

Expository Notes

Hebrews

Gordon Lyons

EXPOSITORY NOTES

HEBREWS

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HEBREWS

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Author

Between the second and the sixth centuries, many commentators believed that Hebrews had been written by the apostle Paul. Other authors had been suggested—including Luke, Barnabas or Clement of Rome. However, from the sixth century up to the Reformation, almost all commentators believed that Paul was the author. Following the Reformation, Luther suggested Apollos as the author of Hebrews. More recently, other candidates have been proposed, such as Epaphras.

A number of commentators, ancient and modern, have doubted Paul's authorship as the writer of Hebrews, due mainly to the marked differences in style. This in itself might be accounted for by the use of a different amanuensis to write down Paul's dictation. However, other notable differences include the fact that the author of Hebrews uses terms and phrases not used by Paul elsewhere in any of his epistles. Furthermore, the writer of Hebrews quotes almost exclusively from the Greek Septuagint (LXX) version of the Old Testament, whereas, in his epistles, the apostle Paul quotes from both the Hebrew and Septuagint OT Scriptures. However, assuming that Paul would have written this letter in Hebrew, some have suggested that it was translated subsequently into Greek by Luke, whose personal style bears some similarities to that used here. Others suggest that a translation of the Hebrew text into Greek was made by Clement of Rome (e.g., Eusebius).

There are certain references in Hebrews that might suggest Pauline authorship. For example, in Hebrews 13:23, the writer mentions Timothy's release and a possible visit by Timothy to the Hebrew believers. Timothy was a close associate of Paul. Although not impossible, it seems unlikely for him to have visited any church or fellowship of believers not associated in some way with the apostle Paul.

Concerning the marked differences in the style of this letter from other epistles of Paul, this may be due partly to Paul's use of a different amanuensis (all his letters were dictated and written down by a scribe or amanuensis). Paul may have chosen this particular amanuensis because of his extensive knowledge of the Old Testament legal and sacrificial systems (Mosaic and Levitical). While ministering to the Gentile churches, the apostle would not have needed to deal so extensively with the laws and sacrifices of the Old Testament. However, when addressing Hebrew believers, Paul would have needed to adopt an entirely different approach—an approach that showed unmistakably that Christ had come in fulfillment of the Old Testament Law and sacrifices. This meant that whoever wrote to the Hebrews needed to be very familiar with the Mosaic Law and the Jewish sacrificial system. As a former Pharisee, the apostle Paul would be familiar with the entire Old Testament arrangement. Nevertheless, Paul had been a Pharisee, not a scribe. Therefore, Paul (or Saul) was not strictly a Jewish theologian. Theology and Law was the realm of the scribes. The Jewish scribes studied the Law, transcribed it, and preserved it in its minutest details. Again, the scribes or experts in Jewish religious law, and rabbis, interpreted and taught the Law of God to the people.

For this reason, Paul may have chosen a believer, who formerly had been a Jewish scribe, to act as his amanuensis while writing to the Hebrews. This might explain the difference in style and language. Furthermore, Paul would have adapted his usual style and language to make it more appropriate and relevant to Hebrew Christians.

Having said this, we must concede that this is just a theory. No one can be certain who wrote this treatise. One sentence in Hebrews chapter 2 seems to rule out Pauline authorship. This verse reads as follows:

Hebrews 2:3 ESV

(3) ...how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard [him].

Here, the writer declares that this great salvation *'was confirmed to us'* (i.e., to the writer and to other later disciples) *by those who heard [him; i.e., the Lord Jesus]*. From this, it appears that the writer and others did not receive their teaching from the Lord Jesus directly, but from his apostles. Paul, however, received his teaching by direct revelation from the Lord Jesus. (Acts 9:1-8; Gal. 1:10-12)

Whoever wrote Hebrews was well known to Timothy (Heb. 13:23). Again, the writer seems to have been well educated in classical Greek and Hebrew style and was familiar with the Greek Septuagint (LXX) version of the OT. The most important matter is not the knowledge of the human author, but the knowledge that this epistle was given to its human author by God and written by inspiration of his Holy Spirit.

Purpose

This epistle is written principally to Jewish Christians. These Jewish believers had endured much persecution since their profession of faith in Christ. Some of them had begun to consider whether this extreme persecution was a mark of God's disfavour for having left the Jewish place and mode of worship. Some were even being tempted to forsake the assembling of themselves together as Christians.

At the time this letter was written, the temple in Jerusalem was still standing. The services were still being conducted there. The priests still ministered there, and performed all the rituals and ceremonies of the law. Hence, some of the persecuted believers considered leaving the Christian fellowship to return to the ritual and ceremony with which they were familiar.

Thus, the writer of this epistle sets out to demonstrate to the Jewish Christians that what they now possessed in Christ was better by far than what the temple or Jewish priesthood could offer. He emphasises the many ways in which Christ and the Christian faith is immeasurably superior to the Jewish faith, to its repeated ritual and ceremonial practices, and to the Mosaic Law insofar as it related to the Levitical priesthood and to sacrifices and offerings for sin.

To this end, the writer to the Hebrews demonstrates the Son of God's superiority over: ¹

- The prophets (Heb. 1:1-3)
- The angels (Heb. 1:4 - 2:18)
- Moses (Heb. 3:1-19)
- Joshua (Heb. 4:1-13)
- Aaron (Heb. 5:14 – 7:18)
- The rituals and ceremonies of Judaism (Heb. 7:19 – 10:39)
- The Old Testament patriarchs and all other servants of God (Heb. 11:1 – 12:3)

¹ This list is based on An Exposition of Hebrews, Vol. 1, Introduction, by A. W. Pink



HEBREWS CHAPTER 1**God Speaks by His Son****Hebrews 1:1-2****Hebrews 1:1**

The writer of Hebrews begins by asserting categorically that *God spoke...* (to our fathers by the prophets). The Old Testament revelation was not the words of finite and mortal men, but the Word of the sovereign, true, living, infinite, immortal and eternal God. Hence, the divine origin of these OT Scriptures is expressly affirmed at the very outset of this letter.

In past centuries and for many generations, God had spoken to his people Israel through the ministry of the prophets. The Lord God had revealed his word and will to these prophets by dreams, visions, and audible voices from the LORD, etc. However, these methods of communication were of an extraordinary and spiritual nature. On each occasion, God's express will and purpose was made known to his chosen prophets by the Holy Spirit. The holy prophets received the infallible word of God and proclaimed God's exact pronouncements to the people, as guided and inspired by the Spirit of God. (2 Pet. 1:21)

In this way, these holy men of God communicated to the people everything that God wanted them to know, and everything that was necessary for them to obey. To listen to the voice of the prophets was to listen to the voice of God speaking through them (Gk. *in* the prophets; i.e., in their person). To obey the word of God as proclaimed by these prophetic messengers was to obey God himself. (Exodus 4:12; 2 Pet. 1:21; see also Num. 12:6-8; Jer. 26:2; Ezek. 3:17; Hos. 12:10)

Thus, in times past, God had instructed his people through his prophets. Men such as Abraham and Moses (in their prophetic and teaching capacity (cf. Gen. 20:7)), and very many others including Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Amos, Joel, Malachi and John the Baptist had all declared the word of God to the people.

Verse 1 says that God spoke by these men at many different times and in a variety of ways. Thus, we see that God did not communicate with his people only infrequently, but regularly, over a period of very many years and indeed centuries.

Again, God did not communicate his will and purposes for his people in one way only, but in various different ways. Sometimes, this would be by straightforward teaching or proclamation of God's word and will. Often, it would be by analogy, parable, riddle or other instructive or illustrative devices. Frequently, the message of the prophets would concern the daily lives of the Israelites. At other times, however, the prophets would speak of matters that would occur in the lives of future generations, including future times of blessing, but including also the LORD's use of other nations to chastise or discipline Israel.

In all these ways, God demonstrated that he was in sovereign control of all events throughout heaven and earth. This included all events relating to his people, Israel (formerly, the Hebrew people). Every word spoken by God through the prophets was fulfilled, or would be fulfilled, in its proper time and place. Therefore, every word of God proved (or would prove) true; i.e., unchangeable and infallible.

Now, however, God no longer speaks afresh to his people by (or *in*) the prophets (although their messages are still relevant today as the inspired word of God). Now, God has chosen a new and far superior way of communicating his word and will to the people. Thus, verse 2 declares:

Hebrews 1:2

To the Jews of former ages, had been committed the oracles—or Word—of God. (Rom. 3:2) In these former days, God had spoken to his people by his prophets. Now, however, in the present latter days,² the Almighty God has spoken to us by (or *in*) his Son. No longer does the Lord God choose frail human instruments to communicate to us his will and purposes. Rather, he has chosen to communicate his will and purposes *through his only Son—and only through his Son.* (Acts 4:12)

We should note that this verse declares that God *...has spoken...* (to us by his Son). The prophets declared progressively God's revealed will and words to the people over a period of many centuries. Now, however, God *has spoken* (once-for-all) in the Person of his Son: i.e., he has revealed his full plan of salvation and purposes for his church in and through his Son. Nothing can—or ever will—be added to that revelation or declaration of God's will and purposes. In the pages of the New Testament, God's Word is final and complete. It cannot be augmented by any additional utterances or revelation: for God *has spoken...*to us by (or *in*) his Son.

The Eternal Son of God is the Logos; the express Word [of God] directly communicated to the people. (John 1:1) No longer does God speak through human intermediaries. Rather, God now reveals his will through the one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus. (1 Tim. 2:5)—he whom the Father has highly exalted and has raised to the highest place in heaven. Thus, those who hear and obey the living Word—or Son—of God, hear and obey God himself. Contrariwise, those who refuse to hear and obey the Son of God refuse to hear and obey the Father himself. (John 5:23; 14:24)

From this, it is evident, that there is no other way of hearing or learning the word, will and purposes of God except through his Son. Similarly, there can be no other way of communicating with God in praise, worship, prayer and petition, or by any other means, except through his Son. Those who do not listen to, or approach, the Father through his Son, cannot experience God's presence, fellowship or salvation. (John 14:6)

Verse 2 tells us also that God has appointed his Son heir of all things. The exalted Lord Jesus is heir to—in the sense of being the Possessor or Proprietor of—everything in all creation (and the redeemed believer is a joint-heir with the Son of God in his glory). God the Father is the Sovereign God of all creation, but he exercises his sovereign power and dominion through his Son. The exalted Lord Jesus Christ is Ruler of everything in creation, including everything that concerns his church. (Ps. 2:6; Isa. 9:6; Matt. 28:18; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:18; Heb. 1:3)

But is the Son any less powerful than the Father? Not in the least. The Son is equal with his Father in eternity, power and glory. In *mode of operation*, he submits to his Father, but *as a person of the Godhead* he is, and forever will be, equal in every respect with his Father. (Col. 1:15-19) Thus, when God created the universe, he did so through his Son. At a word of command from God, or at the exercise of God's almighty and sovereign will, the Son executed the creation of the universe in its entirety. This in itself demonstrates conclusively the eternity, power and glory of the Son. (cf. Gen. 1:1 with John 1:1-3)

² *latter days*: To the Jews of that age, the 'last' or 'latter days' were considered to refer to the times of the Messiah. If, however, we interpret the phrase as, 'in the end of these times', or 'in these final days', the meaning is 'at the conclusion of the Jewish dispensation.' (cf. J. Brown; commentary on Hebrews, ch. 1. v.2).

Thus, even at this early point in the letter, the Jewish believers to whom it was addressed could begin to comprehend more fully something of the immeasurable superiority of the Son over all others—including Moses: and over everything else in all creation.

The Son is the Express Image of God

Hebrews 1:3

The Son possesses exactly the same glory as his Father. He is the majestic brilliance (outshining or effulgence) of God's glory: He is not merely a radiant or mirror image of his Father, but a distinct person with all the glory and all the qualities of his Father. What the Father is, so also is the Son. The attributes belonging to the Father, belong also to the Son. In every respect, the Son possesses the full measure of his Father's glory.

What are some of the qualities or attributes common to both Father and Son?

- Omnipotence; omniscience; omnipresence;
- Eternity; immortality; transcendence;
- Infinite wisdom; righteousness; holiness; justice; truth;
- Infinite love; grace; patience; mercy; compassion.

Every one of these attributes is common to both the Father and the Son. In addition to these, both the Father and the Son exercise divine sovereignty. There is no conflict here. The Father exercises divine sovereignty through the person of his Son; or, the Son exercises divine sovereignty on behalf of his Father, and as the full and co-equal Ruler with, and Representative of, his Father.

Verse 3 tells us also that the Son is the exact imprint of God's nature (or essence or substance) or the precise representation of God's being. What God is in his divine nature, so also is the Son. The characteristics that make up the Most High, Sovereign, Holy and Personal God, inhere also in the Son. He is his Father's exact representation or express image, and yet the Son remains a distinct person from the Father. Those who see the Son see the Father: i.e., they see in the Son the exact image and person of his Father. (John 1:14; 14:9-10; 2 Cor. 4:4,6; Col. 1:15-16)

Once again, this passage asserts the full deity and co-equality of the Father and the Son—an assertion that is true also of the Holy Spirit.

Who or What Sustains Creation?

Verse 3 tells us also that the Son upholds (or maintains) the universe by the word of his power. God created the universe and all it contains through his Son. (cf. Gen. 1:1 with John 1:3) However, the Son now sustains everything in the entire creation. (1 Cor. 8:6) At his word of command, all the planets throughout the entire universe rotate on their axes and move in their respective orbits. Within the atmosphere of this planet, the heavens give or withhold rain at their appointed seasons. Indeed all creation is subject to the will and word of the Son, through whom the Father acts. (Col. 1:16-17)

It may be objected that the created universe is subject only to the laws of nature; or, at least, that He who created the entire universe then ordained natural laws to sustain the universe, without further divine intervention.

This objection, however, must be considered invalid. It is true that God instituted the laws of nature. It is true also, that by observing these laws, science can explain—in natural and scientific terms—much that takes place in our universe. However, the implied or asserted conclusion is false. This is because the argument has failed to include and explain everything that is involved in the control of the universe. Science explains only what it can see, calculate or deduce from the physical evidence. It cannot explain the *ultimate source* of its findings, but at this stage must resort to theories or hypotheses.

What human mind can hope to grapple with, or explain, the origins or continuance of the universe? Human minds can tell us much about the operation of the universe in scientific and technical terms, and this information is perfectly valid, for it is simply explaining the basics of God's creation in human terminology. However, it would be a very foolish person indeed who thought that their finite human mind could comprehend the incomprehensible.

Thus, we must remember that even the most learned and intelligent minds on earth are finite human minds, subject to misapprehension and error—sometimes, gross error. With the limitations of their natural faculties (including their intellectual or rational abilities), they can see and explain only what their finite minds enable them to see and explain—and only what God, in his wisdom, is pleased to reveal to them by those means.

Fundamental to the laws of nature is the presence and power of the Eternal God and Jesus Christ his Son. If it were possible to remove the almighty sovereign power of God's Son over the universe, then the observable laws of nature would collapse, and the entire universe would resolve itself into chaos.

The laws of nature *exist* only because the Eternal Son of God has ordained them. The laws of nature *continue to operate* only because they are being sustained by the word (i.e., the command or will) of God's Son. However, for everything to continue in its present manner, or in the manner determined for the future, the Son must continue to work through, or—on occasions—*override*, the laws of nature. Thus, the continuance of the creation is not subject to the laws of nature alone. Rather, the created universe is subject to the laws of nature *as ordained and sustained by the Son of God*.

Jesus Exalted to God's Right Hand

The next part of verse 3 tells us that Christ's work on earth culminated in the purging of our sins. The Lord Jesus fulfilled what the Old Testament sacrifices typified, but could not achieve—the purging and removal of sin. The Great High Priest of our profession accomplished what the Jewish high priests could never accomplish by the annual sprinkling of the blood before the mercy seat: For, by the sacrifice of his own perfect life and the shedding of his own blood, the Lord Jesus provided a full and final satisfaction for (or remission of) all sins for all time. Christ's substitutionary and atoning death on the cross satisfied and therefore cancelled our debt of sin forever; for, by our acceptance of that perfect and once-for-all atonement for sin, we have been justified, forgiven and cleansed from all iniquity. Our forgiveness and justification was made effective—once for all—when Jesus died on the cross, when he was buried, and when he was raised to life on the third day. (John 1:29; Heb. 7:27; 9:12-14,26)

Once raised and ascended to heaven again, however, God the Father exalted his Son and seated him at his own right hand.

