “tabernacle” in which He now serves is the reality of which the earthly tabernacle was the type, so His sacrifice is the reality of which all the sacrifices under the Levitical system were also typical. And now, the perfection and efficacy of His ministry as our High Priest, is based upon the perfection and completeness of the sacrifice that He made.

VERSES 4-5: The Priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ could never be accommodated within the earthly system. That role had been filled by men qualified to do so and, at the time this epistle was written, was in the process of passing away having become redundant. Further, He could never have been a priest under the old earthly order for He was not of the tribe of Levi and His priesthood was not established by law.

While He could never be a priest after the order of Aaron, conversely, the priests of the old order could never qualify to fill the position of High Priest of the new covenant, a position which only Christ could fill. Theirs, like the tabernacle in which they served, was only a “shadow” ministry. It foretold and illustrated the truths of the reality. This is why it was so important for Moses to follow God’s instruction precisely and ensure that “you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain”. During his forty days on Mount Sinai, God gave to Moses the detail of the earthly tabernacle he was to build. It was an illustration or “object lesson” to the people of Heavenly and eternal realities relating, in particular, to the sacrificial and High Priestly work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

VERSE 6: It follows, then, that “the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which He is mediator is superior to the old one....” The measure of the superiority of His ministry over that of the Levitical priests is seen by the superiority of the covenant of which He is the guarantee (7:22). The reason the new covenant is superior to the old is because it is “founded on better promises”. The fulfilment of the “promises” under the old covenant depended upon both parties — God and the people — adhering to its terms. It promised eternal life and a right relationship with God to those who kept the Law. Its promise could not be fulfilled, however, because the people could not adhere to their part of the covenant. But under the new, as mediator, Christ is the One through whom all its terms are carried out, and He has done so and will continue to do so without fail (9:15).

Within this chapter we find our Lord Jesus Christ described as “the Minister of the sanctuary” (verse 2 KJV), and in this verse “the Mediator of the new covenant”. The sanctuary is God’s dwelling place: The Minister of the sanctuary brings us near to God to share the blessings of His presence through His sacrifice. The covenant deals with our redemption, relationship and response to God: The Mediator of the covenant prepares us for the sanctuary so that we are acceptable to God and able to enjoy His presence.

VERSES 7-8: The first covenant was satisfactory for the purpose for which it was designed — a signpost pointing to the reality. But, while emphasising the fact of sin, it was faulty when it came to the point of fully dealing with it and bringing people into a right relationship with God. Had this not been the case no provision would have been made for a new covenant — one that would fulfil the Divine purposes.

VERSE 8 shows us that the fault was not actually with the first covenant, but rather it was with the people who were unable to fulfil its terms and therefore, if people were to be redeemed and made right with God, a new covenant was required.

From this point to the end of verse 12 is a quotation from Jeremiah 31:31-34 where God, through Jeremiah, while the old covenant was in force, speaks of the time of the instigation of the new covenant and what it would do as far as the people were concerned.

VERSE 9: The new covenant would be different from the old in that the old did not provide for the fault or “weakness” of the people, whereas under the new God Himself would undertake to fulfil all its terms. Such a covenant would fully provide for such “weakness” and completely fulfil the Divine purpose. Under the old covenant God had to turn away from the people and they did not enter into the blessings He had for them because they were unable to remain faithful to its terms despite their assurance to God through Moses that “We will do everything the Lord has said” (Ex. 19:8).

VERSES 10-11: Here the new covenant is introduced. As its mediator Christ is the One through whom it is enacted. No longer would the laws of God be an external condemning code, but would be an intrinsic part of the new nature placed within a person by the indwelling Holy Spirit upon acceptance of Christ as Saviour. Thus, with the new birth comes a new desire to know God and to please God. There would be not only a sanctuary above, but also a sanctuary within where fellowship with God, His joy, peace and power could be experienced and enjoyed. God has always desired full fellowship with mankind, and through this covenant it is made possible. All who accept Christ and what God has done for them through Christ become His people and He becomes their God.

VERSE 11 alludes to the perfect state to come when ultimate redemption and universal knowledge and relationship with God shall be a reality. (See Revelation 21:1-4).

VERSE 12: Because of the perfect and complete sacrifice of Christ, sin is fully dealt with. This means that God not only forgives the sin of His people, but He actually has no further memory of it. For the believer, in place of his or her sin, God sees only the divine righteousness of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21).

VERSE 13: This verse makes it clear that the new covenant is not complementary to the old, but rather it supersedes it. With the establishment of the new, the old has become redundant. It has served its purpose and so is replaced by that of which it was the shadow. The words “will soon disappear” suggest that the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system were still in operation when the epistle was written (10:11), although they were completely without relevance. They probably continued until the destruction of the Temple under the emperor, Titus Vespasian in AD 70.

CHAPTER NINE

In the previous chapter we have seen the superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ in His high priestly capacity over the priests of the old covenant, and that He ministers in the true tabernacle set up by the Lord. In the first ten verses of this chapter the sanctuaries of both the old and the new covenants and their significance are dealt with in a fuller sense and, again, we see here also the superiority of the new over the old. The old covenant had an earthly sanctuary, the new covenant a Heavenly sanctuary. The sanctuary of the old covenant together with its regulations for worship are shown to be no more than an illustration, pointing forward to the time of “the new order” (verses 9-10). The chapter also shows the supremacy and value of the blood sacrifice of Christ in cleansing the sinner and bringing him to dwell in the presence of God, within the “veil”, and putting him in possession of an “eternal inheritance” (verse 15).

VERSES 1-10: The following is an overview in order to emphasise and highlight the main theme of the passage.

First, that which appears on the surface to be a contradiction in verse 4, concerning the golden altar of incense needs to be clarified. The writer has placed before us a picture of the tabernacle on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). This altar which normally had its place in the Holy Place is here described as inside the Most Holy Place because uppermost in the mind of the writer is its role in the proceedings of the Day of Atonement. On that day the High Priest brought a censer of burning coals from that altar, plus two handfuls of incense into the Most Holy Place. He then placed the incense on the fire before the Lord. The smoke covered the “atonement cover” or the “mercy seat” which was the location of the Shekinah Glory, so that he did not die (Lev. 16:12, 13). The golden altar of incense marked the boundary of the Holy of Holies as well as the curtain, and had very real significance on the Day of Atonement.

Returning to the main point, we are reminded that the tabernacle was in two sections — the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place or the Holy of Holies. Into the first the priests went continually to conduct their ministry, but into the second — the Most Holy Place — only the High Priest was permitted to enter and that once a year on the Day of Atonement, and never without blood.

It is in the difference between these two compartments and the veil that separated them that the main point is found. In chapter 8 we were told that Moses was to ensure that everything was constructed according to the pattern given him. This was important because the Lord was setting out an illustration of Heavenly truths. Into the Holy Place, separated from the Most Holy Place, man might enter in the earthly service of the tabernacle, but the presence of God was not there. The presence of God dwelt in the Most Holy Place but, because of his sinfulness, man was unable to dwell there. The veil was the symbol of separation between the Holy God and sinful man. The entrance of the High Priest once a year with the blood of the sin offering foreshadowed the only means of access and pointed forward to the time when access in reality to the true Most Holy Place would be made possible.

Thus, in this way, the first and second compartments become an object lesson of the two covenants. Under the first, the Levitical, man was kept at a distance, unable to enter and enjoy the presence of God. Under the second, the new covenant of which Christ is both Minister and Mediator in the order of Melchizedek, God’s people are brought right in to dwell in the good of His presence, their sin having been fully dealt with through Christ’s perfect sacrifice and precious shed blood on their behalf. (The words of verse 7, “never without blood”, emphasise the fact by way of inference that there is no other way for sinful man to be made right with God apart from the shed blood of Christ.)

VERSES 8-10: As the Great Revealer of Truth, the Holy Spirit supervised the details of the tabernacle in the Old Testament and the unfolding of its teachings in the New. This makes it clear that the Old Testament narrative is far more than just a historical record, but is also an effective

object lesson of New Testament truths. Through this object lesson one important truth the Holy Spirit was teaching was that under the old covenant the way into the Most Holy Place was not disclosed and the people remained at a distance from God. But the time would come when that way would be opened up. That time had now arrived, and the object lessons given then, through the tabernacle, foreshadowed the great truths of this present age of grace, under the New Covenant. (The concern of the writer was that as long as the Hebrew people adhered to the teachings of the Old Covenant which had become obsolete, they would continue to remain at a distance from God, outside the sphere of New Covenant blessing.)

As believers we need to appreciate and appropriate these truths and live in the good of the presence and redemptive blessings of God. We should be careful not to allow things into our lives that rob us of our appreciation of His blessings and the awareness of His abiding presence.

Having demonstrated the incapacity of the earthly tabernacle with its offerings to effect the perfecting of the worshipper, the chapter goes on to contrast this with the glories and perfections of Christ, His High Priesthood, His offering, His Heavenly sanctuary and His mediatorship of the New Covenant.

Verses 11-12: In the study of the Old Covenant we learn there were four things used to foreshadow the truths of redemption: (1) The priest, (2) the sanctuary, (3) the blood, and (4) the means of access into the Most Holy Place. In these verses we are introduced to the realities that they pointed to:-

1. Christ, the High Priest “of the good things that are already here” (NIV).
2. The greater and more perfect tabernacle — Heaven itself, the place of the immediate presence of God (verse 24).
3. Christ’s own precious blood.
4. Christ, as the way into the Most Holy Place, or the way to full acceptance with God and access into His presence.

As our Great High Priest, verse 11 tells us that Christ “went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle”. That is, He passed through the real experiences which the various aspects of the earthly tabernacle foreshadowed — from the great altar in the courtyard, which spoke of Calvary, to the Most Holy Place itself, speaking of the immediate presence of God (verse 24).

Furthermore, His was the life that perfectly fulfilled the ministry typified by the priests within the first sanctuary or room (verse 2). As the Perfect Servant He fully subjected Himself to the Father’s will and “learned obedience by the things He suffered” (See 5:8 and notes. Also Phil. 2:7 and Psalm 40:8).

In His death He was the fulfilment of the offering on the great altar. He became the sin-bearer and dealt with the barrier between the holy God and sinful man, bearing Divine judgment for human sin. Because of His complete and perfect offering the veil was rent and the way was literally opened into the Most Holy Place.

He was the One who, as our great Leader (2:10) entered, in the efficacy of His own blood, into the true and heavenly Most Holy Place after His glorious resurrection and ascension. Now, as our Great High Priest He ministers that heavenly life to His people through the Holy Spirit.

VERSE 12: It is important to realise that only Christ can make us fit for the presence of God and bring us into the Most Holy Place. He can only do so by the same means that He entered in Himself, having obtained eternal redemption, and that is through the power and efficacy of His own blood. The animal sacrifices of the old covenant could never do this. Their only value lay in the fact that they pointed forward to Christ’s perfect sacrifice.

In all this we see the depth of Christ’s personal interest in His people and His unutterable love for us. It was a love which overcame all difficulties and overpowered all opposition, refusing to be turned aside, that bore all the suffering, judgment and agony of the cross in order to obtain

“eternal redemption” for us. The permanency of His work is implied by the word “eternal”, and is in contrast to the transitory ministry of the old covenant.