Under the Jewish arrangement, the high priest entered the holy of holies once a year with the blood of the atoning sacrifice. Standing before the mercy seat, he sprinkled the atoning blood for the sins of the people, as instructed in the Law.

Whenever the high priest had performed this solemn and sacred ceremony, he retired from that most holy and awesome place where the Most High God deemed to meet with his people's representative. (Lev. 16:2-20; Heb. 9:7)

Unlike the earthly high priest and representative however, the Lord Jesus entered the most holy place in heaven. Again, unlike the earthly high priest, the Lord Jesus offered his own blood once-for-all as a sacrifice for the sins of his people. And, unlike the earthly high priest, our High Priest did not need to retire from the most holy presence of God once the blood had been sprinkled in the heavenly sanctuary. On the contrary, since the risen and glorified Lord Jesus had satisfied fully every demand of God's holy and just law, and since he had paid in full the penalty for our sins for all time, God the Father exalted his Son high above every name that can be named and seated him at his own right hand in glory. (Eph. 1:20-22; Heb. 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; see also Ps. 110:1)

In the present context, the 'right hand' is the symbol or position of equality, dignity, power, glory and authority over all things in heaven and on earth, including the church (cf. Job 40:14). The expression 'right hand' can also indicate the immediate presence of God, either locally with his people, or in his glorious presence in heaven (cf. Ps. 16:11; 17:7-8 and frequently elsewhere).

In this passage, the reference is to God's immediate presence in glory. To that place and position, the Son of God has been highly exalted. This is not to say that the Son did not occupy a position of equality, dignity, power, glory and authority before this. Indeed, the Son of God had held this position with the Father from the eternal ages (aeons); but, at this time, the glory of the Son was not widely revealed to anyone unaware of the full counsels of God. Now, however—since the completion of his work on earth—God has exalted his Son publicly before mankind and angels. Now, the Father declares to all creation that the Son rules supreme over the entire universe of men and angels, and that he (the Father) executes his purposes for creation and for the church through his highly exalted Son. (Eph. 1:20-23; Phil. 2:9-11)

The Son Exalted over Angels

Hebrews 1:4-14

Hebrews 1:4

The verse begins by saying:

(4a) having become as much superior to angels.... (ESV)

This does not imply that initially the Son was inferior to angels. Manifestly, this is not the case, since the Son is an uncreated and infinite Being who has existed with the Father from eternity, whereas the angels are created and finite beings who were brought into existence at a specific time. Consequently, the Son of God has been exalted high above all from the eternal ages, and high above the angels from the time of their creation.

The reference in verse 4a above is to the fact that the exalted Son of God laid aside his heavenly glory (although not his deity), took upon himself true human nature (without sin), and that he humbled himself, making himself for a time lower than the angels to accomplish the work of redemption. (Phil. 2:6-11; see also Rom. 8:3)

As the Lord Jesus—truly God and truly Man—and on account of his finished work of redemption, followed by his exaltation to glory, the risen Christ became *as much superior to angels*, etc...: That is,

As the only true, perfect and sinless *Man*, the risen and glorified Lord Jesus is now exalted high above (or, has *become as much superior to*) angels, etc. Nevertheless, as the uncreated and eternal *Son*, he has always been infinitely superior to angels, who are but created beings.

The holy angels of God are the highest *form* of God's creation, insofar as these angels have not been involved in the effects of the fall. (Redeemed men and women occupy a higher *status* as they stand in closer relationship to God and to his Son. When finally glorified, the redeemed children of God take their place as joint heirs with the Son in the immediate presence of God. The holy angels do not enjoy such exalted privileges as the children of God, but—although glorious creatures—they remain servants (not children) of the Father and the Son.)

Essentially, the angels of God are highly intelligent and glorious spirit beings (or spirits). The several ranks or categories of these angelic spirits serve and worship in the immediate presence of God. Angelic beings serve God also throughout the earthly realms, operating between God and his church—although never in the sense of mediators. The holy angels are powerful servants of God for the benefit of the church while on earth. (Heb. 1:14)

These angels are extremely powerful and wise creatures, although, since they are created beings (not uncreated, infinite or eternal beings), their power and wisdom cannot begin to equal that of the Father or the Son.

The angels are far superior to fallen mankind in respect of power, glory, intelligence and many other attributes. (This is why, potentially, the *fallen evil angels* or demons are so dangerous; especially, to anyone who is without the Holy Spirit of God. These fallen angels or demons have lost their dignity and glory, but not their power or intelligence, which they now use for evil ends, directed against God, mankind, and especially the church of God on earth).

However, the *holy angels* remain the glorious servants of God. Yet, so that no one may imagine that these mighty and holy angels occupy a position closer to God than that of his own Son, the writer to the Hebrews now tells us what God has done regarding his Son and concerning his Son's relationship to the angels in heaven.

Thus, verse 4 continues by saying:

(4b) ...as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. (ESV)

The name that the Lord Jesus has inherited is that name which is above every name. It is that name which the Father has bestowed upon him in virtue of his voluntary humiliation, his completed and perfect work of redemption, and his ascension to and enthronement at the Father's right hand. It is the name before which all men and angels will fall down in adoration, praise and worship. (Heb. 1:2)

Concerning these events, the apostle Paul writes:

Philippians 2:6-11 (ESV)

(6) who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, (7) but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. (8) And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

(9) Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, (10) so that at the name of Jesus every knee should

bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, (11) and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

As the eternal Son of God, the Lord Jesus has always been superior to even the highest ranks of the holy angels. Yet, to demonstrate to mankind and angels that the *Lord Jesus* is in fact the eternal *Son of God*, the Father has now exalted the risen glorified Lord Jesus to such a high station in heaven that none but God alone—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—could occupy that position.

In this glorious position, the exalted Lord Jesus' superiority over angels exists to such a degree that the angels could not possibly be considered as anything more than *servant-creatures* of exalted status. Their exalted position, however, is incomparably lower in status than that of the exalted Lord Jesus, who is the uncreated, eternal Son—not a created servant. (Heb. 2:9; 1 Pet. 3:22; Rev. 5:11-12)

Similarly, the name given to the incarnate Son of God at his birth—Jesus—is a name that expresses the very presence and character of God; for it means, *YHWH* (or 'Yahweh') [*is*] *Saviour*, or *YHWH Saves*. (cf. Isa. 45:21-22 with Matt. 1:21) As applied to the Son of God during his incarnation, this name in turn meant that *IMMANUEL* (God with us) was now dwelling or 'tabernacling' among his people. (cf. Isa. 7:14 with Matt. 1:23; see also Isa. 9:6)

Since the Lord Jesus has finished once-for-all his work of redemption on earth, the Father has exalted his Son far above every name that is named, in heaven and on earth, and over every kind of created being. All things on earth, and even in heaven itself, are now subject to the rule, power and authority of the Son—excepting only the Father himself. (Ps. 2:7; Eph. 1:21; Phil. 2:9-11; Col. 1:18; 2:10)

Hebrews 1:5

Among the holy angels of God are the exalted beings Michael and Gabriel. Ever since the day that the LORD created them, these mighty angelic beings have worshipped and served God faithfully. Yet, at no time did God ever consider addressing these or any other angels as 'My Son' (Sometimes, angels are called 'sons of God' in a generic sense, but not in a personal or relational sense. Furthermore, at no time is the singular word 'son' used in respect of angels). Similarly, God never speaks of the angels as though he were their Father.

The writer to the Hebrews is quoting Psalm 2:7, where these words are used. Originally, these words were written concerning God's king in Zion (Jerusalem). Ultimately, however, the words of this Psalm could not have applied solely or principally to any earthly king, but only to the King of kings. It is to him above all others—the exalted Lord Jesus—that these words apply. He alone can be termed rightly *the* Son of God. He alone can address God as his Father, in the unique sense applicable to the members of the Godhead.

The expression, '*...today, I have begotten you*', refers to the pre-eminence, priority, position or rank of the eternal Son of God. The expression is related to the term 'firstborn' (v.6), which—in this and many similar contexts throughout God's Word—does not refer to primogeniture or *priority of birth*, but to *priority of rank or status*. When God's Word speaks of the Son being 'begotten' of the Father, or of the Son being the 'firstborn', it is referring to his pre-eminence as a Person of the Godhead, and to his priority of position, rank and status above everyone and everything else in the entire creation. (Cf. Acts 13:33; Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15-19)

Elsewhere, the Lord Jesus is spoken of as the '*firstborn of the dead*'. This refers to the Lord's resurrection, and once again to his priority over all others: For the Lord Jesus was the first person to rise bodily from the dead never to die again. (Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5)

(See also Exodus 4:22, where the entire nation of Israel is termed God's 'firstborn son', emphasising not their birth, but the fact that the LORD had elected, and granted priority to, this nation from among all others as his own special people.)

Hebrews 1:6

Verse 6 ought to remove any lingering doubts regarding the full deity of Christ. When God brought his firstborn into the world, he said;

"...Let all God's angels worship him."³ (ESV)

Mankind is commanded to worship God and to worship God alone. Likewise, all the holy angels are commanded to worship God and to worship God alone. Here, however, angels are being commanded to worship the Lord Jesus Christ, born as a baby at Bethlehem. Clearly, then, for Jesus to be the express object of *divine worship* (not homage), he must be God. This is just one of the very many passages in God's Word that attribute fully deity to Jesus, the Son of God. (Cf. Luke 2:9-14 with 1 Pet. 3:22; Rev. 5:11-12)

In passing, someone might claim that the use of the term 'firstborn' in this verse implies that Jesus was a created being. This is not so. Jesus was indeed born as the incarnate Son of God. However, in the Bible—and as we have demonstrated under verse 5 above—the term 'firstborn' is not always used to mean the first to be born physically; i.e., it does not relate always to primogeniture. On several occasions in the Scriptures, this term assumes a different meaning. On those occasions, 'firstborn' means 'pre-eminent' or 'ranking above all others'. This is the meaning here. As the Son of God and as the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus ranked above all others. In this respect, he is the 'firstborn' or uniquely pre-eminent One.

Hebrews 1:7

(See Psalm 104:4)

Concerning the angels, then, God's Word says that he makes his angels winds, and his servants, flames of fire. Here the Scripture may be alluding to the manner in which God uses the natural element: viz., he uses winds as his agents or messengers to accomplish his purposes, and he uses fire to achieve his will and purposes at other times. This, simply, is God working providentially through nature. Just as God exercises full control over the natural creation to cause it to obey his will, so the Lord exercises the same full control over his spirit creation (the angels) to ensure that they do his bidding.

It is possible, however, that the meaning intended is that God makes his angels *like* winds, insofar as they operate in all areas, moving to and fro to accomplish the purposes of God in the world, and—being spirits—moving like the wind in its motions. (Remember, that, in Hebrew—as in Greek—the same words (*ruach* or *pneuma*) can be translated as 'spirit', 'wind', or 'breath'.) Similarly, God's servants the angels may be said to move like flames of fire, or at lightning speed, from one location to another. (Cf. 2 Kings 2:11; 6:17; Ezek. 1:13-14; Dan. 7:10; Zech. 6:5)

³ This quotation does not appear in this form in the Hebrew OT Scriptures, but it appears in the Greek Septuagint (LXX) version of Deut. 32:43. This is the version with which these Hebrew Christians would have been most familiar.

Hebrews 1:8

(See Psalm 45:6-7) ⁴

Quoting now from Psalm 45—a Psalm speaking about the Davidic and Messianic King—the writer demonstrates just how highly exalted the Lord Jesus is above the holy angels. Here, Jesus (the Messianic King) is expressly termed 'God'. Although the exalted Lord Jesus is the eternal Son, yet he is also eternal God—but a distinct person from the Father. This brings to mind the opening words of the apostle John in his Gospel:

John 1:1-2 (ESV)

(1) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (2) He was in the beginning with God.

The Son is God; i.e., although a distinct person within the Godhead, he possesses all the attributes or characteristics of his Father to the same degree. He is therefore equal with his Father in every respect. To deny this, is to deny the plain teaching of Scripture, both here and in very many other places. (John 10:30; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; 1 Tim. 3:16; Titus 2:13-14)

Verse 8 tells us also that the Son's throne—or sphere of divine and sovereign power—endures throughout the eternal ages. The Son will reign forever and ever: That is, God the Father has exalted his Son (the Messiah-King) above all power and authority in heaven and earth, and has given to him the name that is above every name. (Eph. 1:21-22; Phil. 2:9-10; Heb. 1:4) Thus, the exalted Lord Jesus will continue to exercise sovereign power and dominion throughout the eternal ages. Ultimately, all creation will submit to his sovereign sway and worship and serve the exalted Lord Jesus, as the holy angels do now. Thus, the Son is demonstrably superior to the angels.

The '*sceptre of uprightness*' (ESV) or the '*sceptre of righteousness*' (Gk, 'rightness' or 'straightness') was the symbolic rod or ensign borne by rulers to indicate both royalty and the exercise of moral integrity and justice in their government or reign. (Cf. Ps. 72) To emphasise the moral righteousness (or rectitude) of the ruler, the sceptre that he or she bore was straight (indicating uprightness of character). Sometimes, the sceptre was embedded with precious stones or metals, indicating the moral purity of the ruler's reign. Granted, no human ruler ever attained to the righteousness signified by the sceptre. However, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is King of kings and Lord of lords, bears that sceptre in absolute righteousness, holiness, truth and justice.

Again, unlike any earthly ruler, the Son's kingdom is characterised by perfect and unwavering righteousness. (Isa. 9:7; Isa. 32:1-2) This is the very nature of God. He is intrinsically just, holy and righteous. Thus, all that he does is governed by his wise, just and righteous nature. To this end, it was necessary to redeem sinful men and women with the perfect spotless blood of his Son, that they might be accounted righteous in his sight and reconciled to him. For without this gift of righteousness, no one could ever stand in God's presence. This too demonstrates the superiority of the Son of Righteousness above the holy angels.

⁴ I won't discuss here the different interpretations of these verses from Psalm 45. For information on possible alternative interpretations or translations of Ps. 45:6, see, for example, Keil & Delitzsch on this passage. (GL)

Hebrews 1:9

God rewarded his Son for the work of perfect righteousness and substitutionary atonement that he accomplished on earth. As a king is anointed with oil to show his exaltation to the office of ruler, so God the Father anointed his Son above all others; for he is King of kings and Lord of lords. His sovereignty extends over all human and angelic rulers, and over every other power in all creation.

Furthermore, and most importantly, Christ (the Messiah) is God's Anointed. Others before him had been anointed as prophet, priest or king; and occasionally with two of these offices combined. However, unlike any other, God anointed his Son as Prophet, Priest and King *par excellence*. He alone bears all three offices. He alone bears these offices in absolute perfection and integrity. Thus, he alone truly loves righteousness and hates—and utterly repudiates—wickedness. (Heb. 7:26)

Thus, too, it may be said that God has anointed his Son with the oil of gladness beyond his companions (or above his fellows). No other prophet, priest or king ever received such a righteous and holy anointing as God bestowed upon his Son. No other prophet, priest or king could ever attain to the absolutely holy, righteous and just life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor could any other created being. Even the most holy angels of God cannot attain to the infinite perfections of God the Son, since—although holy—they are nevertheless created, finite and inferior beings.

Once again, then, the Scriptures demonstrate that the King of Righteousness and the King of Kings is superior by far to even the most mighty of holy angels—including seraphs, cherubs or any other class of created spirits.

Hebrews 1:10-12

(See Psalm 102:25-27; cf. Col. 1:15-19)

Here, the writer addresses the LORD (God) as the one who founded the heavens and the earth. However, the LORD God did so through his Son. All creation was brought into being by the express will of the Father exercised by the power of the Son. (Isa. 48:13; John 1:1-3) The creation is God's handiwork. Nevertheless, the created universe is not eternal. It had a beginning and it will have an ending. The creation is presently ageing and decaying; and, at God's appointed time, this present creation (i.e., the present created heavens and earth) will pass away. Then, a total change—or complete transformation—will take place throughout the entire created universe. (Isa. 34:4; 65:17; 2 Pet. 3:7-13; Rev. 21:1)

Unlike the creation, however, God the Father and God the Son will endure forever. They cannot age or pass away. They have been from before the beginning of time, from eternity past; and they will continue to be for all eternity yet to come—long after this present creation has passed away. (Ps. 90:2)

Here again, the writer demonstrates the Son's superiority to angels, for no holy angel has ever existed from eternity. No holy angel is uncreated. All were created by God according to his will and purposes. Therefore, as beings created at a specific point in time, the angels are inferior to the uncreated, eternal Son of God.

Hebrews 1:13

Again, God has never said to any of the holy angels that they should assume a place of sovereign power, authority and glory at his own right hand. No being can assume such an exalted position save God alone. Yet, it is to this very position in glory, at his own right hand, that the Father has exalted his Son. (Heb. 1:3; 10:12) And, through his Son's sovereign rule and dominion, God will ensure that every enemy in the created earthly and heavenly realms is placed under his feet. Thus, the Son will be all in all, with everything and everyone subject to him, except the Father himself. (Ps. 110:1; Matt. 22:44; Acts 2:34; 1 Cor. 15:25-26)

This, however, is a position that no holy angel can ever occupy. Thus, once again, we see that the Son of God is infinitely superior to the angels of God.

From these arguments, we learn that the Son of God is immeasurably higher in power, glory and authority than any created being. Although glorious and mighty in power, the angels are inferior by far to the eternal Son of God. Indeed, myriads of holy angels worship and adore the Son, the Lamb of God, just as they worship and adore the Father—with reverence and awe. (Heb. 1:6; 1 Pet. 3:22; Rev. 5:9-12)

What, then, is the purpose of the angels? They were created by God to be used as his holy messengers, helping to serve his purposes in the government of the universe, and to minister to, and to protect, his people. Thus, God used holy angels to keep watch over his people Israel; and, in the same way, God's uses his holy angels to keep watch over his church. (Ps. 103:19-21)

One aspect of the angel's service to God is expressed in verse 14:

Hebrews 1:14

The angels are not supreme rulers, nor are they intermediaries between God and man, nor are they powers or authorities in their own right. They derive all their mighty power and authority from God and they are subject to the Son of God in everything that they do.

(Sometimes, the angel 'Michael' is referred to as a 'prince'. However, this does not imply rule over God's creation but rather is an indication of his chief or great position among other ranks of holy angels, and relates to his position as protector or defender of God's people, Israel. (Dan. 10:13,21; 12:1))

Again, the chief of fallen angels—Satan—is called '*the prince of the power of the air*' (Eph. 2:2) or '*the god of this world*' (2 Cor. 4:4). However, these titles and positions were not bestowed by God. Rather, they are descriptive appellations used by the apostle Paul to indicate that the evil being of whom he speaks (in 2 Corinthians and Ephesians, etc.) is the chief among the mighty and fallen angels (or unclean or evil angels, or demons). The devil himself is referred to as *the prince of the power of the air* or *the god of this world* (or, *this age*) because he has usurped his appointed position and now exercises his malevolent power and influence over the world, and over the nations, governments and people of the world.

Concerning the holy angels or angels of God, however, and in respect of the church, these angels are termed 'ministering spirits'; i.e., they are powerful spirit beings whom God uses as his *servants* for the good of the church. More specifically, God employs these holy angels to serve or minister to those whom he will call, or has called, into the fellowship of his Son; i.e., to every elect child of God prior to, and following, their regeneration and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

As a rule, God's elect are unaware of the presence or ministry of these holy angels. Yet, frequently, we learn from Scripture that they surround God's people, protect them and act like a shield about them defending them from evil.

Thus, in Scripture, it is written:

Psalm 34:7 (ESV)

The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.

(See also Ps. 91:11; Dan. 3:28; 6:22; Matt. 18:10; Acts 27:23)

Of course, the power and ability of the holy angels is limited to that of superior created beings. Ultimately, our times are in God's hands. He is our final protector and guardian (cf. Isa. 63:9). However, where he can employ his holy angels, as the messengers of his will and purposes for the preservation of his people, he does so.

The angels, however, are *agents* of God—*servant* spirits. They are not mediators. Again, God's people are expressly forbidden from worshipping angels or from affording to them any devotion or homage that is due to the divine person of God alone. (Colossian heresy; Col. 2:18-19)

In passing, we might remember one specific expression or title: *the Angel of the LORD*. This was an expression used—not of created angels—but of the LORD God himself, or of the pre-incarnate Son of God, when he appeared as God's Holy Messenger or 'Angel' during the Old Testament period. (Gen. 22:11; 31:11; cf. Ex. 13:21 with Ex. 14:19)

HEBREWS CHAPTER 2**No Escape for Neglecting Salvation****Hebrews 2:1-4****Hebrews 2:1**

The first four verses of this chapter assume the form of a parenthesis to the author's main theme. From verse 5 onward, the writer will return to his theme of the Son's undeniable and immeasurable superiority over the angels.

Here, in this present passage, the writer is emphasising to his readers the necessity of hearing and heeding (or obeying) the teaching that has been delivered to them. Indeed, they were to give the most earnest attention to those things declared to them by the Spirit-inspired apostles and by other preachers of the Gospel. For the Gospel embodied and proclaimed the one and only way of salvation through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, this one and only way of salvation was the word, message or teaching of the Sovereign Lord God himself, and of his Son Jesus Christ. Thus, these Jewish readers were being exhorted to exercise the utmost care, lest they should drift away (lit., 'run out' —as from a leaking vessel) from the fundamental and unchanging truths of God's Word and God's salvation. (Luke 8:15; cf. Deut. 4:9; 32:46)

We too, who belong to Christ, must take great care to listen to and respond to the Gospel message. This not only means hearing and obeying the good news of salvation itself, but also hearing and obeying every word of the Lord Jesus and his apostles and also every teaching presented to us by the inspired writers throughout the New Testament.

Those who heed and practise the teaching of God's Word grow daily in the grace of God and in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. By feeding on the Word of God, their souls are nourished on the Bread from heaven. By hearing, trusting, and obeying the sacred Scriptures, the child of God grows in all things spiritual and eternal. (Rom. 15:4)

However, it is essential that we do not neglect the study of the Word or the fellowship of prayer. Were we to neglect the eternal truths of God's Word, it would lead to uncertainty, doubt and confusion of mind. Continuing to neglect the eternal Word of God leads inevitably to spiritual famine, and ultimately to an increasing lack of interest in spiritual matters and concern for our spiritual well-being. Even worse, by neglecting the study of God's Word, we begin to lose sight of the fundamental truths of salvation, and of their essential and unchanging nature. We become more inclined to accommodate error and false teaching, since we have lost the spiritual ability to discern the spirits; i.e., to distinguish between truth and error in teaching or preaching. (1 John 4:1) Hence, the reason that the writer of Hebrews warns these believers against drifting away⁵ from what they had heard and learned from the Lord Jesus, from his apostles, and from other God-inspired teachers and writers of the Holy Scriptures—all of which is set down for us in the New Testament. (2 Tim. 3:14-17; Heb. 10:23-27, 38-39)

Thus, we learn how important it is for the people of God to hold fast to the truths of the Bible, and not to be moved from these infallible and unchanging truths by the teachings of ungodly or unspiri-

⁵ *drifting away*. lit., to let slip, or 'leak away', by inattention, neglect or carelessness.

tual men, by the opinions of worldly-minded men or women, or by the evil or compromising influences of this modern age. God's Word cannot change; nor can it be modified to suit the moods and tastes of the present age, or a particular culture or system of beliefs, or a politically correct and socially or culturally accommodating society. (Isa. 40:8; Jer. 23:29; 1 Thess. 2:13; Titus 1:9)

Nevertheless, we are to pay attention to, and hold fast to the truth in love and in a spirit of humility. And we are to endeavour to impart that truth to others with heartfelt love and concern for them, and not with a critical or judgmental attitude or with the intention of imparting the truths of God's Word as mere doctrine or a system of belief. Without the power and presence of the Holy Spirit operating in conjunction with the living Word of God, no one will be convicted of sin or be convinced of the truth. Thus, in paying attention to, and holding fast to the truth and making it known to others, we must do so out of a sincere or unfeigned love for Christ, for one another, and for a lost and perishing world. (1 Thess. 1:5)

Hebrews 2:2-4

In verse 2, the writer is referring to the law given to Moses on Mount Sinai. The writer also refers to the presence of God's holy angels at the giving of the law. This fact is not mentioned expressly in Exodus chapters 19 and 20, where the giving of the law to Moses is first recorded. However, in Deuteronomy chapter 33 verse 2, the Scripture says that *The LORD came from Sinai...with ten thousands of saints* (lit., 'holy ones'). Very likely, this refers to the presence of the glorious angelic hosts with the LORD God on Mount Sinai. (See also Acts 7:38,53; Gal. 3:19)

The law formed a covenant between God and his people, and it became binding on the entire Israelite congregation. By obeying the words of the law, the people of Israel were rewarded with God's blessing on their lives, on their journeys, and on their inheritance in the Promised Land. However, by disobeying God's law, the people were rewarded with God's temporal judgments and curse, resulting in loss of blessings, chastisement, and—eventually—more severe punishment at the hands of foreign powers (such as Assyria and Babylonia).

Thus, says the writer to these dispersed Jewish believers, if God did not spare his people in past ages when they refused to hear or heed his word—the word spoken by the LORD God himself—how shall we believers escape today, if we neglect the Gospel of eternal salvation, as spoken by the Living Word himself—the very Son of God? God chastised his people, sometimes severely, when they refused to hear and heed his word as delivered under the law. Will not God chastise his people, possibly severely, if they refuse to hear and heed his word as expressed in the Gospel of eternal salvation? Should we not remember that refusing—or neglecting—to heed the truths of our salvation is tantamount to refusing or neglecting to hear or heed the Son of God himself? Granted, God will not withdraw the gift of salvation that he has bestowed upon his people, for that gift is guaranteed to us by the perfect and finished work of the now exalted Lord Jesus. Nevertheless, the Lord can and will chastise his people if they do not respond to his word as he has revealed it to them in the Scriptures of truth.

The fact that the writer is addressing believers here, and not the unregenerate, can be deduced from the context. Throughout these passages, the terminology used is appropriate only to those who know the Lord. Thus, the writer is not warning unregenerate individuals of the consequences of ignoring the Gospel. This is a separate issue, not addressed here. Nor is he suggesting that a born-again believer can forfeit his or her salvation. Just as God's chastisements of the people of Israel did not mean that he had disowned them, but rather that he was disciplining them for their own good, so now God does not disown his elect people, but he disciplines them for their own good. If, after having bene-

fited from all the blessings of salvation, his people then ignore the privileges and responsibilities of their salvation, then the Lord will discipline them to restore them to himself and to his word.

Nevertheless, we must bear in mind that on frequent occasions certain people make a profession of faith that is not genuine. Such false professors are never included among the people of God, although, to others—including true members of God's church—they may appear genuine. Yet, God knows those who are his (2 Tim. 2:19)—and those who are his must live a life consistent with their election and calling, both publicly and privately. Those, however, who have never experienced regeneration, justification and sanctification, do not belong to Christ—whatever may be their claims to the contrary. (Rom. 8:9) For this reason, those who have come to the very threshold of salvation and to the verge of God's kingdom, without actually entering in, may find that the solemn warnings in this epistle against despising the grace of God apply to them and to other false professors.

To return to genuine believers, however, not only did these believers hear of the words of the Lord Jesus from his apostles, they understood more fully the import of these truths as the apostles expounded in detail these teachings to them. Furthermore, the apostles' testimony, which was authenticated in the Hebrew believers' sight by miraculous, signs and wonders, was augmented by the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit whom they had received from God. Thus, God himself was seen to bear witness to the word and teaching of the apostles and other servants of God who proclaimed the truth to them in the power of the Spirit. Not only had they received the gifts of the Holy Spirit leading to regeneration, repentance and faith, but they had also received individual gifts from the Holy Spirit for edifying the body of Christ. These gifts had been distributed to each one according to the will and purposes of God for that individual within the church.

Thus, the recipients of this letter knew that the Spirit of the Lord had been working powerfully in their midst. It would have been culpable indeed to have neglected the message of salvation that had brought so many divine blessings into their lives, and to have treated lightly the gifts of God's Holy Spirit. Yet, some of these believers stood in grave danger of drifting away from the truth, or letting slip the essential truths of their salvation.

We See Jesus

Hebrews 2:5-18

The writer now returns to the subject that he began in chapter 1, where he was demonstrating the superiority of the Son to the holy angels. Thus, in verse 5, he writes:

Hebrews 2:5

God did not plan to subject the coming world (Gk., οἰκουμένη, *inhabited world* or *inhabited earth*) to the supervision or rule of his holy angels. That was never his intention when he formed his plans in the counsels of eternity. Rather, rule over the world to come, or over the new creation, is to be invested in Christ who will exercise sovereign dominion as King of kings and Lord of lords. However, sharing with him in his rule over the coming world (and the coming age) would be the redeemed, sanctified and glorified saints—not the holy angels.

Dominion over the entire creation is invested in the Son of Man—Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus became a man—a true and perfect man—that he might suffer and die for sinful men and women. He took upon himself the form of a man, not the likeness or form of a holy angel. Thus, when God highly exalted the Lord Jesus, he raised him to the position of absolute supremacy over the entire creation—including the mighty and holy angels of God. From this position of absolute supremacy, the exalted

glorified Lord Jesus rules over all; and from this glorious place and position, he will rule not only in this age (or over this present world) but also over the coming age (or the coming new creation).

Hebrews 2:6-8

(Cf. Psalm 8:1-9)

Now, the writer considers more fully the position of mankind. Humanly speaking, and compared to the holy angels, man is lowly and insignificant. Nevertheless, mankind is significantly higher than the animal creation, since—unlike them—he has been created in the image and likeness of God (morally, spiritually, and rationally, etc.). Although greatly marred by the fall, God's image in mankind has not been effaced completely. (Gen. 1:26-28)

Mankind was made a little lower than God's angelic creation. The expression, '*made... lower than*' implies that, originally, man (in the person of Adam before the fall) stood at a higher level than he does now, but that God brought him down to his present level. This is true if we consider that—at his creation—man was made equal with the holy angels insofar as both he and they shared immortality or eternal life: i.e., as originally constituted—and like the holy angels—Adam and Eve would not have died. (Gen. 2:16-17) However, because of his sin and fall, man forfeited eternal life (although he retained an immortal soul). (Gen. 3:17-19) Thus, God had made him a little lower (in degree and for a time) than the angels. Again, mankind bore the image and likeness of God in his soul—albeit, now greatly defaced by the fall.

We may summarise this as follows:

- If Adam and Eve had not sinned and fallen from their position of original righteousness, then they would have remained the sinless (righteous and holy) children of God. As such, their position as God's *children* would have afforded them a higher *status* before God than that of the holy angels (just as the redeemed children of God are now).
- However, although created as God's glorious *servants*, the holy angels remain a higher *form* of God's creation than mankind.
- From the creation of mankind, God had honoured man and granted him dominion over the entire earth, putting everything—without exception—under man's feet. (Gen. 1:26) To put or place under one's feet is a figure of speech, often used in a royal or military context, to indicate victory over enemies, the complete subjugation of an adversary or opponent, or unhindered rule over a particular realm or sphere of activity. In the case of mankind, this would have been unhindered dominion over the entire earth, including the animal kingdom.
- Man ought to have been able to rule the earth in peace and tranquillity. However, his disobedience and fall brought with it almost unabated turmoil, stress and difficulty into his attempts to subdue the creation—a creation originally perfect but now labouring and languishing under the curse of God. As a consequence of the fall, and of the curse on the earth, mankind could never achieve fully that degree or extent of dominion over the earth that God had intended for him at his creation. On the contrary, and on many occasions, fallen mankind has had to struggle, strive or fight to maintain some semblance of order, rule, government, or dominion over the earthly creation. (Gen. 3:17-19)

Thus, the writer of this epistle can say that we do not yet see man exercising complete dominion over the earth; nor are we likely too, as long as mankind remains in his fallen, unregenerate state. Even redeemed man will not be able to exercise complete dominion until the Son of God has glorified him

and restored to him that perfect, sinless and immortal state, which was lost by the fall. Then, indeed, it will not be the holy angels of God but redeemed and glorified mankind who will rule in the new creation, subject only to the eternal sovereignty or reign of Christ the King.