VERSES 13-14: The Holy Spirit now takes up more fully the subject of the power and efficacy of the blood sacrifice of Christ. A contrast is drawn and we are reminded of the blood of goats and calves under the old Levitical order and, from Numbers 19, the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who had become ceremonially unclean. Anyone who touched a dead body was ceremonially unclean and was excluded from the camp. To meet the need of cleansing, the ashes of a heifer which had been sacrificed and of which the blood had been sprinkled seven times towards the tabernacle, were mingled with water and sprinkled on the one who had been defiled. Thus he was restored to his place and privileges and with a clear conscience he could once again take part in the life and worship of the people.

VERSE 14: In the light of this, the question is asked by way of emphasising the efficacy of the blood of Christ, that if such a sacrifice had the power to cleanse the ceremonially unclean so that with a good conscience they could once more take up their place and privileges, “*how much more*, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God?” The blood shed under the first covenant was only capable of ceremonial and “outward” cleansing, whereas the blood of Christ fully cleanses from actual sin.

The preciousness, power and efficacy of the blood of Christ, the Son of God, is indeed far beyond our capacity to understand. It is the basis of not only permanently dealing with sin, but opening Heaven itself to bring us near to God. When that blood, which has gained us entrance to the Heavenly sanctuary, is applied to the conscience by the Heavenly High Priest, there is infinite and effectual cleansing. Conscience is that God-given capacity which, when functioning correctly, tells us just what we are. A conscience fully cleansed by the blood of Christ and fully aware of that cleansing because of the removal of all sin (1 John 1:7), has the sense of guilt and worthlessness removed. It therefore has the ability to respond to the inward work of the Holy Spirit and, in appreciation and co-operation with all that Christ has achieved, draw near to God in worship. Such worship overflows in loving and willing service and obedience to Him. It is all made possible because of the worthiness and obedience of the One who “through the eternal Spirit offered Himself unblemished to God”.

The cleansing away of all sin by the precious blood of Christ is not the final objective. It is that which clears the way for divine activity within the life. We are cleansed from all sin in order that “we may serve the living God”. But only through such cleansing can we ever truly serve God.

Andrew Murray adds the thought, “Christ entered the Holiest through His own blood, not for Himself, but for us. We go in too, by His blood and His Spirit, not only for ourselves, but to intercede for others”.

VERSE 15: The writer now arrives at his conclusion: “For this reason” – in the light of His perfect sacrifice and in order that eternal redemption, full cleansing of sin, nearness, true worship and service to God may become realities — “Christ is the mediator of a new covenant”. The significance of this is that through His sacrificial and vicarious death He is mediator of a covenant with the capacity to fully achieve God’s purposes regarding His people (“those who are called”) and put them in possession of “the promised eternal inheritance”. Only His sacrifice could do this and therefore He is not only the Mediator of the new covenant, but also the sacrificial Victim. His sacrifice is effective not only for those living since the Cross, but also for those living before the Cross, during the time of the old covenant. All who are saved, whether under the Old or New Covenants, are only ever saved through the atoning work of Christ. No one was ever saved by virtue of the sacrifices offered under the old covenant. The only virtue of those sacrifices lay in the fact that they pointed forward to Christ’s perfect sacrifice upon which the new covenant is established. How futile it was then, for the Hebrews to continue with the old Levitical system!

The first covenant did, however, contain the moral Law — that holy standard showing God's requirements for mankind. It is the transgression of God's holy standard that constitutes us guilty, condemned sinners. The new covenant, based on Christ's sacrificial death on our behalf, sets us "free from the sins committed under the first covenant" when saving faith is exercised. (See Romans 3:19-26).

VERSES 16-17: In these verses we see that in the case of the new covenant (which involves the possession of the believer's eternal inheritance as mentioned in the previous verse) just as an earthly inheritance can never be bequeathed without the death of the testator, so God could never bequeath this "eternal inheritance" without the death of the Testator (Christ). Therefore, it is emphasised that all the blessings of the New Covenant — redemption, forgiveness, cleansing from sin, sanctification, nearness to God and possession of the eternal inheritance — being bestowed on the repentant sinner, are completely dependent upon the sacrificial death of Christ.

VERSE 18-21: This fact was demonstrated symbolically by the shedding of blood in the first covenant which, as we have seen, was the shadow of the new.

Verses 19-20: These verses have as a background Exodus 24:1-8 where the blood was applied to these items in ratification of the old covenant. Vine points out that the water was emblematic of the work of the Holy Spirit in cleansing and separating. The scarlet wool set forth the dignity and glory of Christ's humanity in connection with his vicarious sacrifice. The hyssop, the lowest of the vegetable creation, was typical of the lowliness of Him who "humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death" (Phil 2:8).

VERSE 21: The dedication of the tabernacle and its vessels was accompanied by a similar ceremony involving the sprinkling of blood.

VERSE 22: In fact, under the old economy almost everything was ceremonially cleansed and dedicated with blood. There were a few exceptions. Water, incense and fire were also used. Those who were too poor to bring even a small animal for sacrifice were allowed to bring fine flour instead (Lev. 5:11). But the point the writer is making is that without the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness, and here he is alluding to the death of Christ. (See also Lev. 17:11).

The last section of the chapter (verses 23-28) clarifies for us by way of summary what has been said previously. The new or better covenant involving the true Heavenly sanctuary must be ratified by better sacrifices than those of the old. An important phrase here is "once for all" referring to the efficacy and permanence of Christ's sacrifice (verse 26).

Three appearances pertaining to Christ are mentioned:

Verse 24 - He has "entered Heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence". He appears for us in God's presence in all the virtue of His completed work on earth. He is there as our Intercessor and Sustainer.

Verse 26: "But now He has appeared once for all ... to do away with sin". Before He could become our Intercessor and Sustainer He needed to become our Redeemer.

Verse 28: "He will appear a second time". Here He comes to claim His own — those redeemed by the better sacrifice — His own precious blood.

Taken together they reveal His full redemptive ministry — from the penalty of sin (vs 26), from the power of sin (vs 24) and ultimately from the presence of sin (vs 28).

VERSE 23: As already stressed, all that pertained to the old covenant was simply illustrative of Heavenly realities under the new covenant including its accompanying sacrifices. But in order for us to enter into the Heavenly realities and blessings, to be accepted in the presence of God and for the new covenant to be ratified, better "sacrifices" were needed. We may well ask, "Why should the Heavenly things themselves need to be purified?" The subject before us is not only the remission of sins, but our access into the very presence of God. Our sins have come up before God and demand His

righteous judgment. Christ has borne that judgment and, as the Victorious One has entered Heaven itself by means of His own blood. On the basis of His precious shed blood even the memory of our sins has been cleansed away. (See 8:12, 10:17). We are now able to enter into and enjoy the riches of the presence of our God having been made fully acceptable through the redemptive work of Christ which has not only cleansed us from all sin, but has actually removed memory of such as far as God is concerned.

(Vine makes the following comment: "That the plural 'better sacrifices' should be used in reference to the death of Christ when emphasis has been laid upon His one sacrifice as being offered once for all, may occasion surprise. As, however, the writer has been speaking somewhat fully about the sacrifices under the Law, he probably has in mind that the offering of Christ was the fulfilment of various kinds of sacrifice, such as the sin offering, the peace offering, the burnt offering and the trespass offering.")

VERSE 24: We should not lose sight of the fact that the writer is endeavouring to show his Hebrew readers that the sanctuary and the temple under the old economy were not the reality, but only a copy thereof for the purpose of illustration and anticipation of the reality. Thus Christ did not enter that man-made sanctuary. Rather, having "obtained eternal redemption" (verse 12), "He entered Heaven itself". He did so on the basis of His perfect sacrifice in order to appear on our behalf in the presence of God and as the author (captain or leader) of our salvation (2:10), to lead us into that same hallowed place and position.

VERSE 25: Here are two distinct differences between the old and the new economies:

1. Because of the efficacy of His sacrifice, Christ's entrance into Heaven on our behalf never needs to be repeated because access for the redeemed has been gained once for all. The high priest, under the old economy, needed to enter the earthly sanctuary continually, because the way into the Most Holy Place had not then been disclosed (verse 8).

2. Related to this, Christ's never-to-be-repeated entrance into Heaven on our behalf was on the basis of His own precious shed blood. The high priest, under the old economy, entered continually with blood that was not his own and that could never take away sins. This inferred the unacceptability of his own blood because of his sinfulness. He needed a sinless, vicarious sacrifice. Christ alone is that sacrifice, to which the blood that the high priest of the old order carried into the earthly sanctuary, pointed.

VERSE 26: The once-for-all nature of Christ's sacrifice is emphasised. An entrance into Heaven on our behalf that needed to be repeated such as under the old economy, would have meant that the sacrificial death of Christ would also have needed to be repeated. But Christ has appeared *once for all* at the consummation of the ages for the purpose of putting away sin by the sacrifice of Himself — the perfect, vicarious and comprehensive sacrifice.

The sacrificial death of Christ upon the cross is the very focal point in God's redemptive plan. All ages prior to that event looked forward to it; all succeeding ages look back to it. It was there, at Calvary that the great, all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ completely dealt with sin. The one who, by faith, accepts Christ, can rest assured that his sins are put away *once for all*.

VERSES 27-28: The finality and completion of Christ's sacrifice is further emphasised. Just as man dies once and death completes his time in this scene, so Christ died only once and completed redemption's work on earth. But in his death He made it possible for God's righteous judgment for sin to be removed from man, because He Himself bore that judgment.

However, the words "many people" (NIV) infer that not all will have their sins removed and thus be saved from judgment. Only those who exercise saving faith and receive Him as Lord and Saviour will have their sins taken away (Romans 10:9). These are the ones for whom He will appear a second time. At this appearance He will not come as the perfect sacrifice for sin, but to culminate the salvation of those who have received Him and to save them from the very presence of sin.

CHAPTER 10

This chapter concludes the presentation of the contrast between the imperfections of the Levitical system under the Law, and the perfections of Christ and His once-for-all sacrifice. This contrast can be clearly seen by comparing the first verse with the 14th.

Vine points out that at the close of the ninth chapter the three events relating to the redemptive work of Christ were stated, though not in chronological order. In this chapter, by way of overview, these three events are dealt with again, enlarging upon the first two and setting all three in order of occurrence:

- 1. His incarnation (verses 5-10).*
- 2. His present intercessory ministry at the right hand of the Father (verses 11-13).*
- 3. His return for His people (verses 36-37).*

VERSE 1: Chapter 9, verse 9 referred to the tabernacle of the Law as being an illustration of the Heavenly realities that were at the time yet to be revealed. Here the Law (the old Levitical system) is referred to as a shadow. But there cannot be a shadow without a real object to cast the shadow, and so the verse says “the Law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming”. These good things are the blessings of redemption as presented in the gospel of Christ, that at the time the Levitical system was operative, were still in the future. They are made real to the believer by faith, and are to be fully realised with Christ in glory.

It follows, then, that the Law, with its repetitive year-by-year sacrifices could never bring perfection, or make its worshippers acceptable to God because it could never fully deal with sin. The fact that its sacrifices needed to be repeated proves this point. It was only of value in the light of the then future sacrifice of Christ.