Hebrews 2:9

At present, therefore, man—whom God has made a little lower than angels in respect of immortality, dignity, power and glory—does not exercise full dominion over God's created earth. Nevertheless, by faith, we see the Perfect Man, spotless and sinless, righteous, just and holy, exercising that very dominion over the entire universe, including the earth—the Father alone being excepted from his Son's sovereign and universal dominion. (Col. 2:15; Heb. 1:8)

For a short time, however, the Son of God too was made (or assumed) a position lower than the holy angels. The incarnate Son of God assumed this position of humiliation, however, not as a result of sin as was the case with Adam, but rather in order to offer himself as the perfect Redeemer of fallen and sinful men and women. (Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:6-11; cf. Heb. 10:7) The holy Son of God became man—true, perfect and sinless Man. Yet, as man, he had assumed a position below that of the angels of God. Granted, the Son of Man also remained truly the Son of God; and, as such, he remained eternally pre-eminent to all created beings—including the holy angels.

Verse 9 says that *we see* (or behold) him [Jesus]... That is, we behold steadfastly, or look upon intently, the One who is the Lamb of God (...*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!* (John 1:29)). We see Jesus as the One who is truly perfect Man, and who lived a holy and perfect life. (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 John 3:5) We see Jesus as the One who, according to the will of God, suffered as the spotless, holy, perfect Lamb of God, to make atonement for all of God's elect people. (1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18; 1 John 4:10) We see Jesus, as the Father's One and only Son, who—when he had paid the price for our redemption—God raised from the dead for our justification. (Rom. 4:25; 7:4) Again, we see Jesus as the One whom God has exalted to his own right hand in glory, now interceding for his redeemed people in the very presence of God the Father. (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; cf. 1 John 2:1) Furthermore, we see Jesus—once made a little lower than the angels—now crowned with superlative glory, and coming again one day to gather his people home and to reign forever with his saints over the new heaven and earth. (Heb. 2:7,9; Rev. 6:2) *The One who once was crowned with thorns, is crowned with glory now!*

In this passage, to '*taste death*' is not simply 'to die' (although, elsewhere, it is used in this sense. (Matt. 16:28; Mark 9:1; John 8:52)) Rather, in the present context, which speaks of the *suffering* of death or the instrumental causes of death, to '*taste death*' means to experience the pains, agonies and mental and physical torments of being put to death in such a cruel manner (i.e., by crucifixion). Again, the Lord '*tasted death*' when he experienced in his own holy Person not only the full weight and punishment of all his people's sins (while never at any time contracting sin personally). (1 John 3:5; 1 Pet. 2:24) Furthermore, and while enduring the unspeakable wrath of God against sin, the holy One of God also experienced the soul-crushing agonies of being forsaken temporarily by his beloved Father in heaven.

Verse 9 says that the Lord Jesus tasted or endured the pains of death *for all* (*lit.*, '*for every*' [*one*] or '*for every*' [*kind*] or '*for all*' [*things*] or '*for all*' [*kinds*]).⁶ Clearly, the Scriptures cannot affirm in one place what they deny in another. The Word of God plainly teaches that all God's elect people will be saved. However, it does not teach that all people without exception will be saved. Therefore, in view

⁶ See BDAG or similar for further meanings.

of the plain teaching of God's Word in many other places, we must understand this verse in its context and within the general context of all other related passages. From this, it becomes evident that the word does not always mean 'all (people) without exception'.

Frequently, this word merely means 'many'. For example, when the Scripture says that '*all the world came to Jerusalem to be taxed*', it clearly means all the Roman world (or that part of the Roman world). It does not mean all the inhabitants of the earth. Again, when the Scriptures say that '*all the people of Jerusalem were baptised by John the Baptist*' this clearly does not include the vast majority of the scribes or Pharisees, nor does it include many other residents of that city. The word 'all' is simply being used as a synonym for 'many'.

Furthermore, when we consider the apostle Paul's inspired teaching, we see that he makes a clear distinction between the *all* who are in the first Adam (i.e., all mankind without exception) and the *all* who are in the second Adam (Christ). Clearly, the 'all' in Christ are all the elect: i.e., all regenerate believers—not all mankind.

So we are to understand the word 'all', 'every man', or 'everyone' in the verse before us. Yet again—and depending on the context—the words 'all' or 'every' can mean 'for all [kinds]' or 'for every [kind]'. Thus, frequently, we are to understand the expression 'all' or 'every' as meaning all kinds of people, or people of every kind: i.e., to all [kinds] of people *without discrimination or distinction* because of ethnicity, colour, creed, social standing, etc.

Hebrews 2:10

The Son of God is the one for whom all things exist and by whom all things exist. Through him, God the Father created the universe and all it contains. Through the Son, God sustains the created universe. Through the Son, the Father works all things in accordance with his own plans and purposes. Through the Son, God fulfils every plan and purpose for his elect people and for his church. And, through the Son, the Father will bring all things to their final consummation and will inaugurate the new creation in which righteousness dwells, and in which his redeemed people will share as joint heirs with the Son of God in his eternal glory. (John 1:3; Rom. 11:36; Col. 1:15-18; Heb. 1:2)

Furthermore, the Lord Jesus is the Founder, Author, Leader or Captain of our salvation. He is the one and only Person through whom we may find forgiveness of sins, and by whom we may be reconciled to God. He is the one and only Person who can bring redeemed sinners into full fellowship with God, and who one day will present us faultless and blameless in his Father's immediate and glorious heavenly presence. There is no other Person in heaven or earth who can redeem sinful men and women, or who can effect their reconciliation with the Father in heaven. (Acts 3:15; 5:31; Heb. 12:2)

It was fitting—or it was proper, appropriate or seemly—that God the Father should make perfect through suffering the Captain, Leader, or Author of our salvation. By his own sovereign will and good pleasure, it was fitting that he who created the universe, and for whom all things exist, should deem to show mercy to his rebellious human creation through the sufferings that would be endured by his holy, spotless Son.

For the Son of God to become a suitable substitute for sinful men and women, it was essential that God's Son assume full humanity. The eternal Son had to be made like men in every respect, except sin. In other words, in order to live a life of perfect righteousness for sinful men and women, and to suffer and die on their behalf, the Son had to become a perfect Man. He had to take upon himself all the limitations common to mortal and human experience (e.g., hunger, thirst, weariness, fatigue, human suffering, etc). Being perfect Man, of course, these limitations would not include sin or a sinful

nature. Nevertheless, *as a Man*, the Lord Jesus could be tempted or enticed to sin—yet without ever yielding to temptation or committing sin. At all times, and under all circumstances, the Substitute of God’s appointing had to—and did—remain the sinless, spotless, perfect Man, and the unblemished, perfect Lamb of God. (Heb. 2:17; 4:15)

Since he was to die as the sinner’s Substitute, the incarnate Son of God first had to live a life of unwavering obedience to God while on earth. He had to obey his heavenly Father perfectly, not only on his own account but also on account of those for whom he was to die—thereby providing perfect obedience and righteousness in their stead. Furthermore, the Son of Man had to suffer the same temptations as others (yet without sin). He had to suffer the torments of his false accusers, on account of those he had come to save. He had to suffer the enduring wrath of God on the cross, as he made atonement for our sin, bearing in his own holy Person the punishment due to us. However, when the sinless Lord Jesus suffered, his sufferings were of far greater intensity than could have been experienced by any other man or woman on earth. For, since he was absolutely spotless and holy, uncontaminated by sin and untouched by a sinful nature, the temptations, sufferings, punishments, and other forms of affliction that the Lord endured must have tortured his holy and righteous soul. Yet, he did all this for those whom he loved and whom he had come to reconcile to his Father in heaven.

In these ways, therefore, God the Father made the Lord Jesus (*as Man, or in respect of his humanity*) perfect through suffering. We must be careful to observe, however, that this perfection did not relate to the Lord Jesus’ moral or spiritual nature (which forever remained impeccable, or unchangeably perfect and incapable of improvement), but rather to his experiences as a human being. The Lord Jesus was made perfect or mature in those things that—*as Man*—he learned by experience.

For example, by his perfect obedience to God, the incarnate Son learned what it was to endure suffering as a human being. He learned what it was to be punished for sin (not his own sin—but that of others). He learned what it was to endure his Father’s wrath and to be forsaken by his Father in heaven. He learned what it was to enter the realms of death. In all these things and more, the holy and sinless Lord Jesus experienced for the first time such torments of body and soul. Thus, again, he was made perfect by these experiences—not, as we have said, in respect of his personal nature or character, which was unchangeably holy and righteous, but in respect of his encountering and enduring those afflictions which could never touch him as the holy and eternal Son of God, but to which he submitted voluntarily when he became the Lord Jesus Christ—the Saviour of sinful men and women. (Heb. 5:8-9)

This was the cost of reconciling sinners to God and of bringing them into full fellowship with the Father. This was the cost of removing the enmity between God and sinful mankind and between sinful mankind and God in heaven. This was the cost of redeeming a people for himself, of adopting them into his own family, and ultimately of bringing many sons to glory. The spotless, holy Lamb of God had to suffer unimaginably to pay the purchase price of our redemption. He had to be made perfect—i.e., fully mature or experienced—through suffering, so that others might be forgiven, and reunited to God in heaven through their union with the Lord Jesus; the holy, spotless Son of God. (Heb. 7:26)

Hebrews 2:11

On this occasion, the words 'sanctifies' and 'sanctified' are being used not only in their more usual and specific sense (relating to the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification) but also in a more general sense denoting that which has been set apart for, or dedicated to, a particular purpose. (John 17:17,19; Heb. 9:13-14; 10:10,14; 13:12)

From eternity, God the Father had set apart for himself, or sanctified (in the general sense), a special people—'called out' or elected from among every nation on earth. He has given this people to his Son. The Son assumes ownership of God's elect people and sanctifies or consecrates them to God. These are his 'sheep'. They are the ones for whom the Lord Jesus has come to lay down his life. (John 10:17-18, 27-30)

By his perfect life and atoning work on their behalf, and because of his resurrection and ascension, the now exalted and glorified Lord Jesus bestows upon all of his elect people the full benefits of the salvation that he has obtained for them by the shedding of his own precious blood.⁷ (cf. 2 Tim. 2:10; 1 Pet. 1:5; Rev. 12:10)

Thus, by their union with Christ in faith and obedience, believers become the children of God, heirs of the Father, and joint-heirs with the Son in his glory. (Rom. 8:17; cf. Eph. 2:19) The Father set apart, consecrated or sanctified his Son unto his service when he sent his Son into the world. Similarly, the Son sets apart, consecrates or sanctifies to God and to his service all his redeemed people; that, mystically and spiritually, they may be one in Christ Jesus. Since, now, the redeemed children of God have been consecrated to the Father, and since, now, they are his heirs to glory, and joint heirs with his Son, therefore the Son is not ashamed to acknowledge his redeemed people as brothers (inclusive of both brothers and sisters in Christ). Far from distancing himself from the redeemed of mankind, the highly exalted Lord Jesus draws near to his blood-bought people and acknowledges each one as a child of his Father and a brother or sister of the Father's Son.

Such love, mercy, grace and condescension that we should be called the children of God! Such remarkably condescension and love on the part of the Son that he is not ashamed to acknowledge mere mortal human beings—albeit redeemed—as his brothers!

Nevertheless, although the Lord Jesus acknowledges his redeemed and sanctified people as his 'brothers', it would not be appropriate for us to refer to the holy Son of God by the term 'Brother'. The Son of God condescends to call us his 'brothers', but we should acknowledge that the risen glorified Lord Jesus is and will always remain our highly exalted Saviour, our Lord and our God.

Hebrews 2:12

(Ps. 22:22)

Alluding now to Psalm 22 verse 22, the writer expands on the thought that the Son of God considers his redeemed people as his brothers. Here, the Son is asserting that he has declared or proclaimed the name of the LORD God to his brothers: i.e., he has taught all his own people of the things concerning the Father in heaven, and he has praised the Father's name in their company. Initially, the 'brothers' would have referred to all the true followers of Jesus while he ministered on earth, including both men and women (and not just the twelve disciples). By extension, however, it applies to all

⁷ For a more detailed explanation of redemption and its application to the elect, see on *Bible Truths Explained: Atonement and Redemption* by Gordon Lyons.

those individuals who have been called to belong to Christ, through faith in him, and who are now known as his brothers or sisters. This includes every *true* believer in the church worldwide—the entire body of all the regenerated and redeemed people of God.

Hebrews 2:13a

(Isa. 8:17-18 LXX; cf. Ps. 18:2)

Using the Septuagint version of the Old Testament (the version with which these Jewish believers would be most familiar), the writer of Hebrews cites two more phrases. The references are not direct quotations of a messianic nature, but rather are being used by the inspired writer to draw a parallel between Isaiah's hopes and experiences (and that of the children of Israel—or more correctly, Judah), and to apply the principles to the Lord Jesus' hopes and experiences (and that of the children of God).

Firstly, the writer quotes the Son as declaring that his trust or hope is in God, which indeed was the case with the Lord Jesus throughout his life on earth. So, too, the Lord's redeemed people must continue to place their hope or trust in God and in his Son Jesus Christ.

This passage is based on the Jewish people's experience in the time of Isaiah the prophet. God had committed to Isaiah the responsibility of declaring his word faithfully to his wayward children (Judah specifically; but here taken to comprehend the entire nation of Israel). The people, however, had not responded and were now under God's chastening hand. Yet, faithful to his calling, Isaiah did not forsake God's people or cease to care for them—nor did the LORD. Nevertheless, faced with the ingratitude and rejection of the people to his messages from God, the prophet felt that the only one in whom he could hope and trust was the Lord God himself—unlike Judah, who had hoped and trusted in the arm of flesh (human power, effort or strength alone), only to see their hopes dashed and their nation threatened and overrun by foreign powers.

Hebrews 2:13b

(Isa. 8:18; cf. Isa. 53:10; John 10:29; see esp. John 17:6-12)

Referring originally to the prophet Isaiah, the writer of Hebrews quotes these words; and, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he applies them to the Son of God and to the children whom the Father has entrusted to his Son. From before the foundation of the world, God had predestined these individuals to become his own special and elect people. God has committed the care of all his elect people to his Son, and the Son acknowledges this elect and redeemed people not only as the Father's children but also as his own brothers (and sisters).

That God has indeed given his elect people to his Son can be seen from Jesus' own teaching in the Gospel of John. In chapter 17, the Lord declares in his prayer to the Father:

John 17:6-12 (ESV)

(6) "I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. (7) Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. (8) For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.

(9) "I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. (10) All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. (11) And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

(12) While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

Clearly, then, the Lord Jesus had come to redeem a people for himself and for his Father. However, this people had been predestined from all eternity to become the children of God. (Eph. 1:4-5; 2 Tim. 1:9)

Hebrews 2:14a

Those whom God had predestined to eternal life were members of Adam's fallen race. In order to make atonement for their sins, therefore, the eternal Son of God had to become a human being like them in all respects, except sin. To this end, the Son of God became God incarnate by being born of the virgin Mary at Bethlehem. Since he had been conceived in Mary's womb by the direct operations of God's Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus did not inherit Adam's sinful nature. (Luke 1:35) Consequently, Jesus came into the world possessed of a sinless human nature; and, when he grew to manhood, it was to a perfect and sinless manhood. Only as a sinless human being could the incarnate Son of God live a life of perfect obedience to God both for himself and as a substitute for sinners. Again, only as a perfect Man could the sinless Lord Jesus suffer and die on behalf of all God's elect people; for only as a spotless or unblemished blood-offering would his atoning sacrifice be acceptable to God.

Therefore, the eternal Son of God had to share in the humanity of men and women, without at any time incurring in his own holy Person the moral pollution or their sin. He died on the cross, bearing their sin and guilt in his own body. However, he was not bearing the sin itself, but the just penalty or punishment due to that sin. He was assuming the legal liability for the sin of all the men and women whom God had given him. But he himself remained uncontaminated by that sin. Thus, the sacrifice of atonement that the Lord Jesus made to God remained a pure and perfect offering, which God was pleased to accept as a full and final atonement for the sins of all his people throughout the ages, from the creation of mankind to the end of the ages. (Isa. 53:10-12; 1 Pet. 2:22-24)

Now, therefore, the Son is not ashamed to call these redeemed children of God his 'brothers'. For, by virtue of his incarnation as a human being, the Lord Jesus became like his brothers in all respects except sin.

Hebrews 2:14b-15

The second part of verse 14 tells us that the Lord Jesus also died in order to nullify or destroy the devil's power in respect of death. The verse refers to the devil as *the one who has the power of death*. However, this is not to be understood in the sense that the evil one can exercise control over death or that he can determine how, when and where a person dies. This kind of power is not within his grasp, nor has the power of death ever been at his disposal. God alone holds the power of life and death. God alone determines how, when and where a person will be born, live and die. (Acts 17:24-28)

The verse is not speaking of a power over death possessed—or once possessed—by Satan, but which Christ removed from him at the cross. Rather, it is alluding to the effects of sin, which became evident from the fall of man and has continued ever since—namely, death as the wages or penalty of sin. Satan—in the guise of the serpent—tempted and deceived Eve in the Garden. Thus, in yielding, Adam and Eve brought upon themselves the penalty due to sin, which is death. However, Satan was the instigator or author of their sin. In this respect, Satan’s temptation and man’s sin is the cause of death in the life of every human being. (Gen. 3:1ff)

In this respect, therefore, the devil exercised the ‘power of death’ over fallen mankind. However, even this power—or threat of death brought about by Satan’s temptation and mankind’s sin—was about to be nullified. By his death on the cross, the Lord Jesus would effectively strip Satan of his power to intimidate men and women with the threat of death for their sin; for the Lord Jesus would overcome the threat of death by his sacrifice of atonement. By this means, the Lord Jesus would nullify or destroy the power of Satan’s threats, and would guarantee to all his redeemed people the gift of forgiveness of sin together with eternal life. (Col. 2:15)

With this gift in their possession, the children of God could never again be intimidated by Satan’s threats of death for those who sinned, or of coming judgment and punishment after death. In the same manner, the redeemed children of God would never find themselves in slavery or bondage to the fear of death. They knew that Christ had overcome death once-for-all, that he had paid the full penalty of their sins that had demanded death, and therefore that no fear of death or of the grave remained. Rather, the redeemed people of God anticipated by death the joyful entrance into the immediate and everlasting presence of God in heaven and of his Son who loved them and had died to bring them to the Father’s heavenly dwelling.

Hebrews 2:16

It is most certain that the Son of God did not come into the world to render salvation possible for angels. In the present context, this may refer to fallen angels, including Satan—since he is the subject of the previous verses. Furthermore, the holy angels do not stand in need of help or aid from the redemption afforded by the Son of God. Assuming, therefore, that the writer is speaking here of the fallen angels, it is most certain that Christ did not die for them. There is no possibility of salvation for Satan or for any of the fallen angels or demons. According to the Scriptures, their only prospect for the future is that of their final and everlasting doom in that place prepared for them by God: namely, the lake of fire. (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 19:20; 20:10)

The phrase may possibly be understood as saying that the Son of God did not take upon himself the nature of angels. This is true, and it is certain that—had he done so—he could not have provided a satisfactory atonement for sin—for they are spirits, not flesh and blood creatures. In order to provide atonement for sin, the Son of God had to assume the form of a human being (yet without sin himself), and live and die as a perfect man—not as a disembodied holy angel. No, the Son of God did not come to help or save fallen angels, nor did he take upon himself the form of a holy angel. Rather, he assumed the form of a man—a human being—and he came to help and save the sons or descendants of Abraham; and ultimately, for all the elect among Adam’s race.

From this, we observe that the Lord Jesus did not come to die for all mankind indiscriminately, but only for a specific people. This people are referred to as ‘the descendants of Abraham.’ However, we are not to understand by this all the *natural* children or seed of Abraham, but rather all the *spiritual* children or seed of Abraham. This alone corresponds with the teaching of God’s word, including the words of the prophets, of the Lord Jesus himself, and of the apostles. In their teaching, it becomes evident that not all those who claim descent from Abraham actually belong to Abraham. That is, not

all Abraham's physical descendants are his true children. God reckons only those as the true children of Abraham who had the same kind of faith in God's word, as did the patriarch. Thus, all true believers—and they alone—are the children of Abraham. And this belief in God and in his promises encompasses faith in the promised Seed or Messiah whom God would send. Therefore, all those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ with all their hearts are the children or descendants of Abraham. They alone inherit the blessings made to Abraham concerning his (spiritual) offspring. They alone inherit the blessings of salvation promised to all those who have faith in Jesus. (Matt. 3:9; Rom. 9:6-8)

Hebrews 2:17

As we have seen, the Son of God had to be made like his brothers in every respect (except sin). Only by assuming human form, could the Lord Jesus understand human suffering and act as a merciful High Priest on behalf of his people. Only by humbling himself and becoming obedient unto death, could he offer a perfect substitutionary sacrifice for sin as a faithful High Priest unto God.

Thus, the Lord Jesus became Man—perfect, sinless Man. As perfect Man, he became the perfect Mediator between God and man. Again, as perfect Man, he became the perfect High Priest of our profession, offering up to God the only sacrifice that could propitiate and take away sin forever—the sacrifice of his own spotless life; or the shedding of his own precious blood. Thus, this perfect Man was both the High Priest *ministering before* God and the *offering to* God for the sins of the people. In the present context, 'the people' are those about whom the passage is speaking—namely, the people whom God had given to his Son, and whom he had predestined to eternal life.

Hebrews 2:18

But why was the Lord Jesus able to sympathise with our weaknesses, and understand our failings and sins? Because he himself suffered as we have suffered, says the writer to these Jewish Christians. The sinless Lord Jesus has been tempted in every respect as we are tempted—yet without sin. Therefore, he understands how we suffer when tempted. And he knows what causes us to stumble and fall into sin on so many occasions.

However, unlike his people, the Lord Jesus never stumbled or fell into sin. Nevertheless, he must have endured much greater temptations and sufferings than any human being has ever—or could ever—endure. The reason for this is that he was, and forever remains, sinless:

- *As the Son of God*, he could not sin. He could not be touched by temptation because he had no inner fallen nature, no disposition toward evil, and no proclivity toward sin or temptation.
- *As the Son of Man*—i.e., in respect of his human nature which he assumed at his incarnation—he was subject in all respects to the temptations to sin that we endure. Even so, he never yielded to temptation.

From this, we observe that temptation itself is not sin; only submitting to temptation in thought, word or deed constitutes sin. Again, failing to resist temptation, or to flee temptation, is sin. But standing against temptation is righteousness, as exemplified *par excellence* by the Lord Jesus when tempted by the evil one.

Therefore, because of his personal acquaintance with temptation (but not with sin), the Lord Jesus is able to help and deliver those who are tempted. He has destroyed the power of the evil one over death. He has destroyed likewise the power of the evil one over temptation. Thus, Satan cannot

tempt us above that we are able to endure, but with the temptation, God also provides a way of escape.

Satan cannot compel us to sin, but he can deceive and delude us into believing (wrongly) that we are too weak to resist temptation. This is a lie of the devil, and one that God's people must recognise, so that—by the grace of God—they can resist the temptation. This, too, is one of the ways in which the Lord Jesus continues to help his people, by helping them to recognise and arm themselves against the wiles of the devil as they read and study the Word of God. (1 Cor. 10:12-13; Eph. 6:10-20)

HEBREWS CHAPTER 3**Jesus Superior to Moses****Hebrews 3:1-6**

In the previous chapters, the writer has demonstrated the Lord Jesus' superiority over angels. Now, he will demonstrate the Lord's superiority over Moses.

From their Jewish backgrounds, many of the readers of this epistle considered Moses as possibly the greatest of all God's servants. Moses was the one who had met with the living God on the holy mountain, and who had brought to the people of Israel the Ten Words (or Commandments) of God engraved in tablets of stone.

Furthermore, many ordinary Jewish people reasoned, that since Moses had met God personally, and since God had delivered his holy words to Moses to give to the people, then Moses must be the principal spokesman for the Jewish people. No one could surpass the one to whom the LORD God had delivered his Law in person.

Even some of the Jewish Christians to whom this epistle is addressed may have tended to elevate Moses above his station. It seems that some of them had thought that Moses was so highly exalted in the sight of God that any other servants whom God would send would be of lesser status than Moses, or at least no greater than his equal. Furthermore, had not their own Scriptures asserted that God would raise up a prophet in their midst, *like Moses*, and *like their brothers*? If, indeed, Jesus was this Prophet, then surely he had to be like Moses, and like his brothers; i.e., one of the same kind, rank, or status? (Deut. 18:15,18)

This was indeed a grave mistake. Yes, the Son of God had to be made like his brothers—insofar as he had to become a man like them, and suffer like them. However, this did not mean that the incarnate Son of God stood on the same level as Moses and the prophets. Indeed, he who was superior to the holy angels of necessity must be superior to Moses and the prophets. For, unlike the holy angels, Moses and all the prophets were members of Adam's fallen and sinful race. Thus, in the next few verses, the writer sets out to demonstrate to the Jewish Christians the superiority of the Lord Jesus over their much-revered prophet and deliverer, Moses.

Hebrews 3:1

The writer of Hebrews has explained in chapter 2 in what way the Lord Jesus had to be made like his brothers. He has explained how the Lord Jesus had to suffer like them, and then suffer and die to make propitiation for their sin. The writer of this letter has pointed out that the Lord did not act on behalf of angels, but rather on behalf of Abraham's descendants.

Those who heard these words, or read this letter, would understand the significance of the expression, 'Abraham's descendants'. However, it was imperative that they understood this expression correctly as intimating not all of Abraham's physical seed or descendants but only those who had faith in God similar to that of Abraham: In other words, Abraham's *spiritual* seed or descendants alone were reckoned as the heirs of God's promises.

These spiritual descendants are here described as those who have received a 'heavenly calling'. This makes it abundantly clear that no one can become a child of God (i.e., a Christian) unless he or she has received and responded to this heavenly call. This is the effectual call of the Holy Spirit, acting

(generally) through the Word of God, regenerating the soul and bringing sinners to repentance and faith in the Son of God. Without this heavenly calling, none can ever be known as the children of God, the heirs of salvation, or the true spiritual children of Abraham, and therefore as those to whom the promises and the blessings of the Gospel pertain. However, the writer is assuring his readers that they indeed did share in this heavenly calling, and therefore are the true children of Abraham and of God. For this reason, and for this reason alone, the writer can refer to these Jewish believers as 'holy brothers'—for, by virtue of their calling in Christ Jesus, they have been set apart from the world and sanctified to God.

The writer now appeals to these believers to '*consider Jesus...*' That is, they were to think most carefully and seriously about the person and position of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, they had believed on him. But had they appreciated fully just how holy he was (and is) and how highly exalted he was (and is)? Had they realised the distinction between the holy Son of God and the prophets whom God had sent to the people in previous generations? The Son of God was sinless and undefiled. The prophets whom God had sent to the people—and this included Moses—had all been raised up from among fallen and sinful mankind.

Thus, the writer declares, '*Consider Jesus....*' Think most carefully about his person and work.

'*Consider Jesus, the Apostle...*' This is the only place in which this form of the word 'apostle' is used in relation to the Lord Jesus.

'*Consider Jesus, the Apostle...*' The word, 'Jesus' means 'Yahweh Saves' or 'Yahweh [is] Saviour'. The word 'apostle' means 'one who is sent or dispatched by another', whether as an envoy, ambassador, delegate or messenger. In later use, it came to mean 'a person sent by another (usually, as a government ambassador and spokesman) bearing plenipotentiary authority to represent that other person's name or government and to act on his or its behalf'. (Bearing in mind that the apostles of the Lord Jesus were inspired by the Holy Spirit to preach, teach and write infallibly the very words of God, the latter meaning of 'apostle' is probably the more appropriate meaning here, even although this use may not have been so common at the time.)

Jesus is designated 'the Apostle'. He is *the* Sent One of God. He is the One whom the Father sent into the world with full power and authority to represent his name and to act on his behalf. However, no other prophet ever possessed this level of power or authority from God—not even Moses. All previous prophets and servants of God could only declare the words that God had given them, and act as God enabled them. Unlike them, the words that the Lord Jesus declared personally were the very words of God himself. They were not merely the words of God relayed to the people indirectly through human messengers—as with the prophets, including Moses.

Again, as 'the Apostle' whom God had authorised to act in his name, the works that the Lord Jesus performed were the very works of God himself. Unlike ordinary human servants of God, the Lord Jesus had the power within himself to perform miraculous deeds in God's name and for his glory. (When the Lord Jesus declared that he could only do the works of his Father, he was not declaring that he *could not* act without his Father's aid, but that he *would not* act independently of the will and purposes of his Father. Thus, in everything that he did, the Son's works corresponded exactly with the will of his Father in heaven.)

Thus we see that the Lord Jesus is shown to be 'the Apostle' above all others: superior by far than any other 'sent ones' of God—whether apostles or prophets.

Next, the writer refers to Jesus as our 'High Priest'. The Lord Jesus was the High Priest above all others. Others were chosen from among men—sinful men. As such, these high priests needed to make

atonement first for their own sin and then for the sins of the people. However, our High Priest—the Lord Jesus—was chosen, appointed and sent by God. Again, our High Priest did not have to atone for his own sins, for he was (and is) perfectly sinless. Thus, our High Priest was able both to act as our Perfect Representative and Mediator before God and to offer to God a perfect and unblemished sacrifice of atonement—the shedding of his own blood and the sacrifice of his own life. Again, unlike the earthly high priest who ministered continually in the temple, our High Priest offered one sacrifice for sin for ever and presented his blood at the mercy seat in the heavenly sanctuary. By this one atoning sacrifice, the exalted Lord Jesus has taken away sin for all time. Now, he is seated in glory at his Father's own right hand. However, we will discuss this more fully in its proper place.

The Lord Jesus is the Apostle and High Priest *'of our confession'* (or profession). This—asserts the writer of this epistle—is the One whom we Jewish believers acknowledge as our Messiah or Saviour. Christ Jesus is the One whom we confess as our Lord and Redeemer. We believe that he is the promised Anointed One of God. We believe that he came to save his people from their sins. And, through faith, we all have been united with him in his death and resurrection. We are all the children of God, and the true spiritual children of Abraham, our forefather.

Thus, says the writer, *'consider Jesus'*. Consider who and what he is, both in himself and in relation to his redeemed and holy people. Consider seriously and carefully what is involved in our confession of faith in him.

Hebrews 3:2

There can be no question but that the Lord Jesus remained utterly faithful and obedient to his Father. In everything that he did, he reflected or executed the will and purposes of God in heaven. He failed in nothing, for he could not fail. He accomplished everything that the Father had sent him into the world to accomplish.

It may be argued that Moses too remained faithful in the service of God. This is true in a relative sense, but it is certainly not true in an absolute sense, as it was with the Lord Jesus. The Jews placed their faith in Moses and in the law that Moses had delivered to them. (Even so, they failed to obey the law.) Moses, in whom they trusted, was faithful to God insofar as his human weaknesses and faults would allow. However, he was not faultless in his service to God. Neither was he perfect in his personal life. Yet, within these limits, Moses remained faithful to the LORD who had appointed him. (Num. 12:7)

The verse says, *"Moses...was faithful in all God's house."* That is, Moses was faithful to the LORD in all that God had called and appointed him to do in respect of his people. (Here, 'God's house' is taken to represent the household or people of God, rather than a physical structure such as the tabernacle, etc. (cf. 1 Cor. 3:9; 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 2:5)) The writer will have more to say on this subject in chapters 5-7 of this epistle.

Hebrews 3:3

Jesus is counted worthy of far greater honour and glory than Moses. Even although Moses remained faithful, his faithfulness as a servant of God could never be compared to that of the incarnate Son of God—*the* Servant of the LORD. Moses acted as a human representative, leader and deliverer of God's people from bondage in Egypt; but all his actions were contaminated by his sinful nature. The Lord Jesus, however—the Captain of our salvation—delivered his people from their bondage to sin and death, finally and forever. Unlike Moses, all Jesus' thoughts and actions were perfect, and remained completely uncontaminated by sin. His faithfulness to God was a perfect or unfailing faithfulness. His faithfulness to God was not limited by the constraints of a fallen, sinful nature.