VERSE 2: The question here implies that if the Law did have the ability to bring perfection, its sacrifices would not have needed to be repeated. They would have ceased upon the realisation of perfection, and its worshippers would no longer have had any conscious guilt of sins.

VERSES 3-4: Far from being the case, those sacrifices under the Law not only did not have the capacity to fully deal with sin, they were an “annual reminder of sins”. The writer still has in mind the Day of Atonement when annually the high priest confessed over the head of the scapegoat all the sins of the people (Lev. 16:21-22), so that every year the people were made aware of their sinfulness.

VERSE 4: The scapegoat was a type of Christ bearing away our sins, but those accompanying sacrifices did not have within themselves the capacity to deal with sin. As the verse says, “It was impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins”. The worshipers were not cleansed once for all. Their sins were covered temporarily by virtue of what those sacrifices typified, but they were not purged, and they retained a consciousness of the guilt of their sins.

Having been shown the complete inability of the sacrifices of the Law to take away sins and make the people acceptable to God, we now turn to see something of the nature and efficacy of the Sacrifice that does take away sins and that brings perfection.

VERSES 5-7: Wuest says, “In view of the fact that the blood of sacrificial animals cannot take away sin, the Messiah, when He became incarnate in humanity to perform His priestly work of offering a sacrifice that would pay for sin, did not offer animal sacrifices, but instead Himself, in His physical body begotten through the virgin birth.”

The quotation is from Psalm 40 and shows that even in the OT it was acknowledged that the blood of the animal sacrifices of the Levitical system did not please God because they could not take away sin. It was further acknowledged that a sacrifice was to be offered that would please Him and fulfil His holy requirements. The words “it is written about Me in the scroll” (NIV) or “the volume of the book” (KJV) refer to Christ Himself whose sacrificial work was typified in the Levitical system under the Law.

VERSES 8-10: The writer now expounds the quotation from Psalm 40. Although the Law required that the various offerings of the Levitical system be offered, they did not please God in that they did not fulfil His requirements and fully deal with sin. Therefore no-one could be made acceptable to God (or be saved) by this system (see Romans 3:20). All it could ever do was to bring a consciousness of sin.

VERSE 9: Now our attention is turned to the Sacrifice that did fully meet the Divine requirements and that was in full accord with the Divine will. These words from Psalm 40 are shown to be Christ's own words, "Here am I, I have come to do Your will."

Vine points out that this was not simply an expression of His desire to do the Father's will; it was far more. It was a majestic statement that carried with it the certainty of accomplishment. The end was assured from the beginning. Such certainty was possible to no mere human being. Only one of the Godhead could speak with truth in such a manner. "He had come in the consciousness of an absolute competence to fulfil the Divine counsels". Furthermore, Christ was not under constraint to do the will of the Father, for His will and the Father's were as one. This is brought out by the words of 9:14, where concerning Christ it says, "Who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself unblemished to God". As in everything, there was complete harmony within the Godhead concerning the work of redemption.

Through the accomplishment of the Divine will in the work of redemption on Calvary, Christ set aside the Old Covenant under the Law and established the second or the New Covenant. (As has been shown, this is the main theme of the Book of Hebrews).

VERSE 10: Through the accomplishment of that same Divine will that Christ came to accomplish, sin is dealt with completely and believers are made fully acceptable to God and permanently set apart for Him (verse 14) through "the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all". (Here, in this verse, we have positional sanctification, while in verse 14 we have both positional and practical). For this reason His is a once-for-all sacrifice, never needing to be repeated, because all that God planned in redemption is achieved thereby.

VERSE 11: In view of what has just been said, the writer draws attention to the futility of what was still happening in the temple at Jerusalem. Despite all that had happened at Calvary, including the miraculous rending of the great curtain from top to bottom between the holy place and the holy of holies, and the resurrection of Christ Himself, the religious leaders of the nation of Israel still carried on the old Levitical system with regular monotony. They apparently did so until the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Vainly the priests stood (such posture indicating that theirs was a work that was never finished – compare 1:3b and verse 12), day after day, performing their religious duties, and offering the same sacrifices which could never take away sins.

VERSES 12-13: But we could go from the futility of that scene to another, outside the city, to a place called Calvary. This was the scene of the one and only sacrifice that did fully deal with sin. From there we could go to the tomb where His body was laid, and we would find it unoccupied. The Priest on this occasion was the Lord Jesus Christ and the sacrifice He made was that of Himself. As has been emphasised, His was a once-for-all sacrifice, and when He had made it and completed the work of redemption, He ascended on high and sat down on the right hand of the throne of God. Thus, on the basis of an accomplished work (indicated by the fact that He sat down), He occupies the throne of all power and authority (Matt. 28:18). As chapter 7 has shown, His is the Melchizedek Priesthood, consisting of both priesthood and kingship on a non-transferable, eternal basis.

VERSE 13: As a result ultimate victory is assured as this quotation from Psalm 110:1 shows. (See also 1:13 and notes). All creation, including His enemies, will finally acknowledge His sovereignty and Lordship, either through grace or in judgment.

VERSE 14: For by His once-for-all sacrifice the whole will of God concerning humanity will be fully accomplished, including not only the conquering of His enemies, but also the eternal perfection of those who are presently "being made holy" (NIV) or "sanctified" (KJV). These, too, at one time were His enemies, but through Divine grace have been redeemed and through the indwelling Holy Spirit are being "conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29, also Eph. 2:10), the process of practical sanctification.

VERSES 15-17: The Holy Spirit, through the prophetic Word from Jeremiah 31:33-34, testifies to these truths. Under the New Covenant the laws of God (His holy requirements) would cease to be an external, condemning code. Instead, on the basis of Christ's work of redemption and the indwelling Holy Spirit, they would be an intrinsic part of the new nature and placed within the heart and mind of every believer.

VERSE 17: The other characteristic of the New Covenant stressed in this passage is the final cleansing, forgiveness and removal of sins. Not only is God able to fully forgive sins on the basis of Christ's sacrifice, He is also able to forget them.

VERSE 18: Thus the writer concludes the doctrinal section of the epistle, having shown the temporary nature of the Levitical system and the efficacy and subsequent permanency of the sacrificial work of Christ. Where sins have been fully dealt with, there is no longer need for further sacrifice.

We come now to the practical exhortations of the epistle, and the writer takes up where he left off in 4:16. All that has transpired in between — the setting forth of the all-sufficiency of our Great High Priest, His perfect, once-for-all sacrifice and His present intercessory work — is the basis for the following.

VERSES 19-22: In the light of all that God has accomplished through Christ, the writer addresses, primarily, his Jewish brethren, exhorting them to leave behind the old Levitical system and to appropriate the benefits of the New Covenant.

Because of His all-sufficient sacrifice, they can with confidence now enter the Most Holy Place — not into an earthly tabernacle, but into the reality to which it pointed: Full acceptance in the presence of God and the enjoyment of His presence, in this present life and more completely in the eternal state to come, on the basis of the shed blood of Jesus. The Most Holy Place, in the good of the Father's presence, is now the rightful dwelling place of every believer.

VERSE 20: Entrance is gained by a new and living way. It is new by virtue of the fact it was newly opened by the sacrifice of Christ, and because never before had there been unlimited access into God's holy presence. It is a living way because the living Christ Himself is "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6, Heb. 7:25). This new and living way has been opened to us through the rending of his body, typified by the rending of the veil in the temple at the moment of His death. It is important to note that entrance is through the veil. "We can only enter the Holiest as we confess His death to be the ground of our approach" (Stuart).

VERSE 21: Moreover, we have a Great Priest. Christ is referred to as such because His priesthood combines perfect sacrifice and intercession with ultimate authority (Matt. 28:18). This is further borne out by the fact that He does not minister "in" the house of God, but "over" the house of God (see also 3:5-6).

VERSE 22: We are therefore encouraged to draw near to God in the knowledge that the One who shed His blood which gives us title to do so, has entered in before us and invites us to follow by that "new and living way" which has been opened for us.

In the appropriation and full enjoyment of this tremendous privilege, there are five accompanying exhortations. Let us draw near to God:

- (1) With a sincere or true heart.
- (2) In full assurance of faith.
- (3) Holding unswervingly to the hope we profess (verse 23).
- (4) Considering how we may spur one another on to love and good deeds (v. 24).
- (5) Not giving up meeting together (verse 25).

(1) With a sincere or true heart (verse 22). This is set in contrast to one characterised by mere profession. If we are to enjoy the near place to God's heart to which Christ has brought us, we must have a true, wholehearted commitment to Him. God has surely shown the sincerity of His heart towards us.

(2) In full assurance of faith (verse 22). Believing and resting upon all that God has said regarding the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ, the putting away of our sin by that sacrifice and our subsequent acceptance by God.

It is our personal faith in what God has done for us that links us to His grace by which we are justified or made right with Him (see Romans 5:1). This is borne out by the figures used in this verse of sprinkling and washing. "The sprinkling speaks of the believer's appropriation by faith of the blood of Christ (9:13-14). The washing is the washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5)" (Vine).

(3) Holding unswervingly to the hope we profess (verse 23). This hope is the glorious certain expectation of all that God has promised on the basis of the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ (6:17-20). He Himself and His work on our behalf is the very substance of this hope. It is closely related to the assurance of faith. We are exhorted to hold fast, "without wavering", or "unswervingly" to this hope, because "He who promised is faithful". The inference is that we should be steadfast in our devotion to the Lord and not become sidetracked by doubt, some sinful habit or some selfish, ungodly attraction and thereby be cheated out of a life of blessing.

(4) Considering how we may spur one another on to love and good deeds (verse 24). “Let us consider one another” is to be the language of the members of God’s household (3:6). It is living in the good of the Holiest, dwelling in and being permeated by the love of God that the believer develops a concern for the needs of fellow believers and is truly conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). Everything that hinders love and the propagation of good deeds is to be set aside, while everything that provokes these is to be encouraged.

(5) Not giving up meeting together (verse 25). It is very difficult for believers to encourage one another to love and good deeds unless they regularly meet together. In the previous exhortations we have had brought before us three essential areas of the Christian life — Faith (verse 22), Hope (verse 23) and Love (verse 24). These are the areas in which we need encouragement by fellow believers, and in which we need to give encouragement to others. “We are to draw near in faith, hold fast the hope, and provoke to love” (Vine).

The Holy Spirit gives a further exhortation here in this verse, probably in the light of increasing godlessness as the end of this present age approaches. Rather than slacken off meeting together, we are to give this greater emphasis among believers “as we see the Day approaching” because, as in all times of spiritual decline, we will need greater encouragement.

The following section of the chapter (verses 26-31) parallels 6:4-6 and deals with those “who were once enlightened” as to the truth of the new covenant. Remembering that the epistle was primarily written to Jews, the sin implied here is wilful apostasy to Judaism. For those who were guilty of this there was no second sacrifice for them to look forward to. Christ’s is that which both fulfilled all the types under the old covenant and rendered it obsolete, and is sufficient to atone for all sin. Rejecting Christ or “trampling Him under foot” and “treating as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant” they could expect nothing but divine judgment. Verse 25 has referred to “the Day”. This is the Day of Judgment, the time when all such apostasy and Christ rejecters will ultimately be dealt with.

VERSES 26-27: “The verb rendered ‘sinning’ is in the present continuous tense, signifying not an act or a series of acts, but a condition” (Vine). It is the continuing sinful condition of wilful apostasy despite a clear understanding of the truth. Here the writer is addressing those Hebrews who had “received knowledge” of the truth (which is somewhat different from receiving Christ and thus being born again). But despite their understanding of NT truth, which had been impressed upon them by the Holy Spirit, they had deliberately elected to reject such knowledge and instead return to Judaism. They were allowing the truth of Messiah to “flow by” without it taking any effect on them (see 2:1-3 and notes). For them, because of the redundancy of the old covenant sacrifices, and their rejection of Christ’s sacrifice, there was no sacrifice left. God has no other plan of redemption. There is only one Way and He has laid it out clearly in His Word.

VERSE 27: Upon rejection of Christ the only alternative is judgment. When the enormity of such judgment as described here is understood, it is indeed a “fearful expectation”. It is described as “raging fire that will consume the enemies of God”, which includes all who reject Christ and His perfect sacrifice for sin.

VERSES 28-29: Here Deut. 17:2-7 is referred to, where the case involved rejection of the true God and worship of false gods. The revealed way of approach, worship and service of the true God (as recorded in the Law) was rejected and allegiance was given to false gods. In such a case the person was to be stoned to death on the word of two or three witnesses. No mercy for such rejection was shown.

VERSE 29: In the light of this, how much more deserving of punishment and how much more severe should be the punishment of one who wilfully and contemptuously rejects the Son of God and spurns the efficacy of His precious shed blood — the blood of the new covenant. Wuest points out that such a person has insulted the triune God. “Treading under foot the Son of God” is a sin against God the Father who demonstrated His love to a sinful world by the gift of His Son (John 3:16). Counting the blood of the new covenant as an unholy or common thing is a sin against God the Son who shed His precious blood in sacrifice. Rejecting the striving and convicting work of “the Spirit of grace” is a sin against the Holy Spirit.

Wuest further points out regarding the words “the blood of the covenant that sanctified him”, in connection with the identity of the person committing this sin, that the writer is referring to those merely “professing” to be saved and that the idea here is “the blood of the covenant by which he *professes* to be sanctified”.

VERSE 30: Here the Word of God, which reveals the consistent nature of God in punishing wilful sin, assures the certainty of divine punishment for rejection of Christ. Hence the words “For we know Him” (see Exodus 34:7 for example).

The quotation in this verse is from Deut. 32:35-36. Vincent says that the word “vengeance” (KJV) or the words “it is mine to avenge” (NIV) is an unfortunate translation since it conveys the idea of “vindictiveness” which does not reside in the Greek word. Rather it is the full meting out of justice to all parties. God’s punitive actions, in conformity with His character and the whole plan of salvation, are on a righteous rather than a vindictive basis.

VERSE 31: The implication here is that it is a dreadful or fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God when one is a Christ-rejecter or an apostate, having known the truth. Vincent makes the comment, “The living God, revealed in the living Christ, will not suffer His sacrificial gift and His covenant to be slighted and insulted with impunity.”

Regarding the words “living God”, Alford says, “the idea of life and energy attached to the name of God, brings vividly out the fervour with which He will consume His adversaries”.

In the final section of the chapter the writer turns from solemn warnings regarding apostasy, to words of encouragement arising from the past conduct of many of his readers. He uses this to encourage them to go on to full acceptance of Christ as their Messiah and Great High Priest, and not to return to the futility of Judaism.

VERSE 32: The Hebrews the writer addresses here are exhorted to “constantly remember” the earlier days when they were first enlightened as to the truths of the New Covenant. At that time they had appeared ready to exercise saving faith and receive Christ. They had apparently distanced themselves from Judaism, and had been prepared to suffer the consequences of intense persecution as a result.

VERSES 33-34: They were even prepared to be made a public spectacle as they were exposed to contempt, and at times took their places in suffering alongside other Hebrews who had exercised saving faith and were truly born again.

VERSE 34: This verse explains the lengths they were prepared to go to in taking their stand with their fellow Jews who had wholeheartedly embraced the New Covenant. They had shown compassion and had ministered to those who were imprisoned for their faith, and even suffered joyfully the unjust confiscation of their own property. They did so because they had received knowledge of the fact that in Christ they would have “better and lasting possessions”.

VERSES 35-36: Having reminded them of their initial joy, courage and boldness upon their understanding of the New Covenant message, the writer exhorts them not to discard this “confidence” and shrink back to the empty formalism and futility of the temple sacrifices and ritual of Judaism.

VERSE 36: Rather, they should persevere, or continue on to the point of exercising saving faith in Messiah. Then they would truly be “richly rewarded” and become the recipients of all the promised blessings of redemption.

VERSES 37-38: The above exhortation and subsequent promised blessings are strengthened by the further promise and incentive of Messiah’s soon return. It is then that believers will enter into all the fullness of what Christ has procured for them.

VERSE 38: The quotation here is taken from Habakkuk 2:3-4 where the prophet was surrounded by oppression and injustice. But in the midst of it all he had faith — a vital link with the Almighty God (see Hab. 3:17-19). The necessary factor required in making the blessings of the New Covenant a reality in their own lives was faith, as opposed to works — particularly the futile works of Judaism. Faith here is portrayed as a life principle which begins with the exercising of saving faith (Romans 5:1). The life of faith or the life sustained by a vital link with the living God through Christ is the life the writer is encouraging his readers to enter into. (It is the subject of the next chapter where it is illustrated in the lives of various OT characters). Unless true saving faith is exercised it is only empty profession and will end in a shrinking back in time of crisis, such as persecution. In this case it would have been a return to the empty formalism of Judaism, incurring the displeasure and ultimate judgment of God as mentioned in verses 26-27.

VERSE 39: Finally the writer expresses confidence in the fact that true born again believers, of which he was one, are not in the category of those “who shrink back and are destroyed”. Rather, the genuineness of their faith is seen by the fact that they “cleave to, trust in and rely on God through Jesus Christ” (Amplified NT), and thus they are saved. It is this assurance the writer desires all his readers to experience.

CHAPTER 11

Up to this point the writer has revealed the superiorities of Christ and of the New Covenant over the old which has become redundant. He answers the question as to how one enters into the good of the New Covenant. Having shown faith to be the one requirement (10:38-39), he now proceeds, in this chapter, first of all to define faith. Then, having done so he provides enlightenment by giving examples of the “ancients” or “elders” of former periods (who are referred to as the “great cloud of witnesses” of 12:1), and who gained the victory through faith. They lived according to the principle by which the writer is encouraging his readers to live, and thus they bear witness to the value of “living by faith”. Thereby, together with the OT saints, NT saints would be made perfect (verse 40).

This chapter has come to be known under several appropriate headings, among which are “The Saints’ Hall of Fame”, “The Honour Roll of the OT Saints” and “Heroes of the Faith”.

VERSES 1-2: In defining faith here, Vincent says, “Faith apprehends as a real fact what is not revealed to the [physical] senses. It rests on that fact, acts upon it and is upheld by it in the face of all that seems to contradict it. Faith is a real seeing”. (See for example verse 27 where, speaking of Moses it says, “He saw Him who is invisible”). To further define faith we could say that it is believing and obeying and, as a result, receiving promised divine blessing. Just as our natural senses put us in touch with the physical world, so faith is the spiritual sense that puts us in touch with the spiritual world. It makes the physically unseen things of God real to us. It is the God-given assurance of what He has promised and the conviction of spiritual realities that cannot physically be seen.

VERSE 2: The OT saints, a selection of whom are mentioned in this chapter, were commended for the fact that they lived by faith, and this chapter is indeed a tribute to them. But, in a special individual way, God commended each through the sense of faith. For instance, Abel had that inmost commendation from God that he was a righteous man. Enoch had that inmost assurance that he pleased God. As we walk with God and please Him our faith, too, matures and is strengthened by the inmost sense of God’s presence, approval and pleasure. The OT saints mentioned in this chapter believed what God had promised and they acted upon it. They heard the Word of God, they believed and their lives were framed accordingly. Thus they became examples of true faith.

VERSE 3: Faith is the eye in which the believer sees God in all that He has created (Psalm 19:1-4). The believer looks at Creation and is drawn to God. Faith is strengthened and finds delight in meeting everywhere the God who delights to bear witness of Himself to those who seek after Him. The Greek noun translated “universe” or “worlds” refers not only to the physical universe itself, but also to its administration, operation and the successive ages or aeons. (See also Colossians 1:16-17). All has been formed and is administered by the Word of God. The word “formed” is from the Greek “*katartizo*” which means “to fit out or equip, so that the person or thing so equipped might serve the purpose for which it was made. It speaks of a wise adaption of part to part and of the whole to its purpose” (Wuest), in this case, of the created universe and its administration. “Word” here is from the Greek “*rhema*” which refers to the specific command of God. Faith understands that all that we can see of Creation did not originate from that which is tangible to human senses. It came from that which cannot be seen, by a force which cannot be seen either. Faith understands this “force” to be the word or command of God Himself.

VERSE 4: The first example of faith in action from the OT is that of Abel who, by faith “offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did”. Faith was the reason for his better offering. He had obviously heard the Word of God regarding the sinner’s approach to Him and had understood that it could not be without the shedding of blood. He had accepted the Word of God and had obeyed by sacrificing an animal. As with all OT offerings ordained by God, his offering pointed forward to the all-sufficient offering of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus faith draws near to God through God-ordained sacrifice.

On the basis of his faith in which he both heard, believed and obeyed the Word of God regarding the sinner's approach to Him, Abel was declared righteous (Matt. 23:35) and his is the first example of **saving faith**. The word "offerings" (plural) indicates that such sacrifices were his regular practice. Under the OT these "typical" sacrifices needed to be repeated, but under the NT, Christ's is all-sufficient for all time and eternity (10:12). His is a once-for-all sacrifice, never needing to be repeated. Now, under the New Covenant, when the sinner comes to God on the grounds of the precious shed blood of Christ he is saved and declared righteous.

Abel's faith, involving his hearing of the Word of God and his obedience to it, has set a lasting example, which has lost none of its eloquence today – thus the words, "He still speaks, even though he is dead". In summary, it shows that in order for a person to be right with God, faith is the link that brings us into all the good of God's redemptive plan.

VERSES 5-6: Having seen an example of saving faith, we come now to an example of **the life of faith**. Because of his trust in and obedience to the living God, Enoch was commended by God as one who pleased Him. Gen. 5:22 says, "Enoch walked with God", indicating that faith was a consistent life principle with him, resulting in a close relationship with God. He was indeed rewarded for his faith, having received forgiveness, righteousness and, finally, miraculous translation into God's immediate presence without seeing death. True faith is always rewarded by forgiveness, imputed righteousness and ultimately translation into God's immediate presence, whether it is through physical death or at the Lord's coming for His own.

VERSE 6: This verse follows on naturally from the previous one. The tense of the Greek text shows the impossibility of pleasing God without faith. Without faith Enoch could never have pleased God in any way at all, and neither can anyone else. Faith is the absolute requirement for a right and close relationship with God.