Thus, we can begin to see just how vastly superior the Lord Jesus stood in relation to Moses. This, too, was what the hearers or readers of this epistle had to learn. They had to accept that, although Moses was God's appointed servant, he nevertheless was a servant who was subject to failure and sin. Conversely, they had to accept that the Lord Jesus was (and remained) faultless and sinless. Although tempted severely, the Lord did not fail or sin. Rather, he remained absolutely pure in character and conduct, and steadfastly faithful to his heavenly Father. (1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5)

From this, these Jewish believers would begin to understand why Jesus was counted of far greater worth, merit, honour and glory than even their highly esteemed Moses. Now, they could begin to comprehend the effects that the fallen sinful nature had on even the best-regarded of human beings, such as Moses, and how different their lives were from that of the Lord Jesus who never sinned but who lived an absolutely perfect, flawless or impeccably righteous life. (Heb. 3:5-6)

The writer of Hebrews uses another parallel: A person may behold and marvel at a splendidly constructed building. He may praise the outstanding design and gaze in admiration at the magnificence of the structure. Yet, the honour and the glory attending the physical structure pales into insignificance in relation to the honour and glory that attends the one who designed that structure, and who made its magnificence and splendour a reality. Such praise and honour belongs to the architect, rather than to the building—or even to the builder, who is merely implementing the architect's designs and plans. From this analogy, we may see Moses as the builder (following and implementing the Architect's plans). But the Architect is Christ (or God acting through his Son). He above all others is worthy of the highest praise, honour and glory.

Once again, therefore, these Jewish believers could begin to see that—far from being on a comparable level with Moses—the Lord Jesus was superior by far to Moses in every respect, just as he was to the holy angels. (Col. 1:18; Heb. 1:4,9; 2:7)

Hebrews 3:4

At this point—and in the form of a parenthesis—the writer acknowledges that all human structures have been built by someone, and behind each of these structures has been a human designer or architect. Sometimes, this designer has been no more than the same individual who constructed his home—perhaps in the form of a very basic dwelling house. At other times, however, professional architects have been involved to design the building and to draw up blueprints. However, none of the structures—from the most basic to the most magnificent—ever came into being of its own accord. All of them were designed and built by human enterprise and human expertise.

In a much greater sense, nothing in the created universe ever came into being of its own accord. Everything in creation had a Designer or Architect—and that Designer or Architect is God. The entire created universe was designed by him and made by him. The entire created universe is now being

governed and controlled by God: for, unlike human architects and builders, God does not cease to take care of his creation once it has been established. On the contrary, the Lord sustains his creation by his sovereign and almighty power. (Heb. 1:2-3,10)

Hebrews 3:5

(Num. 12:7-8)

Returning now to his main subject—the superiority of the Lord Jesus over Moses—the writer concedes that Moses was faithful in God’s house. However, at this point, he adds that Moses was faithful ‘*as a servant...*’ Not only was he a human being subject to sin and failure, but also—when acting on behalf of God’s people, and in relation to God—Moses was no greater than a humble servant within God’s house. Even although he had been chosen, appointed and commissioned by God, Moses remained a servant in the presence of God. Everything that God commanded him to do, he was obliged to do for himself, and to teach the people of Israel to do. Everywhere that God directed him to go, he was obliged to go and to lead the people of Israel on their way. In all things, therefore, Moses served God. Later, he was to follow the LORD’s express directions in everything shown to him in the holy mountain, again acting as a servant—faithful in the ministry to which the LORD had called him.

As a faithful servant of the LORD, Moses (and Aaron) taught the people of Israel everything that pertained to the commandments and ordinances that he had received from God. He explained to the people the spiritual meaning or significance of all the rites, rituals, ordinances and ceremonies that God had given them. Thus, he was preparing the people to understand more fully the ways of God, the righteousness, truth and justice of God, and the necessity of atonement for sin in order to experience the grace, mercy and love of God. In all these ways and more, Moses—the servant of God—taught the people faithfully all things relating to their relationship with the LORD and what he required of them. In this and other ways, Moses was bearing testimony to all those truths that God had revealed, and which the Lord would reveal more fully to future generations. Yet, essentially, the things of a ritual and ceremonial nature that were declared by Moses to the people were the things that were fulfilled in Christ and abrogated by him. (Cf. Heb. 8:5; 9:8,23; 10:1)

Hebrews 3:6a

Unlike Moses, however, Christ was not a servant but a Son.... Furthermore, the Lord Jesus was not a Servant or even a Son *in* God’s house, but a Son *over* God’s house. Here, the contrast between the Son of God and Moses is unmistakable and complete. Moses acted *in* God’s house *as a servant*. Jesus, however, acts *over* God’s house *as a Son*. Clearly, the Son stands far above a servant. The Son is an immediate member of the family and an heir of the inheritance. A servant, at best, is a worker within the household with no rights of entitlement to the inheritance. Thus, the writer demonstrates once again the superiority of the Lord Jesus over Moses. Thus, too, these Jewish Christians must come to realise that Jesus was not just another servant of God like Moses, but—unlike Moses—Jesus was the unique and holy Son of God.

It may be objected that—speaking through the prophet Isaiah—the Lord God describes his Anointed One (the Lord Jesus) as ‘*...my Servant...*’; i.e., the Servant of the LORD (Isa. 42:1; 52:13; 53:11); and that Jesus therefore must be a servant like Moses.

This is true only in part. It is true that the promised Anointed One (or Christ) was designated as ‘*My Servant*’ (i.e., the LORD’s Servant)—because the incarnate Son of God was to become obedient to his Father in all things relating to the salvation of sinful men and women. In this way, the Lord Jesus was faithful to God as a Servant—but as a Servant *par excellence*. The service offered by the Lord Jesus

to his Father was a voluntary and humble submission for the sake of those whom he had come to redeem.

The Lord Jesus' status as the Servant of the LORD, however, *applied only to his true humanity*. As the eternal Son of God, the Lord Jesus obeys his Father in everything. However, as the Son, he is never considered as a Servant of God in any way whatsoever. As the Son, Jesus is co-equal with his Father in power, glory and eternity. (John 1:1; Phil. 2:6; Col. 1:15-18; Heb. 1:3) Therefore, as the eternal Son of God, he is a full member of the Godhead, and as infinitely superior to Moses as is God the Father. Thus again we see the vast difference between Moses the servant of God and Jesus the Son of God. There is no meaningful comparison between the two. This was a signal truth that some of these Jewish believers to whom Hebrews was addressed needed to recognise and to accept.

Hebrews 3:6b

The writer continues verse 3 by declaring that these believers are God's 'house': That is, they constitute the household or (spiritual) building of God.

Here, the writer is not using the metaphor of a house viewed as the dwelling place of God (whether the earthly or the heavenly temple), but as a house (or household) viewed as the people of God. This latter form of the metaphor would have been very familiar to these believers. It had been used in the Old Testament, and it had been used frequently in the New Testament, directly and indirectly, in the teaching of the Lord Jesus and of his apostles, including Peter and Paul.

It is quite possible that—as Jewish believers—the readers of this letter would also have been familiar with Peter's express teaching in this regard, since he was the apostle to the Jews. And, of course, Peter makes it clear that all believers are like living stones, built up together into a holy temple of the Lord. Paul also develops a very similar theme, where he speaks of the believer's body as the temple of God and the dwelling place of God, the Holy Spirit.

Thus, these believers were being told that God no longer dwelt in a temple (or tabernacle made by hands according to the pattern shown to Moses on the holy mount), but within the hearts and lives of all his redeemed and sanctified people. And, each of these believers taken collectively constituted the house or church of God, among whom the living God made his presence known in power and glory. (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:22; 1 Pet. 2:5)

Now, the writer adds a rider or conditional clause to what he has just said. We are his house—we are members of his body and of his church—if *indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope...* (ESV); i.e., if we hold fast our confidence (or courage, boldness, or fearlessness) of which we boast—or, on which is grounded—our hope or assurance of salvation in Christ. (Heb. 10:23-25)

This part of the verse seems to imply the possibility of failing to hold fast our faith in Christ and consequently of falling away from the faith. However, it is not as it seems at first sight. The writer is addressing those whom he believes are the genuine people of God. He is emphasising the responsibility of individual believers to demonstrate the reality of their profession by their continued perseverance in the faith and in holiness of life. (Matt. 10:22; Phil. 2:12-13; 2 Pet. 1:5-8)

Nevertheless, the writer has to bear in mind that even among the genuine people of God may be those who are false professors of faith. In their case, of course, it is possible—if not probable—that they could fail to hold fast such 'confidence' or 'faith' as they professed. (Ultimately, of course, the Lord would separate the wheat from the chaff, if these false professors had not already separated themselves from God's church). These, then, could fail to hold fast to their (false) profession—and it

ought to be no surprise to God's true people to find such things happening from time to time. (Matt. 3:12; cf. Heb. 6:4-9; 10:26-31)

God's true people, however, are never likely to fail to hold fast to their confidence in Christ or their hope in Christ. Even although they may often stumble in the way, they cannot fall away from their faith; for they are being upheld by an Almighty hand, and it is impossible that even one of his redeemed children should perish or fail to appear at last in the presence of God. (John 10:28-29) Furthermore, the very fact that they persevere to the end is proof positive that they are the genuine children of God. For only those who are not truly regenerated can fail to persevere in the faith or hold fast their confidence to the end. (Incidentally, in this verse, the phrase *'to the end'* does not appear in all the Greek manuscripts. Nevertheless, perseverance in the faith to the end is taught elsewhere by the Lord Jesus.)

It was essential for these Jewish believers (and us) to realise that the grace of God toward his people does not provide a licence to sin or to live the Christian life with careless indifference. The Lord's redeemed people are a holy people, separated from sin and the world and set apart to God. They cannot presume upon the grace of God to deliver them from deliberate or wilful sin, disobedience, rebellion, or persistent and inexcusable doubt or unbelief. Thus, God's Word here is emphasising the absolutely necessity to live a holy, godly and separated life, and to assume full responsibility for ensuring that we do not turn aside from this way of life (as some of these professing believers were being tempted to do), but to persevere in it—by the grace of God.

Again, the writer may have been considering the case hypothetically. Among the believers addressed were many who were very familiar with the teachings of Moses but less so with the teaching of the Lord Jesus and his apostles. Again, some among them may have failed to progress as they should have done with these teachings, and may still have been at a spiritually immature stage in their faith. Even worse, they may have been showing little inclination to grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and to progress in holiness of life.

To such as these, the writer may have added the rider concerning 'holding fast their confidence, etc... [to the end]' in order to awaken them from their spiritual apathy or slumber and cause them to search the Scriptures diligently to learn and to believe the truths concerning their salvation, and to what the Lord and his apostles had said about the necessity of bringing forth fruit as the evidence of their repentance and faith. By thus searching the Scriptures, they would come to learn about the many people who professed faith in God or in his Son but who nevertheless did not belong to God and about whom his Son would declare most solemnly, *'...I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'* (Matt. 7:23 ESV) Thus, too, these believers would come to realise how important it was to continue making progress in the things of the Spirit, of bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit, and of making their calling and election sure by showing that they were indeed holding fast their confidence in the Lord Jesus unto the end. (2 Pet. 1:10)

Hebrews 3:7-11**Hebrews 3:7-8**

(Ps. 95:7-11; cf. Heb. 3:12-19; 4:1-13)

Now, the writer cites a specific case from the example of Israel, and uses it to warn these believers of the danger of failing to heed God's voice or to become fully acquainted with God's Word. The passage cited is from Psalm 95, and reads as follows:

Psalms 95:7-11 (ESV)

(7) For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice,

(8) do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,

(9) when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.

(10) For forty years I loathed that generation and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways."

(11) Therefore I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest."

The psalmist had been confessing that the LORD was the God of Israel, and that they were the sheep of his pasture. The inspired writer of the psalm continued by warning the people not to neglect the Word of God in their day, as their forefathers had done while God had been testing them in past days in the wilderness. Yet, instead of submitting to God's loving and tender hand of discipline, Israel had turned against him, put the Lord to the test, and provoked him to anger by their sins and unbelief in his word.

The psalmist then cites just one example of Israel's waywardness, stubbornness and unbelief: their wilful and inexcusable rebellion against God (directed against his servant Moses) at Meribah or Massah. (Ex. 17:1-7) Ultimately, because of their persistent unbelief and rebellion, God had punished that entire generation of adults over 20 years of age by refusing them entry to the blessings of the Promised Land. (Num. 14:1ff)

Thus, both the psalmist and the writer of Hebrews are warning the professing people of God not to repeat this sin. Granted, some or many among those who perished in the wilderness may not have been the true children of God. Although delivered from Egypt as a nation, some or many among the Israelites may not have been redeemed and delivered from sin personally. A number may have been false professors of the faith. If this was the case, then they died in the wilderness because of their unbelief in God and in his redemptive power. They perished in their sin eternally because they did not have the life of God or the Spirit of God within them.

Nevertheless, others who died in the wilderness were indeed God's children—although they were disobedient and disbelieving children. As happened many centuries later in the church at Corinth, God took their lives from them as a punishment for their repeated, wilful and evil sin. (1 Cor. 11:28-32)

It may be argued that they therefore fared better than those who were spared, since they would have entered into the presence of God after their death. However, we must bear in mind that—at the

judgment for rewards—these people, although saved, will forfeit much if not all of the blessings which would have been theirs had they remained faithful to God. Therefore, they do not enjoy the same measure of blessedness as those who have honoured God and served him faithfully, persevering in the faith unto the end. (1 Cor. 3:12-15)

Hebrews 3:9-10

Verse 9 states that God was grieved or angry with the people of Israel, because—over a forty year period—they had persisted in putting God to the test by their unbelief, disobedience and rebellion; or, they had tried (tested) God to see how far they could go. (cf. 1 Cor. 10:9)

This verse also says that the people always—or constantly—went astray in their hearts. However, it adds a reason for their waywardness—‘...*they have not known my ways*’ (ESV). God declares that Israel had not known his ways, in spite of the fact that Moses had been leading them, and that he had taught them all the ways of the LORD. In what way, then, could Israel have failed to know God’s ways?

Because, although they had heard the word of God taught them by Moses, they had not listened to God’s word. Although Moses had delivered to them the very commandments that God had engraved on the tablets of stone, they had rejected God’s commandments and disobeyed his words. Indeed, even as Moses descended the mountain with the Words of God, the people of Israel were to found engaged in the worship of a golden calf, and indulging in pagan revelry of the vilest kind. They had hardened their hearts against the word of God, and refused to believe the truth or the promises of God. (Exod. 32:1-35)

Therefore, for their repeated and wilful unbelief and disobedience over a period of forty years, the LORD became angry with them and judged them. This was why that entire adult generation of Israel perished in the wilderness. (Jos. 5:6) This was the example that the present day Jewish believers had to take to heart; for, if God had not spared his people when they had sinned in that day, neither would he spare his people should they sin wilfully and repeatedly today. Thus, anyone who professes the name of the Lord must depart from iniquity. (2 Tim. 2:19)

Thus, it was essential that these Jewish Christians did not repeat the sins of their ancestors by refusing to hear and heed the voice of the Holy Spirit. God had remained patient with his people for forty years. He had given them ample time and opportunity to repent of their sins, and to experience the many blessings of this life that he had assured them of in connection with the Promised Land. Ultimately, however, and because of their wilful refusal to repent, believe and obey the word of God over so long a period, the LORD judged his people. Not only did they forfeit the blessings of the Promised Land, they also forfeited their lives on this earth—together with manifold blessings in heaven that might otherwise have been theirs in abundance.

The Jewish Christians knew what had happened to disobedient Israel. And, since God does not change, they must have understood that this could happen to God’s people today, should they prove persistently unbelieving and disobedient. Genuine believers would not forfeit their eternal salvation. Nevertheless, those who sinned wilfully or repeatedly against the Lord could forfeit their present physical life along with many of the spiritual blessings of this life and together with some or all of the rewards laid up for God’s people in heaven. They would be saved—but they would be saved only as by fire, or only as one escaping through the flames. (1 Cor. 3:15)

Nor should these Jewish Christians be tempted to renounce their faith in Christ and turn back to Judaism—just as Israel desired sinfully to return to the old familiar way of life in Egypt. Those who re-

nounce Christ also renounce God. It would have been impossible for these believers to have returned to Judaism and still have maintained fellowship with the living God. Without the Christ of God, there is no salvation from God.