In coming to God it is not only necessary to believe that He exists, but that He rewards or keeps His promises regarding those who do come to Him. The one who earnestly and sincerely seeks God will be rewarded by not only the joy and warmth of His presence, but also by His promised forgiveness, cleansing from sin and imputed righteousness, as both Abel and Enoch were.

VERSE 7: The next example referred to is that of Noah, and here we see typified **the work of faith**. The Genesis record declares that before Noah was warned of the coming flood he "was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God" (Gen. 6:9). As with Enoch, Noah's faith was a principle that motivated and directed the whole course of his life. Thus when God warned him of coming judgment in the form of the flood and instructed him to build an ark for the saving of his family, Noah did not hesitate to obey. By his obedience he demonstrated his holy fear or his godly reverence for God. Despite the fact there was no evidence of the flood, Noah obeyed because, having heard the Word of God, he was certain of that which he did not see (verse 1).

By his faith he not only condemned the faithless, godless occupants of the ancient world because of the godly life he lived before them, but he became an heir or a "partaker" of righteousness. Imputed righteousness found its practical counterpart in his life by right living and thus he was an example of what God required. By his obedience in building the ark (which took 120 years) he was both a witness to the mercy of God and a warning of coming judgment.

As we come to God on the basis of the appointed sacrifice (as did Abel) we will have the capacity to walk with and please God (Enoch) and to serve Him as a witness (Noah).

VERSE 8: One of the greatest examples of faith in the OT is that of Abraham's. The evidence and strength of his faith was seen in his obedience to the call of God. God called and he obeyed even though his destination was unknown to him. He had no inkling of the vastness of the plan God was going to unfold through him, nor was he given any attractive account of Canaan, which might induce him to leave Ur of the Chaldees. Faith hears the call of God, obeys, and rests in the calm assurance that God is leading.

VERSES 9-10: When Abraham reached the land to which God had led him, it seemed humanly impossible that his descendants would ever possess it, for the Canaanites were well established there at the time. However, Abraham believed and trusted God's promise to give his descendants the land and so by faith he remained in there even though it was as a stranger or a foreigner (Genesis 12:6-7).

VERSE 10: Not only so, but faith caused him to realise that his true citizenship was in that everlasting Heavenly city and that any earthly place of residence was not permanent. The believer who is living by faith will also realise where his true citizenship is and will value the things of this world accordingly (Phil. 3:20-21).

VERSES 11-12: Although Sarah's first response to the Lord's promise that she would have a child when she and Abraham were both well advanced in years, was one of surprise and disbelief, they both came to trust the Lord in this matter. They realised the import of the question, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:14), and the truth of Luke 1:37, "With God nothing shall be impossible". Here, through faith in the all-powerful God there was life from the dead (Romans 4:19-21). The whole nation of Israel, God's chosen earthly people, came from a humanly impossible birth. The stars in the heavens and the sand upon the sea shore were used to illustrate the vastness of that future nation's population (Gen. 15:5, 22:17).

How final the death of Christ must have seemed to human eyes, yet how wrong the perception and out of it was born the Church, God's chosen Heavenly people (John 12:24).

VERSES 13-16: One thing that these people of old had in common was the steadfastness of their faith. At the time they died they were still living by faith. They had not entered into the fullness and blessings of the New Covenant as NT believers have: They only saw and welcomed them from a distance. Through their faith in the living God they were taken out of their old pagan lifestyles and, while still on earth, lived as strangers in a foreign land. Through faith they were made conscious of their true citizenship, and thus they lived in this world with the glorious prospect of a better country — a permanent, Heavenly one. With such a prospect they had no desire to return to their former way of life (Phil. 3:12-14). Again, they were "sure of what they hoped for and certain of what they could not see" (verse 1). Because of their faith "God is not ashamed to be called their God" (to be identified with them) and they have now entered into that city which He has prepared for them.

VERSES 17-19: Perhaps the ultimate example of faith is seen in Abraham's willingness to obey God — even to the sacrificing of his son, Isaac, whom God had promised him. By faith Abraham obeyed God in this issue, for even while God was testing him, in his mind he fully expected to offer his son as a sacrifice to God. But more than this, he still believed God's promise that "it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned". Therefore, he realised that in order for God to fulfil His promise He would need to raise Isaac from the dead and that He would indeed do this. Symbolically, Abraham received his son back from death — a striking picture of the death and resurrection of the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ.

VERSES 20-22: These verses mention three people who exercised faith just prior to their deaths concerning things in the future which they could not have known without divine insight from God.

VERSE 20: Isaac invoked a blessing on his two sons by the eye of faith regarding things "far into the future" (Amplified NT), "not just things pertaining to their lifetimes" (Wuest).

VERSE 21: Prompted by faith in God's revelation to him, Jacob blessed each of Joseph's sons (Genesis 48:15-22), and showed his devotion to and trust in God in his old age by worshipping while leaning on the top of his staff.

VERSE 22: In absolute acceptance of God's revelation to him and his forefathers concerning the exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt to the land of promise, Joseph gave instructions concerning his bones. They were not to be left in Egypt but taken with them when God delivered the nation (Genesis 50:24-26, Exodus 13:19).

VERSE 23: Moses' parents are the next to be mentioned in this honour roll of the faithful. It seems they had received at least some divine insight into the fact that Moses had been chosen by God for a special purpose, although it is unclear how much they understood. However, their faith in God was greater than their fear of the evil mandate of Pharaoh which decreed that, because of the growth in population of the people of Israel, all the male Hebrew children were to be put to death at birth. They therefore hid him for three months trusting God to overrule, which He did. As a result, according to the account (Exodus 2:1-10), Moses was brought up in the palace of the king who had ordered his death, with his own mother as his nurse and all the privileges and training of Egyptian royalty.

VERSES 24-28: The example of Moses himself is now brought before us. It is evident that Moses' mother would have had a great deal of influence over her son as he grew up. He not only had knowledge of the ways of the true God, but also realised that his people were not the Egyptians: The people to whom he really belonged were the people of Israel who were enslaved by the Egyptians. Thus, when he became of age he forsook his position as a prince in Egypt, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and identified himself with his own people. By faith he gave up all that could have been his in the palace of Egypt as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, including the fleeting pleasures of a sensual lifestyle, and chose rather to be mistreated with the people of God. He realised such was God's will for his life and that anything short of obedience was sinful. Obedience is an essential part of faith.

VERSE 26: God had obviously given to Moses a revelation of the coming Messiah, His ministry and sufferings (John 5:46, Acts 26:22-23, 1 Peter 1:10-12), and Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ of greater value than all the treasures of Egypt, because, by faith he was enabled to look ahead to the end result. He did not draw back, as those to whom this epistle was addressed were in danger of doing so.

VERSE 27: The occasion in view here is when, as God's appointed leader of Israel, Moses finally turned his back on Egypt to lead the people out to the promised land of Canaan. On a previous occasion he had fled from Egypt in fear of the king because he had impetuously acted on his own volition and killed an Egyptian (Exodus 2:11-15). But this time he had had a personal encounter with the living and true God and he knew he was in step with His purpose. Moses now saw Pharaoh as the insignificant individual he was in comparison to the greatness and power of the God he had come to know and whom he served. He therefore endured because by faith he "saw Him who is invisible".

VERSE 28: Again the reality of Moses' faith is seen in his obedience. He obeyed in detail God's instructions concerning the Passover, including the application of the blood of the lamb (pointing to the sacrifice of Christ) because he knew it to be God's provision and the only way the first born could be saved and the people delivered from Egypt (Exodus 12:1-30). When in faith a person rejects his own way and accepts God's, He meets that person with His divine provision, and safety and security is found under the shelter of the precious blood of Christ.

VERSE 29: When the people of Israel were facing a seemingly inescapable situation, again Moses believed and obeyed God. He stretched out his staff over the Red Sea as God instructed him to do, and God divided the sea, allowing the people to proceed on dry ground. However, that which meant deliverance and entrance to new life for the people of God became destruction and death to the unbelieving Egyptians (Exodus 14). On the basis of the application of the blood, the believer enters new life in Christ. But the unbeliever will ultimately meet Him as Judge.

VERSE 30: Here again faith was the key to divine intervention. Obviously a fortress city such as Jericho cannot be taken simply by marching around it — unless it is at God's command. The people heard the word of God through Joshua and they displayed their faith in it by their obedience (Joshua 6). The strength of the enemy was defeated by faith. As believers enter into their new life in Christ, faith (trust and obedience) is that by which the enemy will be defeated (see Ephesians 6:16).

VERSE 31: This sinful Gentile woman, Rahab, had seen something of God's power operating for and through the people of Israel (Joshua 2:10). She expressed her faith by welcoming the Israelite spies and declaring, "For the Lord your God is God in Heaven above and on the earth below" (Joshua 2:11). Faith was the key to her salvation, and here we have an insight into the truth that salvation is not just for Israel, but also for Gentiles (James 2:25, Acts 10:34-35, 11:18, Romans 3:29-30, Eph. 2:14-16).

VERSES 32-35: The writer now mentions just a few of the more prominent people among the Judges, the Kings and the Prophets. Their actions and accomplishments were all on the basis of faith. They too found that faith was the key which released divine power and action.

VERSES 33-35A sum up their achievements — conquered kingdoms, administered justice or righteousness, gained what was promised — the latter referring to the more immediate blessings of their faith, not the full blessings to be brought in by Messiah (verse 39). There was nothing super human about them. They were people with the weaknesses common to mankind, but through faith their "weakness was turned to strength" (see Phil. 4:13).

VERSES 35B-38: Here we see the triumph of faith in the face of adversity. These people proved that faith put them in contact with the living God, who alone could lift them above all the suffering which this world could bring upon them — a world that was not worthy of them (2 Cor. 4:16-18). God has given to us these examples of faith and triumph over the extremities of hardship and suffering, so that we might learn from them how to bear our own lesser trials.

"Faith transfigures suffering — makes it transparent with the love of God (as we realise His refining purpose), the presence of Jesus, the beauty of holiness and the blessing of Heaven" (Murray). It was faith in God that caused Paul and Silas to be praying and singing hymns to God in the Philippian prison (Acts 16:25) which ultimately resulted in the conversion of the jailer and his family.

VERSE 39: All these OT saints, "although they had witness borne to them through their faith" (verse 4), "did not receive the fulfilment of the promise". As verse 13 has pointed out, "They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance" and died in that faith. "What had been promised" refers to the better covenant to be established by Christ and His redemptive work.

VERSE 40: The final verse in this chapter refers to the main point of this epistle. The reason the OT saints did not receive what was promised, but only saw it from a distance, was because "God had in view some better thing for us, that without us they should not be perfected". The "better thing" is the New Covenant ratified by the precious blood of Christ by which we can "draw near to God" (10:22) and be "made perfect forever" (10:14). The whole point of this epistle has been to unfold this reality and to show that Christ is indeed the true Messiah, the true High Priest and King, of which all that preceded Him were only types.

The OT saints had only the promise: we have the reality. The promise was for them sufficient reason to live a life of faith. What then should be the effect of the reality to us?

CHAPTER 12

We have seen both the superiority and the reality of the New Covenant based on the once-for-all, completely sufficient sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have been exhorted to draw near to God “by a new and living way” (10:20) and we have seen that faith is the key by which we do so and is also that which opens for us all the blessings of the New Covenant. The life of faith has been vividly brought before us by the examples of the OT saints recorded in the previous chapter. On the basis of their example and witness, the writer to the Hebrews now exhorts his readers to enter into that same life principle — that of living by faith. The overall implication of the passage is that the appropriation of salvation is by faith rather than works (see 11:6), which was a truth the Hebrews had difficulty in accepting.

VERSE 1: Speaking of the OT saints, some of whom have been mentioned in the previous chapter, the writer refers to them as “a great cloud of witnesses” which presents the idea of a vast company. The thought is not so much that they are looking down from Heaven as spectators, watching the lives of saints on earth, but that by the example of their lives they witness or testify to the truth and faithfulness of God. They show the real value of a life of faith in which they accomplished great things for God. Each could bear witness as to the reality of God’s presence and power in their own lives, released by their faith and perseverance, often in the face of extreme hardship. By using their godly example and witness the writer seeks to encourage his readers to place their faith in Messiah as High Priest of the New Covenant, Saviour and Lord, and from then on to live the life of faith.

In order for them to do so all unnecessary encumbrance must be put aside. Primarily, that which needed to be put aside by the Hebrew readers to whom the epistle was initially written was the old Levitical system with its stifling legalism and their sin of unbelief and unwillingness to commit themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ as their Messiah and Saviour. But even having done so, in order to maintain a life of faith and thus a life pleasing to God, all sinful encumbrances which hinder and retard spiritual progress must be discarded. The true Christian life or the life of faith is compared to a race to be run which begins with personal salvation. Three things are mentioned in this verse in order to run the race successfully:

- (1) All hindrances must be disposed of. “The Christian runner must rid himself even of innocent things which might retard him. And all that does not help hinders. It is by running he learns what these things are” (Expositor’s).
- (2) Perseverance or endurance is needed: The steady determination to keep going regardless of difficulties and the temptation to slow down or to give up.
- (3) The race must be run according to the appointed course “marked out for us” (NIV). In other words, it must be run according to the rules, and the course must be followed without deviation. The rules and the course to be followed in this race are set out in the Word of God. (See 1 Corinthians 9:26-27, 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

VERSE 2: Having mentioned the need for faith in entering upon and running the Christian race, this verse sets before us the One who is to be the object of our faith, and in so doing presents us with a fourth requirement for running the Christian race successfully. Our focus must be upon the Lord Jesus Christ who’s Person and work has been set before us right from the outset of this epistle (1:2-3). The AV says, “Looking unto Jesus” or, as the NIV, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus”. The Greek presents the idea of looking away from all else and giving Him our full attention. It is the look of dependence upon Him who is described as “the author and perfecter of our faith”. It is the look of devotion in which our hearts go out to Him in worship and commitment. “Faith” in the Greek takes the definite article and so it is “the faith”. “The faith” of which the writer is speaking consists of the truth of the New Covenant.

The word “author” is translated from the Greek *achegos*, a compound word meaning “the chief leader”. When comparing all the heroes of faith, Jesus Christ is indeed the chief leader or the

supreme example. More than this, as the great leader of “the faith” He has opened the way through death and resurrection into glory itself, and by that same hallowed way He is leading His redeemed people to be with Him there (see 2:10).

Not only is He the author, but He is also the “perfecter” or “finisher” of faith. “The word is translated from *teleioo* which means ‘to carry through completely, to finish, to make perfect or complete.’” (Wuest). Vine adds the thought that the meaning of the word includes one “who brings to the destiny determined”. In His exaltation He Himself has indeed arrived at the very destiny of “the faith”, and through Him God is “bringing many sons to glory” (2:10). Along the way He sustains and perfects them as they fix their attention upon Him. Ultimately the whole redemptive plan will be brought to full completion when all of God’s redeemed people are at home in glory with Him.

“The joy set before the Lord Jesus was the anticipation of His glory with the Father and all that was to be the outcome of His finished work on the cross, both in the present age and the ages to come. Because of the value He set upon all this, He endured the cross” (Vine).

Wuest, however, disagrees with this interpretation because, according to him, “it is based upon an erroneous use of the preposition ‘for’.” He says that despite the deep joy of His pre-incarnate life with the Father, He exchanged this for the cross and its shame. He says, “The heroic character of His faith appears in His renouncing a joy already in possession in exchange for shame and death. As such the passage thus parallels Phil. 2:6-8.” As the preposition “for” can apparently be translated either way, surely the conclusion can be drawn that there is truth in both these views.

The completeness of his redemptive work on earth is conveyed by the fact that He “sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (1:3b) in contrast to the priests of the Old Covenant (10:11). Not only is the work of redemption finished, but also He occupies the place of preeminence and supreme authority (Matthew 28:18).

VERSE 3: Again we are exhorted to “fix our eyes upon Jesus”. We are to take His example into careful consideration. Many of the Hebrew readers of this epistle who had become believers were undergoing persecution at the hands of their fellows who were still clinging to the old Levitical order. Here they are exhorted to compare their suffering with that which Messiah endured at the hands of sinful men, and to do this so that they “would not grow weary and lose heart”.

VERSE 4: Here we have inference as to the depth of suffering to which our Lord Jesus Christ was prepared to submit Himself (Phil. 2:8). The writer intends that his readers understand that the degree of their suffering is nowhere near that of His, for they had not resisted evil to the extent of shedding their blood especially under the torture of crucifixion. These Hebrews were battling against the temptation of renouncing their faith in Messiah in order that they might be relieved of the persecution they were enduring. His vicarious striving against sin meant His submitting to the death of the cross, His becoming sin for us, the breaking of fellowship with the Father as a result, and all the intense agony of crucifixion. “The word ‘striving’ (‘struggle’ NIV) is translated from *antagonizomai*— ‘to fight agonizingly against’. It speaks of a terrific fight”. Beyond all the physical suffering His was a battle against Satan and all the powers of evil — a battle in which He gloriously gained the victory, as demonstrated by His resurrection from among the dead. (See Romans 1:4, Colossians 2:15).

VERSES 5-6: We are now reminded of the refining action of God’s discipline and here the writer quotes from Proverbs 3:11-12. His readers were to view their persecutions as being allowed by God in order to chasten or refine them. The word “chasten” or “discipline” is from *paideia*, which refers to the training of a child. It also refers to that which refines and cultivates the soul, especially by correcting mistakes and curbing evil desires. Wuest says, “The word does not have in it the idea of punishment, but of corrective measures which will eliminate evil in the life and encourage the good”. Furthermore, “. . . in its Christian usage it refers to the education of the moral and spiritual part of the individual’s life, and that, principally, in the eradication of sins, faults and weaknesses present in the life” (Studies of the Vocabulary of the Greek NT).

VERSES 7-8: Such a reminder of God's dealing with His people through times of difficulty in order to refine them is an encouragement to go on for Him rather than to "grow weary and lose heart". Hebrew believers needed this reminder to encourage them to "endure hardship as discipline" and to view the persecution they were undergoing in this light. The writer assures them that such a refining process operating in their lives was an indication that they were true sons of God and not "illegitimate children".

VERSES 9-10: All believers are part of God's Heavenly family and the refining process through discipline is part of the family education. The need for submission to God's discipline is emphasized by the comparison with human fathers. They disciplined us sometimes imperfectly, although as they saw best at the time, and we respected them for it by our submission. God, however, exercises perfect discipline and has our best interests at heart: He does so "that we may share in His holiness". "To be like God, holy as He is holy, is our greatest possible profit" (Vine). A heart set upon holiness will appreciate the need for God's discipline and refining process (Psalm 119:67, 71).

VERSE 11: There is a present and a future aspect to God's disciplinary refining process. As with all discipline, while it is taking place it is not a pleasant experience. However, if while undergoing hardship, we look to the future and realize it will produce a harvest of righteousness and peace, we will find incentive to bear it and allow ourselves to be trained by it. Wuest translates the latter part of the verse, "...afterwards it yields a return of the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are exercised by it". "Righteousness" means right living — in a right relationship towards God and man.

VERSES 12-13: The writer returns to the race imagery begun in verses 1-3. In the light of the fact that God disciplines and trains His people and that, even in hardship, He has our best interests at heart and is seeking to refine us so that we may become more like Himself, we should not allow difficult times to overtake and defeat us. An illustration of physical exhaustion and weakness is used in verse 12 to describe their spiritual counterparts. If we fail to appreciate what God is doing in our lives through hardship we can easily become spiritually paralyzed, exhausted and severely weakened. Many of the Hebrew readers of this epistle who were suffering persecution, had apparently allowed themselves to get into this spiritual condition, and they needed to draw upon the strength God had made available to them so that they could be reinvigorated (Isaiah 35:3-6).

VERSE 13: Vine points out that this further exhortation, as the due response to God's discipline, has not to do merely with our own weakness as in the preceding verse, but also with the effect on others. "We are to see to it that our feet walk in a straight path, and thus set an example to fellow believers, so that any who are walking feebly may not be turned out of the way through straying after us, but that their lameness may be healed through the benefit of following in the straight paths which we make for our own feet" (Proverbs 4:25-27).

Alford says the word translated "straight" (KJV) or "level" (NIV) refers to the mark left by a wheel — "the rut or wheel mark indicating a track or road. The meaning seems to be, 'Let your walk be so firm and unanimous in the right direction, that a plain track and highway may be thereby established for those who accompany and follow you to perceive and walk in'." (Isaiah 35:8). The only cure for spiritual lameness is to have our spiritual eyes redirected to Jesus (verse 2) and our hearts filled with His Word.

VERSE 14: It is through the efficacy of the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ and personal faith in Him that believers have peace with God and are made holy or sanctified (set apart for God) (Romans 5:1, Heb. 10:9-10). But these imputed blessings must have their practical counterpart in the life. We are to be constantly and earnestly seeking after peace, and are to refrain from whatever might interfere with it. We are to do our utmost to maintain it, although never at the expense of holiness and truth (2 Tim. 2:22).

Practical holiness has been defined as “living in the centre of God’s will” and discarding all else. It is “being at home” in His presence by “purifying ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit” (2 Corinthians 7:1). The whole point of God’s discipline in the Christian race is to bring about a harvest of righteousness, peace and holiness (verse 11). These attributes are an intrinsic part of the nature of God, but they are imparted to the believer through saving faith and continual obedience to His Word.

The phrase, “without holiness no one will see the Lord” has reference to realizing and enjoying His presence. All will see the Lord either as Judge or Saviour, but only those who are characterized by holiness – cleansed and set apart for God through His grace and “living in the centre of His will” – will experience and enjoy His nearness. F. B. Meyer says, “The one condition for seeing God in His Word, in nature, in daily life, and in closet-fellowship, is holiness of heart wrought there by His own indwelling”.

VERSE 15: The words “see to it” (NIV) or “look diligently” (KJV) stem from the Greek *episkopeo* which carries the thought of exercising oversight. Previous exhortations in the epistle have been directed at self: Here, having first of all brought our own lives into line with God’s Word, we are to look out not just for our own spiritual welfare, but that of others also (Matt. 7:5). We are to have particular concern for those who are merely “professors” of salvation and are thus in danger of missing the grace of God. Many of the Hebrews who had left the temple ceremonies were in this condition and were in danger of going back and embracing the redundant Levitical system once again.