Hebrews 3:11

In his anger or wrath, God had pledged on his solemn oath that these people would never enter his rest: i.e., the promised land of Canaan. (Num. 14:20-23, 27-30; 32:10-13; Deut. 1:35; cf. Heb. 3:18-19)

However, we may also understand God’s rest in a spiritual sense. Ultimately, indeed, the writer will use the analogy of God’s rest on earth to foreshadow a far greater and eternal rest in heaven. (Heb. 4:9)

Because of their repeated and wilful sin, the LORD God ordained that Israel should never experience his rest: i.e., they would fail to experience the peace, tranquillity and joy that accompany forgiveness of sin together with trust in and obedience to God. Because of their rebellion, they could not experience the peace of God in their hearts, but brought upon themselves a life of spiritual poverty, misery, bitterness and hardness of heart, resulting in a distinct insensitivity to, and disinclination for, the things of God. (Isa. 48:18; Rom. 8:6; cf. Rom. 1:18-32)

Such is the punishment of sin upon the lives of those who cherish and practise it, and who refuse to respond to the warnings of God in his Word. Such was the lesson that some of these Hebrew Christians had to learn, if they were not to commit a kindred sin—perhaps by becoming disheartened, discouraged and ultimately disbelieving in relation the Word and promises of God.

Hebrews 3:12-19

Hebrews 3:12

All things written in the past were written for our instruction, admonition and learning. (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11)

What the writer of Hebrews had just related concerning Israel in a past age, he now applies to God’s people today. First, however, the writer makes it plain that he considers his readers or hearers as fellow-believers, by addressing them as *‘brothers’*. Then, he adds, *‘Take care’*—apply the utmost diligence—to ensure that there is not in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart.

The words translated by the ESV as *‘evil, unbelieving heart’* are literally, *καρδία πονηρὰ ἀπιστίας*, i.e., *an evil heart of unbelief*. This is a singularly unusual expression, which the writer is employing to emphasise the gravity of an evil, unbelieving heart—especially among those who professed to know God, as did the Israelites in the wilderness. It was this *evil heart of unbelief* that caused the Israelites to fall away (or depart or apostatise) from God; i.e., from their professed faith in God: and it was this sin that led to God’s judgment on that entire adult generation, except for the LORD’s faithful servants, Joshua and Caleb, and the children and young people of that generation.

Israel of old may have welcomed their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt, especially when it had been accompanied by God’s assurance of abundant blessings in the Promised Land. However, Israel had not been prepared for the rigours of the road, or the hardships of the way. They had expected Moses to lead them straight to Canaan, without experiencing trials on their journey. Yet, of necessity, the way of the LORD must involve training, trial, suffering and sorrow—for these all form part of the Lord’s loving and caring discipline of his people. However, when the LORD presented apparently in-

surmountable difficulties to the people, they grumbled and complained at the obstacles in their way instead of trusting the LORD to deliver them or to provide for them. When most of the spies told Israel of the apparent impossibility of possessing Canaan because of the people then occupying the land, Israel believed their pessimistic report and became utterly despondent. In spite of the encouraging reports provided by Joshua and Caleb, they disbelieved the promises of God concerning the land, and began to rebel more and more against the LORD and against his Word. Had they believed in the word, the power, and the strength of Almighty God, nothing would have been impossible for them.

Thus, warns the writer of this epistle, take great care lest there be found in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart. The promises of God in Christ are Yea and Amen. They cannot fail to be accomplished, but must be fulfilled in every detail. Therefore, what God has begun in his people, he will most certainly complete—namely, their final salvation in glory. (2 Cor. 1:20; Heb. 5:9; 1 Pet. 1:5) Therefore, God's people must not faint or grow weary by the difficulties of the way, or imagine that God cannot cope with seemingly impossible circumstances in their lives. God who delivered Israel will surely deliver us. But God who judged Israel will surely judge us if we disbelieve and rebel against God as they did. Thus, the writer exhorts the Jewish Christians not to repeat Israel's folly, and thereby to fall away from their confidence in the living God. For, if God's people were to fall away from believing God, this would be to invite the judgment of God. Such judgment could lead to the loss of a believer's physical life, although not to the loss of their eternal salvation.

Hebrews 3:13

Here, the writer encourages each of the believers individually to exhort one another in the faith. The verb translated 'exhort' (παρακαλέω, *parakaleo*) is a verb in the imperative mood meaning 'to urge strongly', 'to beseech', 'to entreat', or 'to encourage'. The believers were being encouraged to support and strengthen one another in the teachings that they had received, and in their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—the High Priest who was superior to all others, and eternal in his offices. However, the Jewish Christians were to entreat or encourage each other on a daily basis. Thus, they were to search and learn from the Scriptures, and to share the Word with one another, not only at their regular worship meetings but also in their homes and elsewhere, whenever opportunity afforded. (Heb. 10:23)

By thus encouraging one another from the truths of God's Word, these believers would remind each other daily of the promises of God and of all the blessings and benefits bestowed upon them by virtue of their union with God's Son. Thus, by feeding daily on the precious Word of God, these saints would be much less likely to stray from the truth or to become despondent or disheartened through ignorance of the truth and of the promised blessings. Nor would they be ignorant of the sorrows and suffering involved in their election or calling to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Rather, being more fully informed of these things from the teaching of the Word, they would be much better prepared to meet the onslaughts of the devil and the discouragements and disparagements of the world. Thus, by encouraging one another to pursue a righteous and godly life, they would be less likely to be led astray from the truth, to disbelieve the Word or the promises of God—as did Israel, or to be hardened or to make themselves insensitive to the things of God by the deceitfulness (or ruses, schemes or stratagems) of sin. (Cf. Acts 14:22)

Hebrews 3:14

(14) For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. (ESV)

To understand this verse in its wider context, let us consider the words spoken by the Lord Jesus himself:

Matthew 24:9-13 (ESV)

(9) "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. (10) And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. (11) And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. (12) And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. (13) *But the one who endures to the end will be saved.* (Emphasis added; cf. Matt. 10:22; Mark 13:13; Col. 1:23; 1 Tim. 4:16)

These verses do not imply that a believer can lose his or her salvation. It is simply an assertion that those who belong to Christ will persevere unfailingly in their calling and faith, whereas those who make profession of faith in Christ—but who do not genuinely belong to him—can and will fall away from their (false) profession. This is illustrated most aptly in the case of Judas Iscariot. According to the sovereign purposes of God, Judas had been chosen as one of the Lord's followers. However, unlike the other disciples, Judas had never been effectually called by the Spirit of God. Nevertheless, this man professed himself a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ. He followed the Lord with the other disciples. He acted as their treasurer (although his secret thefts from the moneybag showed the true character and condition of his heart or mind). Again, he went forth with the other disciples working miracles in the name of the Lord Jesus. Yet, for all this, Judas Iscariot was an unregenerate man. Eventually, this became clear when he apostatised from his profession of faith, abandoned the fellowship of believers, and betrayed the One whom he had professed to know and love. (Matt. 10:4; 26:14,25,47; Luke 22:3)

This is the kind of person of whom both the Lord Jesus and the writer to the Hebrews is speaking. This person may not be as openly wicked as was Judas Iscariot. Nevertheless, like Judas, this kind of person makes a profession of faith; he may serve or hold office within the church or fellowship of believers (as did Judas); he may be considered by other believers as a true child of God (as was Judas by the disciples, although not by the Lord Jesus (John 6:64)). Nevertheless, because such a person has never been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, he is still in his sins, still alienated from God and from his Son, and still abiding under the wrath and condemnation of God. (John 3:36; Rom. 1:18, 8:9b) Ultimately, his true state and character will be revealed—either by his apostatising from his (false) profession of faith and forsaking the fellowship of the church, or by the coming of the Lord in his glory when the angels will be sent forth to separate the wheat from the chaff. (Matt. 3:12, 13:49)

These, then, are the kind of people who are not likely to hold fast their original confidence (in this case, a false profession of faith) firm to the end. Those who are without the Spirit of God cannot live a righteous or godly life, because the Holy Spirit has not called or regenerated them, nor is he indwelling or sanctifying them. Therefore, their seemingly 'upright' life is a sham and pretence to others—but not to God. We should be aware, however, that such people are to be found throughout the church of God worldwide. Some of them pose a great danger to the true people of God, who believe these imposters to be genuine children of God. (Cf. Matt. 23:27; Rom. 16:18)

Conversely, those who truly belong to Christ, and who share with him, will hold their original confidence (or faith) in the Lord firm to the end. They can do no other, for they are being upheld by an Almighty hand. They are the sheep of his pasture. Not one of these sheep can ever perish. Nor can any ever be accounted missing from the heavenly fold. (John 10:28-30) They must persevere unto the end, for God is their strength and stay. Although, often, they may stumble in the way, yet they cannot fall away from their faith or fail to reach their heavenly abode. God has promised them eternal life in his presence. The Son has gone to prepare a place for each one of his people. (John 14:1-3) Therefore, those who belong to Christ must keep the faith until the end—for he who promised is faithful. (Heb. 10:23)

Hebrews 3:15

Referring again to the example of Israel in the desert, the writer of this epistle exhorts these believers not only to *hear* but also to *heed*—or believe and obey—the word of the Lord today (at the present time), and each day of their lives, until they entered the Lord's presence in glory.

In this context, the word *'if'* (...*"Today, if you hear..."* etc.) does not imply any possibility of doubt, or of not hearing God's voice. God's voice was to be heard every time the Scriptures were read or preached. Rather, the writer is saying, *'Since you hear his voice...'* (speaking to you in the Scriptures), then heed it and respond to it in faith, trust and obedience. These believers were not to become like Israel in the desert, who heard God's Word, but who disbelieved God's promises, rebelled against the truth, and provoked God to anger. Rather, the Jewish believers are being exhorted to make their calling and election sure by persevering in the faith and in holiness of life, and by believing and being obedient to every word spoken by the Lord in the Scriptures of Truth. (2 Pet. 1:10)

Hebrews 3:16-17

The writer asks who it was that heard God's Word in the desert, but who disobeyed and rebelled against that Word. It was the same people to whom God had demonstrated something of his almighty power and glory, when he had delivered them from Egypt's bondage. That very generation had experienced personally the deliverance of the LORD. They had seen what the destroying angel had done to the Egyptians, and how that same destroying angel had passed over every house bearing the blood of sacrifice on the lintel and doorposts. Thus, they had witnessed both the salvation of the LORD and the judgment of the LORD. (Exod. 12:11-13) They knew that nothing was impossible to the LORD, and that he who had delivered them with an outstretched arm from the wrath of the Egyptians, could and would bring them to the land that he had promised on oath to give them. Yet, when they met with difficulties on their journey, they became discouraged and bitter, refused to listen to God's Word through Moses, and rebelled against the LORD who had delivered them.

Who, then, were these people? They were those whom God had redeemed as a nation and led forth by his Almighty hand from the land of Egypt. They were those whom God had spared by the atoning blood. They were, therefore, 'the people of God'—although, undoubtedly, many among the nation of Israel were not true believers, but mere professors of the faith. However, it was not only these false professors but also the true people of God who refused to heed God's Word, who disbelieved his promises, and who provoked him to anger. These same people hardened their hearts or made their minds insensitive to the truth by their repeated unbelief, disobedience and rebellion. And these same people brought upon themselves the holy and righteous judgment of God.

From this, we learn that even the redeemed people of God can depart from the ways of the Lord and rebel against the truth. In the process, they forfeit the Lord's blessings on their lives. If they repent of their wickedness and folly (as did King David), then the Lord will forgive them, cleanse them and re-

store them to close fellowship with himself. However, if they continue repeatedly in their sin, then they will harden their hearts against God's Word and the truths it contains. Ultimately, if they persist in their sin, God will judge them as their deeds deserve. Like Israel, they may perish in the desert (of their sin and its consequences). God may take their lives in order to preserve their souls, and to prevent them from causing further harm to his church or to its sacred ordinances. This was what happened to those believers at Corinth who despised the Lord's Table and who were in danger of bringing the Lord's Supper into disrepute by their outrageous and scandalous behaviour. (1 Cor. 11:27-32)

As we have intimated, this does not mean that those who were the genuine people of God forfeited their salvation. God had judged them, as their deeds had deserved. Consequently, they had forfeited their usefulness on earth, their capacity to serve the Lord on earth and to gain rewards for faithful and consistent service. Because of their evil behaviour and sin against the Lord and against his people, they had become of no use to the people or church of God. God took their lives—and with it the prospect of great reward in heaven. Yes, they would find a place in heaven—for the Lord had secured a place for all his people. However, they would forfeit most—if not all—of the rewards that might have been theirs in glory. They would be saved—'yet so as by fire'. (1 Cor. 3:15)

Hebrews 3:18

Continuing his series of rhetorical questions, the writer intimates that the people who failed to enter into God's rest were the same people whom the LORD had redeemed from Egypt. Those whom God had redeemed from Egypt, and to whom the LORD had promised further and abundant blessings in a new country, failed to inherit these blessings. By their unbelief and rebellion, they failed to find the rest that God had promised—not only in the physical sense in the Promised Land, but also in a spiritual sense. Instead of their redemption resulting in rest and peace with God, it resulted in turmoil and distress of soul because of the people's wilful unbelief, unfaithfulness, disobedience and rebellion. '*There is no peace for the wicked...*'—as the prophet Isaiah was to say much later of another generation of the professing people of God. (Isa. 48:22; 57:21)

Clearly, then, those of the Lord's redeemed people who behave like Israel stand to forfeit some or many of the blessings and benefits that God has promised to bestow upon them, or that might have been theirs through their union with Christ Jesus. Furthermore, those believers who sin wilfully against the Lord forfeit peace in their soul and inherit instead turmoil and distress of heart and mind. This is one of the consequences of unconfessed and unforgiven sin; and, in this respect, Israel's example should stand as an example to God's people today. This was the lesson that the writer to the Hebrews was endeavouring to impart to these Jewish Christians.

Again, we ought to bear in mind that God had sworn on oath that Israel should not enter his rest. Thus, the people of the Lord today ought to take great care lest they offend wilfully and wickedly, as did Israel, thereby forfeiting peace of soul together with spiritual and physical rest. A truly regenerated child of God will not forfeit his or her salvation, since the Lord has paid for their redemption with his own blood and since he has pledged most solemnly to protect them and bring them safely to glory. Nevertheless, those who rebel consistently against the Lord and who remain wilfully unfaithful and disobedient to him may forfeit much of the Lord's blessings, both in this life and in the life to come.

Hebrews 3:19

Here, we are told that, because of their unbelief, Israel failed to inherit the rest that God had promised. But in what ways had Israel demonstrated such rank unbelief? They had failed to trust God in making provision for their every need on their journey through life (represented by their sojourn in the desert). When they lacked water (representing the necessities of life), they had complained bitterly against Moses, the LORD's servant. In reality, however, they had been directing their complaints and bitterness against the LORD himself, since God had been proving Israel's faith in him and in his word.

Israel, however, had failed the test, not only on this occasion but also on many others. When they had lacked food, they had failed to trust in God to provide them with food. And when God had fed them with meat and bread from heaven, they had complained about receiving the same food every day.

Yet, these unfaithful people had failed to observe that—had they believed God and been obedient to him—they would not now have been wandering in the desert. Had they trusted the LORD to give them the Promised Land—instead of complaining that the occupants were too strong for them—they would by now have entered into the enjoyment of God's rest, together with all the blessings to be found in *'a land flowing with milk and honey.'* (Exod. 3:8) But, in all these ways and more, these people who professed to know and belong to God had not only disbelieved the word of the LORD but also had rebelled wickedly and ungratefully against the LORD and against his word. They had refused to accept that the God who had delivered them from Egypt with an outstretched arm could provide not only for their every need in the desert, but also grant them possession of the Promised Land. Thus, for their persistent and inexcusable unbelief and rebellion, that entire adult generation over 20 years of age suffered the consequences. They lost all that might have been theirs in abundance, and they forfeited their lives on this earth.

HEBREWS CHAPTER 4**God's Rest Requires Faith and Obedience****Hebrews 4:1-5**

In this chapter, the writer begins to apply the lessons learned from Israel to the spiritual lives of his readers—the dispersed Jewish Christians.

Hebrews 4:1

God has pledged most solemnly that all whom he calls to faith in his Son will enter into his rest. This is the essence of the Gospel—the same Gospel that these believers had heard, and to which they had responded with all their heart and soul. Thus, all who had accepted the priestly ministry and offering of the eternal Great High Priest had been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. All of these redeemed children of God had experienced deliverance from sin and condemnation. Through the blood of the cross, they had found peace with God, they were resting in and on his Son, and they were looking forward eagerly to the day when they would rest eternally from their earthly labours in the presence of God Most High and of the Lamb.