The “bitter root” or, more correctly, “root of bitterness”, can be any sin, including wrong doctrine, in any person or persons that causes trouble and leads others astray. Such is more likely to be introduced through mere “professors” of salvation rather than genuine born-again believers, although this is not always the case. Each member of the local company of believers must be on his/her guard to see that this is avoided.

VERSES 16-17: Believers are here further exhorted to exercise oversight over themselves in the matters of sexual immorality and materialism. (With regard to the former, see 1 Corinthians 5 and 6:19-20).

The mention of Esau as a godless or profane person shows him to be the opposite of those mentioned in chapter 11, who were people of faith. Esau typifies those who live solely for the present, treating matters of faith and things pertaining to God as of no value. For momentary satisfaction he was prepared to part with his birthright, which included the honour and privilege of becoming the next family priest on the death of his father. He typifies the person who willingly turns his back on Christ and the way of salvation in search of sensual or materialistic satisfaction. Many of the Hebrew readers of this epistle were in danger of turning away from Christ and returning to the redundant Levitical system, thereby forfeiting the blessings of salvation that otherwise could be theirs.

Vine points out that the “change of mind” that Esau could not bring about was not that of his own mind (for that he did not seek) but a change in Isaac’s mind, by which the result of his wrong decision would be overturned. The person who acts as Esau did will deeply regret having done so when he finds there is no alteration in the determination of the Lord in the matter of eternal loss.

MT SINAI AND MT ZION — A COMPARISON OF THE TWO COVENANTS

We have seen in the epistle that all God’s dealings with man are founded upon two covenants — the old and the new (compare Gal. 4:21-31). Here the old is represented by Mt Sinai, under which the Law was given and by which the holy requirements of God and the sinfulness of man were revealed. Under it the only way salvation could be obtained was by complete uncompromising obedience. Because of man’s sinful nature such is not possible. If man was to be saved something else was necessary which would take the premise off his self-effort and failure. Thus, in His grace and mercy, God introduced the New Covenant, represented in this passage by Mt Zion.

VERSES 18-21: These verses bring to us a description of the characteristics of the first covenant as represented by Mt Sinai where God gave the Law to Moses. They would be particularly meaningful to the Hebrew reader.

In verses 18-19 Sinai is here described as the mountain “that can be touched” or that is tangible to the physical senses, as compared to the Heavenly Mt Zion that is nonetheless real, but in this earthly scene is only perceived and enjoyed by faith. Sinai is further characterized by the elements of fire, darkness, and gloom, tempest and, on the part of the people, fear and trembling. Such were the conditions surrounding God’s giving of the Law, which set forth His holy requirements and revealed mankind’s sinfulness. At Sinai we see God’s holiness, majesty and judgment, but we do not see His love and mercy. Here He is unapproachable to sinful man. The Hebrews are reminded that in coming to Christ they are not coming to this situation as the nation once did in the time of Moses.

VERSES 20-21: Under the Law the least violation meant death for the offender. Not even an animal could exist in the immediate, holy, all-consuming presence of God. Even Moses himself, the divinely appointed leader who had a close relationship with God, said, “I am terrified and trembling” when confronted with the awesome power and holiness of God which accompanied the giving of the Law. Such a description is given by way of urging these Hebrews not to return to this dispensation of God’s dealings with sinful man, but to go on and fully embrace the New Covenant and Jesus as their Messiah.

VERSES 22-24: In contrast to the fearful scene surrounding the establishment of the first covenant at Sinai, we now come to the description of the New Covenant, represented by Mt Zion, the Heavenly Jerusalem. Speaking of believers in regard to this, Philippians 3:20 says, “Our citizenship is in Heaven”. The atoning and high priestly work of our Lord Jesus Christ has brought us from the condemnation of Mt Sinai (Romans 8:1) to the redemptive blessings of Mt Zion, and the dwelling place of the living God, our ultimate destination. The tense of the statement “you have come” shows these blessings to be a present possession for believers. Such would have been a real encouragement to the early Hebrew believers, many of whom were treated as outcasts and persecuted.

We “have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly” (NIV). Angelic hosts were also in attendance at the giving of the Law at Sinai, but their presence only added terror to the scene. The completed redemptive work of Christ has brought about a tremendous change. Now they are “ministering spirits sent to serve those who inherit salvation” (1:14, Luke 15:7, 10). They rejoice in the victory and glorious outcome of the perfect work of Christ and, as always, they are ever ready to do the will of God.

VERSE 23: “The church of the firstborn”: Christ Himself is referred to as “the firstborn over all creation” alluding to His absolute supremacy (Col. 1:15). He is also referred to as “the firstborn from among the dead” (Col. 1:18). We have come to the Church (*ecclesia* — a drawn out company of people) which belongs exclusively to Christ Himself as the “firstborn”, having “given Himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25) and bought her with his own precious blood. The names of each member are recorded in Heaven, insuring their eternal security and their individual value to Christ.

“You have come to God, the Judge of all men”. Christ’s redemptive and intercessory ministry gives believers legal standing in the presence of God and brings them near to Him. As Judge He will not only judge the ungodly, but also believers for the way they have run the race of verse 1. (See 1 Cor. 3:10-15, 2 Cor. 4:10).

“To the spirits of righteous men made perfect” has reference to those mentioned in chapter 11 and all others like them. They were made righteous through their faith in the Word of God (11:38) and now, in the presence of the Lord, have been perfected. Believers living in this present scene have an eternal link with all those who have already passed into the Lord’s immediate presence.

VERSE 24: Above all, the writer wants to convey to his readers that, in embracing the truth he has set before them, they come “to Jesus, the mediator of a *new* covenant” (9:15). The emphasis of the whole epistle has been upon the superiority of Christ and the New Covenant, and the fact that it has superseded the old Levitical system. Thus it was absolutely futile for these Hebrews to return to something which had become redundant.

The sprinkling of blood is that which ratified both covenants, but the message of the blood of the new covenant is far more powerful and effective. It is the precious blood of Christ that is referred to here, and it is that by which we are cleansed from all sin (1 John 1:7), and which brings us into close relationship with God (10:19).

In referring to “the blood of Abel” Wuest says, “... Jesus’ blood, which speaks better things than the blood of the sacrificial animal which Abel offered. It is not Abel’s own blood which is compared here with Jesus’ blood, for the ... analysis of the book shows that the purpose of the writer is to prove that Jesus’ blood of the New Testament is better and takes the place of the animal blood shed under the First Testament.” It appears that the blood sacrifice of Abel is representative of all such sacrifices made under the first covenant.

VERSE 25: At this point we are taken back to the very beginning of the epistle (1:1-2) where we learn that God has spoken twice: First, through the Old Covenant (on earth) and secondly, through the New Covenant (from Heaven in the Person of His Son). The warning is primarily to those Hebrews who were in danger of turning away from their Messiah, back to the temple sacrifices. In so doing they would have been refusing the message or revelation God has given through His Son. The writer reminds them that if the people did not escape the consequences of refusal in the days of Moses under the Old Covenant, there is even less possibility that they will escape if they turn away from the Heavenly revelation. The warning, of course, applies to all Christ-rejecters.

VERSES 26-27: The ultimate consequence of refusing to listen to God is divine judgment and these verses allude to such. At Sinai, at the giving of the Law, His voice shook the earth, but a time is coming, according to Haggai 2:6 (which is quoted here), when not only the earth, but also the heavens will be shaken. Here we have indication of the removal of all that is created and temporal and only that which is eternal and cannot be shaken, remaining. The shaking and removal of the temporal immediately precedes the establishment of the new Heaven and the new earth of Rev. 21:1-4. No Christ-rejecter will ever occupy a place in the coming new order. They will be overtaken by the judgment of God and eternally banished from His presence in Hell.

VERSES 28-29: The Greek word, *paralambano*, rendered receiving, is in the present continuous tense, indicating a process already begun. Already God has begun to introduce His unshakable Kingdom and He is doing so through the message of the New Covenant, the Gospel of Christ. Believers are at present receiving this Kingdom. But it cannot be attained through the Old Covenant, and the writer was anxious that his readers understand this point. They therefore needed to turn to Christ in submission and thankfulness for the mercies of God extended to them, and worship Him acceptably with reverence and awe, realizing His holiness and intolerance of sin. By seeking to maintain the temple sacrifices of the Old Covenant they were not worshipping God acceptably (John 4:23-24).

VERSE 29: The description of God as “a consuming fire” shows that He is not to be trifled with. Outside the redemptive work of Christ there is neither mercy nor forgiveness of sin. There is only condemnation and judgment. With regard to believers, God is a consuming fire, not to consume them, but to refine them and consume everything about them that is contrary to His character (see verse 10).

CHAPTER 13

This final chapter consists of practical exhortations regarding the believer's manner of life. It flows on naturally from the preceding chapter, "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful and worship God acceptably with reverence and awe". True thankfulness and acceptable worship is expressed by a life that is lived to the glory of God in obedience to His Word, and this chapter outlines the requirements for such a life.

An outline of the chapter is as follows: Verses 1-6: General exhortations for Christian living. Verses 7-8: The need for a continuation of Godly leadership. Verse 9: The need for pure doctrine. Verses 10-14: Commitment to Christ in His rejection – being in the world, but not of it. Verses 15-16: Appropriate response to the blessings of the New Covenant – praise and good works. Verses 18-19: A reminder of the importance of prayer. Verses 20-25: Closing remarks.

VERSE 1: "Brotherly love" here is the translation of the Greek *philadelphia*. "Brother" is from *adelphos*, and implies "from the same womb. "Love" is the translation of *phileo*, which speaks of human affection and fondness ("the love of brothers and sisters for each other" – Alford), and is that which is to be maintained among believers. The basis for believers' love for each other is that they all come from "the same womb" – the vicarious sacrifice and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ which has procured for us forgiveness of sins and newness of life. Earlier in the epistle (10:25) the writer gave an exhortation not to give up meeting together. This is necessary not just for formal meetings but also for various social occasions so that Christian love and fellowship may grow and become strong.

The whole epistle has been an unfolding of the love of God for His people. We are to reciprocate by both loving God and our fellow believers. Such is evidence of Heavenly citizenship and is also a witness to the world (see John 13:34-35).

VERSES 2-3: Along with brotherly love comes hospitality and care for those in prison. (See also Romans 12:13, 3 John 5-8).

Hospitality is to be exercised especially to fellow believers and those involved in the Lord's work who travel from other areas as in this case (3 John 5, Romans 12:13). According to the text, in so doing some have entertained angels without being aware of it, as with Abraham in Genesis 18. Calvin remarks, "If anyone objects that this is a rare occurrence, the reply is ready, that not angels alone are received, but Christ Himself when we receive the poor in His name".

Those who held to the old Levitical system persecuted many first century Hebrew believers. Others had been imprisoned because of their stand for Christ. They were not to be neglected by fellow believers, for although in prison they were still members of the same body – the Body of Christ – and in particular need of fellowship and support. Within the Body of Christ all believers are bound together in the family of God and are dependent upon the Lord as well as one another. What affects one should affect all as implied by the words "as if you were their fellow prisoners" and "as if you yourselves were suffering" (see 1 Corinthians 12:25-26).

VERSE 4: Another requirement of living a life glorifying to God is moral chastity. From the wider family of God we come now to the inner circle and from Scripture we learn that the God-ordained institution of marriage is a picture of the love that Christ has for His Church (Ephesians 5:22-33). With regard to this subject, three things are mentioned in this verse:

1. **Marriage should be honoured by all.** This is an exhortation to humanity in general. It is ordained by God to protect the family unit which is the fundamental basis of a healthy society. Where marriage is not honoured in the way God intended it should be social breakdown, fragmentation, upheaval, and chaos are the result.

2. The marriage bed is to be kept pure. Those who are married are to be faithful to each other. Extra-marital affairs have no place especially among believers.
3. God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. “God has appointed retributive effects of these evils in this life, and the certainty of divine judgment hereafter is declared in Revelation 21:8, 22:15” (Vine). (See also 1 Thes. 4:3-8).

VERSES 5-6: Another requirement for living a life to the glory of God is freedom from the love of money. Covetousness and greed are dreadful killers of spiritual life. A certain amount of money is necessary to live in this world, but it is “the love of money” (being motivated by money-making) the believer must guard against (see 1 Tim. 6:6-10).

As believers we are to “seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness” in order to have the perspective in life that is pleasing to God. (Compare Matt. 6:33 with Heb. 12:28).

If we realize the truth of God’s emphatic promise, which is here quoted from Deut. 31:6, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you”, it will provide the motivation for making us “seek first the Kingdom of God” and to be content with what we have. In the Greek, God gives us here the strongest possible guarantee that He will in no way fail us, give us up or leave us without support. He will not leave us helpless, forsake us, nor will He relax His hold on us (Joshua 1:5).

The epistle has set out just what the believer does actually have in Christ. A right relationship with God allows us live in the good of this and to realize the transient nature of the things of this present world.

VERSE 6: Whether in temporal or spiritual needs, this quotation from Psalm 118 verses 6-7 is the language of the believer who is truly walking with God. As we learn to depend on the Lord our anxiety is taken away and we have no cause to fear. Each one of the OT witnesses mentioned in chapter 11 could bear testimony as to the truth of this statement: “The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”

VERSES 7-8: The exhortation here is for believers to remember their deceased leaders – those who had taught them by example and had ministered the Word of God to them. Their manner of life and the outcome thereof should be constantly born in mind and their faith should become a pattern for present believers to imitate. Godly leaders and good roll models are necessary in every generation and should always be honoured and supported (see verse 17 and 2 Corinthians 1:24).

VERSE 8: In association with the recollection of the faithfulness of past leaders who have gone on to be with the Lord, is the fact that Jesus Christ does not change: He is the same yesterday, today and forever. No matter how godly, human leaders are subject to change and failure, but He is not. The inference is that as He was with past leaders to protect, guide and empower them, so He can be with us in just the same way and His faithfulness and power will continue unchanged into the future (see Joshua 1:5b). By our example and instruction, we can therefore confidently teach the rising generation to trust Him and live for Him also.

VERSES 9-10: Many of the initial readers of this epistle were in danger of being “carried away” by the erroneous teachings of Judaism with its binding ritualism. There is no doubt special reference to such here, but any teaching that is not in line with the Word of God is included. Ephesians 4:14 tells us that a mark of spiritual immaturity is that of “being blown here and there by every wind of doctrine”. The remedy, as given in this verse, is to not focus on externalism (such as, in this case, the “ceremonial foods” of the old Levitical system, “which are of no value to those who eat them”). Rather, we should be established by God’s grace, which is revealed in the New Covenant and by the truths of Christ, whereby we are inwardly purified, strengthened and consequently grow in our relationship with Him as Saviour and Lord.

VERSE 10: In order to be established by God's grace and to mature so that we are "not carried away by all kinds of strange teachings" we need to feed at the New Covenant "altar" supplied for this purpose. The temporary, material altar of the old Levitical system that sustained its priests has become redundant and, under the New Covenant, is now replaced by Christ Himself. He became the sacrifice offered upon the altar of Calvary. Now He and His Word are the spiritual food that establishes and makes us strong in the faith. He is the Living Bread by which our souls are sustained.

Those Hebrews who remained under, or reverted, to the old system could have no part in Christ. For them there could be no hope of salvation and no partaking of Christ while they maintained such a position. They had no right to participate and exclude themselves from the "New Covenant altar".

VERSES 11-14: Here the writer draws upon the typology of the sin offering of the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:27). The blood of the slaughtered animals was taken into the Most Holy Place as an atonement offering for sin, while the carcasses were taken outside the camp and burned. The blood taken into the Most Holy Place is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ entering Heaven "once for all, by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption" for us (Heb. 9:12). His precious shed blood is the basis for our cleansing from sin, sanctification and entrance and abode in the presence of God (Heb. 10:19-22).

VERSE 12: The burning of the carcasses outside the camp is typical of Christ suffering outside the camp or outside the gate to the city of Jerusalem, the place of rejection and judgment. The main point of the illustration is that, just as Jesus "suffered outside the city gate", so His sacrifice was made completely outside of the old Levitical system that could never deal with sin on a permanent basis. In order for people to be made holy (fully acceptable to God) Christ's sacrifice could not be a continuation of the old economy under the Old Covenant. The Old was only a picture of the New Covenant (Heb. 9:10) which was established on the basis of the perfect, once-for-all sacrifice of Christ.

VERSE 13: In the light of this, the writer exhorts his readers that, in order to obtain salvation, they needed to leave behind the old redundant system, and to be identified with Christ, outside the whole of Judaism. An extension of this is that believers must be identified with Christ, in His rejection, being willing to "bear the disgrace He bore" outside the camp of the world, and no longer be part of its unholy system, religion and practices. (See 11:26, Romans 8:18).

VERSE 14: Identification with Christ means the believer is, in fact, no longer part of this world. "Here we do not have an enduring city". Rather, "our citizenship is in Heaven" (Phil. 3:20), and, along with the saints of old we admit that we are aliens and strangers on earth (see Heb. 11:10, 13-16). But we are "looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God". Such a glorious prospect should not just be a future reality, but should also be a present governing factor in the life.

VERSES 15-16: Considering the manifold blessings of the New Covenant, there needs to be appropriate response on behalf of believers, and the exhortation of these verses deals with this. "Through Jesus" (not through the old Levitical system) "let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise." This sacrifice of praise is two-fold and is to be offered continually ("not at fixed days and seasons as the Levitical sacrifices, but throughout our lives" — *Alford*): First, "the fruit of lips that confess His name" — that is, praise, speech and conversation that honours His name.

VERSE 16: Second, beneficially good deeds, kindness and generosity towards others. A true appreciation of God and His grace will reveal itself in our attitude to our fellows. Under the New Covenant these are the types of sacrifices that are now acceptable to God. (See also Romans 12:1).

VERSE 17: Believers are exhorted to show obedience and submission to those whom God has ordained to be their leaders (or “guides”, also in verse 7). In verse 7 reference was made to those leaders who had gone on to be with the Lord that their example be imitated; here the reference is to those who are still living and active.

A true leader is one who constantly keeps watch, as a shepherd over his flock, and who guides, by word and example, according to the Word of God. They are answerable to the Chief Shepherd (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:1-4). Where their guidance and counsel is heeded, it is a joy and an encouragement to them and of eternal advantage or profit to those they lead.

VERSES 18-19: A reminder of the importance of prayer is brought before us here. Prayer coming from a heart that truly owns the Lordship of Christ and seeks His honour above all else is that which releases divine action. Vine makes the comment, “Requests for prayer can only rightly be made where the conscience of the requester is clear before God. The writer had no doubt of this in his own case.”

VERSE 19: The object of the writer’s request for prayer was that he might be restored to his fellow believers (to whom he was writing) soon. There seems to be an implication in this that he was suffering some sort of persecution and being detained (verse 3), perhaps under arrest and shortly to face trial for the faith, which would naturally add to the urgency of his request for prayer.

VERSES 20-21: In his benediction the writer prays for those to whom he is writing. He describes God as “the God of peace”, primarily because of the once-for-all perfect sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ which, for the believer, has put away sin. Col. 1:20 declares that He has made “peace through His blood shed on the cross” and thus those who receive Him “have peace with God” (Romans 5:1). Such was not possible under the first covenant. The New Covenant, however, ratified in the precious blood of Christ, is an *eternal* covenant, establishing eternal salvation, which involves eternal security and eternal peace with God. Thus God is both the author and dispenser of peace. (See also 12:14 where the believer’s practical responsibility is in view).

The statement “through (or because of) the blood of the eternal covenant”, made in connection with the resurrection of Christ indicates that His resurrection proved the value and complete efficacy of His blood sacrifice and that He is qualified to be our great High Priest in the order of Melchizedek. The fact that it is referred to as an eternal covenant contrasts it with the Levitical system, which was only transitory.

As the risen, exalted One, He is referred to as “that great Shepherd of the sheep”. (See also John 10:11, 27-29). Isaiah 63:11 refers to Moses as the shepherd of Israel, whom God used to bring the people out of Egypt’s bondage, through the Red Sea to freedom, and who led them through the wilderness. The superiority of Christ to Moses is here demonstrated again as in 3:2-3. As the great Shepherd of the sheep, through His vicarious death and resurrection, Jesus leads His people out of death in “transgressions and sins” into the freedom of being alive with Him (Eph. 2:4-7). He guides them through this wilderness scene and finally receives them into glory. (See 2:9-10 and notes).

The writer’s prayer is that the God of peace, by His almighty power (the measure of which is seen in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead — Eph. 1:19-20), fully equip His people for doing His will. The Greek verb, *katartizo*, has the idea of equipping by means of appropriate adjustment, shaping, mending, restoring, preparing or making complete. He prays that God would equip His people with every good or beneficial thing for doing what is pleasing to Him (Eph. 2:10). Such beneficial provision is available through Jesus Christ “to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

VERSE 22: In his concluding remarks the writer urges his readers to “bear with” his word of exhortation, for he has written as briefly as possible on a vast subject — the wonders of God’s grace as seen in

the New Covenant and its Minister, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. His deep desire is that they study what has been said and embrace it with an open mind, wholeheartedly.

VERSE 23: While the details of Timothy's imprisonment are unknown, the Apostle Paul had encouraged him to "endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Jesus Christ". Such could also have been an implication that the persecution Timothy was then enduring was going to become more severe and that along with Paul he too would have to endure imprisonment for the sake of Christ (2 Tim. 1:8, 2:3). But he had now been released and the writer wanted his readers to be aware of this. Both he and Timothy obviously had a deep interest in their spiritual welfare and therefore desired to pay them a visit as soon as possible.

VERSES 24-25: Finally, greetings are sent to the saints along with special greetings to their spiritual leaders and mentors. Their need for particular prayer and support in the discharging of their responsibilities is here implied (verse 17).

The epistle closes with the prayer that all of God's people experience the reality and ongoing blessings and operation of God's grace whereby they may become mature in understanding and practice.