This, at least, was what the writer to these Jewish Christians was assuming was the true situation with them. However, he hints at a dark possibility, paralleled in the example of Israel: Not all those who had professed faith in Christ actually belonged to Christ. Not all Israel actually belongs to Israel. Similarly, not all who claim to be Christians are actually indwelt by the Holy Spirit. As such, they are not part of the true church of God. As we shall see later, and as we learn from other places in Scripture, many who profess to know Christ and to have served him will be disowned by the Lord at the Last Day. (Matt. 7:23; Rom. 8:9; 9:6-8)

The writer is not suggesting directly that some of his readers were false professors. He is warning them merely of the possibility of such an eventuality, and exhorting them to demonstrate the reality of their salvation by their conduct. It is a fearful thing to make a profession of faith that is not based on reality, and that is devoid of the regenerating and sanctifying power of God's Holy Spirit. Thus, these believers were being urged most strongly to prove the reality of their faith by the way they lived. This involved total commitment to the Lord, wholehearted trust in his Word, and unwavering obedience to his commands. It involved a life of love, trust and obedience, and of perseverance in the face of suffering and difficulties—all achieved by the grace of God in their daily lives. (Phil. 2:12) Thus, they would prove to themselves and to others that they were the true children of the Lord, and not false professors or disobedient children, as were so many among the Israelite people of old. (Heb. 3:17-19)

Hebrews 4:2

The good news concerning deliverance and rest was given first to Israel in Egypt, and embraced by them—at least outwardly. They followed the word that led them out of Egypt and started them on their journey to the Promised Land. They continued in the word of faith and obedience for a while. However, when hardships and difficulties arose, they began to doubt and then to disbelieve the word and the promises of God. Thus, we see that the good news that was presented to them was not combined with true faith but with a superficial faith only. Consequently, many of them later forsook their professed confidence in God and in his word, and desired with all their hearts to return to the ungodly ways of the world (here, illustrated by Egypt). Others—although their faith was more than

superficial—yet did not believe that the Lord could bring them into the land that he had promised to give them. Thus, both alike—false professors, and disobedient and ‘disbelieving believers’—perished in the wilderness. (Num. 11:4-5; Deut. 9:23-24)

In the same way, the writer was exhorting these Jewish believers to ensure that—although they had heard the Good News, and had professed faith in Christ—they must demonstrate their faith by continuing to believe and obey God’s Word. They must persevere in the faith and in the way, even in spite of the greatest trials and tribulations, for thus the Lord would be testing their faith and proving them in the fires of affliction to strengthen and purify them and to show them that they were indeed his own beloved children. (Heb. 4:11)

Those who continued steadfastly in the way of holiness were those whom God had truly called to belong to him; and they could never perish. However, should any among these professing believers fail to pursue holiness of life, and rebel against the Lord, then they must question in their hearts whether or not their profession of faith was genuine. The writer is not speaking here of those who, on occasions, fall into sin—sometimes, serious sin—but of those who, like Israel, sin against the Lord wilfully, repeatedly and inexcusably, and in the light of better knowledge. (Heb. 3:12, 18-19)

Hebrews 4:3

Contrary to the experience of Israel in the desert, and of all persistently disbelieving professors, those who have believed the Good News and who have committed themselves wholeheartedly to the Saviour of whom it speaks, do enter God’s rest. They are at peace with God because their sins have been forgiven through the atoning blood of Christ their Redeemer. (Rom. 5:1; Col. 1:20) They are at rest in his everlasting arms for they are his beloved children and, as the lambs of his fold, he carries them close to his heart. (Deut. 33:27; Isa. 40:11) One day, the Lord will call them home to their eternal rest, where they will dwell with the Lord in his glory and worship and serve him there. This is the believer’s most certain assurance—everlasting peace and rest in the presence of the Father and of his Son.

However, even in this same verse—and so that these Jewish believers might be under no misapprehension—the writer refers once again to God’s solemn oath concerning an unbelieving and disobedient Israel. Under no circumstances would God permit an unfaithful people to enter his sacred rest. This was reserved for the faithful people of God alone, and for no others. Thus, not only would they fail to experience peace and rest in their hearts and lives on earth, but they who merely were false professors would fail also to experience that eternal peace and rest that God has promised to all his elect people. Indeed, for those who professed falsely to believe on the word and promises of God, their place would be in the lake that burns with fire—a place of everlasting suffering and torments, far removed from any sense of tranquillity, peace or rest.

The writer of this epistle must have sensed some need to address these Jewish believers in this way. Perhaps some of them were beginning to doubt the word and promises of God in the Gospel. Perhaps some were becoming discouraged by the severe trials and persecutions that they were being called upon to endure, which might well have included separation or expulsion from home and family, physical and verbal abuse, and even beatings—all because of their faith in Christ. Indeed, perhaps some of them were thinking that it would have been better to remain as Jews, and—even now—to return to the practise of the Jewish religion.

Whatever the reason or reasons, the writer seems to think that these warnings and exhortations are necessary. This would have the effect of encouraging and strengthening true believers, and of warn-

ing any false professors among them of the dire consequences of an evil unbelieving heart and of an unregenerate life.

Hebrews 4:4-5

Clearly, when speaking of God's rest, the writer is not simply considering the land of Canaan (which, as the Promised Land, was an earthly type of God's rest for his redeemed people). Rather, he is speaking of spiritual rest leading ultimately to God's heavenly rest: i.e., a participation in the rest and peace of God in his heavenly dwelling.

To this end, the writer alludes to the creation recorded in Genesis, and especially to the finish of God's creation where he is said to have rested from all his labours (in creation). (Gen. 2:2; Exod. 20:11; 31:17) Thus, as God is now considered to be resting in heaven from his works of creation, so—one day—every true child of God will enter into his immediate presence and will join with him in his eternal rest, while at the same time resting from his or her own earthly labours. This will be true heavenly peace, joy and rejoicing in the presence of God and of his Son, where—together with the holy angels—the saints of the Lord will worship and serve their beloved Redeemer, exalted on high for evermore.

None, however, who have disbelieved the word or promises of God, or who have rebelled against his Word, will ever experience that heavenly rest. (Heb. 3:11; 4:3)

God's Sabbath Rest

Hebrews 4:6-11

Hebrews 4:6

At this point, the writer begins with an exhortation, and then he interrupts his theme in the next few verses, before returning to complete his original exhortation at verse 11.

The writer had made it abundantly clear that many of those who had heard the good news of deliverance had not responded to that message of grace and salvation with all their heart and soul, but only superficially. They had accepted the benefits common to all those who heard the Word, but they had forfeited the blessings intended only for those who obeyed the Word faithfully and consistently. By their unbelief and rebellion, they had excluded themselves from God's promised rest. (Heb. 3:18)

Nevertheless, the rest of God remains open to all those who are prepared to believe his Word and walk by faith in the way of the Lord, embracing not only Christ as Lord and Saviour but also the trials and tribulations that attend their spiritual walk and warfare. To all who trust and obey the Lord, the promised rest is assured—both in this life and in the life to come.

Hebrews 4:7

It appears almost as if the next few verses have been transposed from another location. However, the writer may simply have recalled an earlier train of thought and decided to interject it here before continuing with the exhortation that he began in the previous verse.

God, he says, appointed or designated a specific day—or occasion—on which to address his wayward people. The context in which this 'day' or 'Today' is used requires us to understand it of the immediate present, or 'Now'. In other words, God was commanding his people to hear his words *now* and to

respond to them *now*. Thus, through David writing in Psalm 95:7, the Lord warns Israel to listen to him in this their appointed day: "*Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.*"

In context, the passage reads as follows:

Psalms 95:7-11 (ESV)

(7) For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice,

(8) do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,

(9) when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.

(10) For forty years I loathed that generation and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways."

(11) Therefore I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest."

To harden one's heart is merely to make it insensitive to the moral and spiritual teachings of God's Word, either through repeated sin and rebellion, or by wanton disregard for the truths that God has spoken. Such actions make the heart (or mind) insensitive to the Word of God and heedless of the convictions of the Spirit of God in his common operations. It also steels the conscience, so that a person no longer finds his conscience accusing him of his evil deeds; for—like Esau—he has passed the point of true godly repentance and has reached the stage of final impenitence. (Heb. 12:16-17) The great danger for those who stubbornly and persistently harden their hearts against the Lord and against his Word is that, ultimately, God will judge that person by hardening his or her heart permanently—as he did with Pharaoh and others. (Ex. 4:21; 7:3; cf. Ex. 14:17; Rom. 9:18)

Thus, warns the writer to these Jewish believers, "Now—Today—is the day in which the Lord is speaking to you. Do not fail to hear his voice, and to obey it. Do not resist the Spirit of grace, as did (for example) those disbelieving and wicked people in Noah's day. Rather, hear the Word of the Lord spoken to you this day; trust his Word implicitly, and obey it wholeheartedly."

The writer, of course, was endeavouring to encourage these believers to press on toward the goal or mark, and not to lose heart or become discouraged. (Phil. 3:14) It was essential that they persevered in their faith, thereby proving the reality of their profession, and ensuring their entry into God's ultimate rest above.

Hebrews 4:8

As we know, none of the adult generation of Israel that had disbelieved and disobeyed God's Word entered the land of promise. Even Moses himself was excluded from that land. However, Moses' successor Joshua led all the surviving children and those adults who were below 20 years of age into the promised land of rest in Canaan. (Num. 14:29; 32:11)

However, as the writer of Hebrews points out, God was not speaking merely of the rest experienced by his people in Canaan. Up to a point, that rest had been achieved already; and, furthermore, Canaan's rest was only typical and temporary. Now, God was speaking of another rest: a rest that the people of God were to experience subsequently, on a much higher level than the physical rest found eventually in the land of Canaan. This rest would be permanent or eternal.

Hebrews 4:9

This 'other' rest, of which God is speaking, is termed 'a Sabbath rest'. Possibly, this is because—when, in six days, he had finished the creation of the universe—God rested from his labours in creation. God instituted the seventh day as a Sabbath or day of rest from all forms of ordinary labour: a day that was to be set apart or sanctified to the Lord. Since God was resting from his work in creation throughout the remainder of this present age, this represents a permanent state of rest for the believer when he or she is called ultimately into the immediate presence of God. Similarly, since God commanded the Sabbath, or one day in every seven days, to be set apart throughout the remainder of this present age, this provides a temporary period of rest for the people of God—a regular weekly period of rest typifying the permanent eternal rest in heaven.

These, however, are only faint illustrations of the true situation. They do not correspond exactly or entirely with God's eternal rest in glory. They merely endeavour to sketch the bare outlines of the glorious rest awaiting the redeemed of the Lord. Furthermore, those who would inherit this eternal rest in God's presence must first have experienced reconciliation with God through faith in his Son, bringing them into the blessings and benefits of peace with God and spiritual rest here and now. (Rev. 7:14-17; 14:13; 21:4)

Hebrews 4:10

We must bear in mind that the writer is addressing Jewish Christians, all of whom would have been very familiar with Jewish rites, ceremonies and ordinances when they had practised their former religion. In addition, they would have been familiar with all the feasts, sacrifices and offerings of the Jewish economy, and of the Levitical priesthood. To these former Jews, their religion was a religion of works. It was a religion where sacrifices and offerings had to be made continually for the covering of sin, for none of these sacrifices or offerings could ever remove sin completely or cleanse the worshipper's heart or conscience fully. (Heb. 10:1-4)

To these people, their former manner of life was characterised by constant efforts to please and honour God. It was attended by the performance of regular—often daily and hourly—rites, rituals, ordinances and ceremonies. Thus, to turn away from the practise of this religion to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ involved a radical transformation not only of their personal lives through regeneration, but also of the way in which they practised their new faith. Here, in their new faith, everything of which the law had spoken, or which the sacrifices and offerings of the law had typified, had been fulfilled in Christ. Everything had been completed—once-for-all. (Rom. 10:4; Heb. 7:27; 9:12) Now, they had no need to practise daily or hourly ceremonies, rites or ordinances. Nor did they need to observe the multitudinous traditions of men. All these works had ended. They had entered into rest—a permanent spiritual rest experienced through faith in the Great High Priest of their new profession (or confession). Therefore, they had rested from their former religious works as God did when he rested from his works of creation.

This, of course, was not to suggest that their new faith in Christ did not involve them in action of any kind. Works of merit intended to contribute toward or to augment their salvation were excluded totally from the practice of their faith. However, as the redeemed children of God, they were to be involved actively in exercising the labour of love (1 Thess. 1:3), in producing the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), and in proving themselves willing, wise, faithful and obedient servants of the Lord, leading to great reward in heaven. (Matt. 25:13-21)

Hebrews 4:11

At this point, the writer returns to the exhortation that he had begun in verse 6. However, he merges the theme of verse six with that of verse 10 as he continues his exhortation.

In view of all they had learned, and being aware of Israel's example of unfaithfulness, the writer urges these Jewish Christians to exercise the utmost diligence in entering into God's rest. The word that he uses for '*strive*' (KJV, '*labour*') is derived from a verb meaning, 'to hurry' or 'to hasten'. The form of the verb used here means 'to give [the utmost] diligence' or 'to be diligently conscientious' [in the pursuit of something].

Of course, the writer realises that God's people enter that rest by grace alone through faith alone, and he is not suggesting otherwise. Rather, he is encouraging these believers in the strongest terms to prove the reality of their conversion to Christ by heeding and obeying his Word, or by following the teachings given to them by the apostles and other leaders of the church. So long as they continued steadfastly in the faith, and endured the sufferings or persecutions of the cross, they were certain to persevere unto the end. Perseverance, or faithful and persistent endurance, in the faith was evidence that they were truly the children of God. (Matt. 10:22)

However, in the latter part of this verse, the writer again points out the dangers of failing to pursue the course set before them. Should any of these Jewish Christians turn aside permanently or apostatise from the way—the way of righteousness, truth and godliness, and from their profession of faith in Christ—then this would be evidence in itself that their profession was false and that they had never been the true children of God by regeneration and by adoption. This would be to emulate the example of Israel, and to invite the judgment of God upon an unbelieving, unfaithful and rebellious heart and life.

The Incisive Word**Hebrews 4:12-13****Hebrews 4:12**

No longer were these believers living with the dead letter of the law. (Not that the law itself was dead or unspiritual, but rather its precepts and principles led to death because—in thought, word and deed—it exposed and condemned sin, without providing a remedy except by perfect obedience to its every precept.) (Rom. 7:12,14)

The perfect holy law of God had been their tutor or guide to bring them to Christ. Now, however, these believers were no longer under the law but under grace. Yet, the grace of God did not provide a license for sin. On the contrary, grace brought with it the earnest and heartfelt desire to follow a holy and righteous life, as God's Holy Spirit enabled. But the people of God still required to be taught from the Word of God. Indeed, it was this Word—in conjunction with the Spirit of God—that brought life to the soul. This Word was to be food, nourishment or sustenance for their soul.

Yet, they were to remember that in hearing or reading the sacred and imperishable Scriptures, they were hearing or reading the very words of God. This Word was infallible. It was inerrant. It was unchanging. Every word that God had spoken must prove true, and every word must be fulfilled—both in general or eschatological terms, and in the believers' personal lives. (1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16)

But what are some of the characteristics of the Word of God?

- It is *living* (KJV, *quick*): It is vital and spiritually life giving or life imparting, through the gracious operations of the Holy Spirit on a person's soul. No other book, and no other agency, can ever be said to be living in this sense, for no other book or agency can impart true spiritual life and food to the soul through the revelation of its truths as applied by the Holy Spirit. Primarily, however, the Son of God is the Word in person. He embodies every truth of the living Word—for he is that Word—and imparts it to those who are united to him by faith. (John 1:1-3,14; 6:63)
- It is *active* (KJV, *powerful*): As the Holy Spirit grants an understanding heart or mind to the truths of God's Word, so also—with divine energy and power—he applies the principles of these truths to the believer's life through the ongoing process of sanctification. (John 1:12; 1 Pet. 1:23 (see context, 1 Pet. 1:14-25); Eph. 5:26; 2 Thess. 2:13)
- It is *sharper than any two-edged sword...* (Lit., *two-mouthed* or *double-mouthed*). The Word of God is no dead letter or book of rules, regulations or teachings devoid of life. Rather, God's Word is the sharpest and most incisive instrument possible to imagine. It is pictured as a sword because it is an instrument or weapon of spiritual warfare—a weapon to be wielded against our own sinful nature, the world and the devil. Again, God's Word is described as a two-edged or double-edged sword because it cuts asunder all that surrounds its incisive blade and sweeps back and forth cleaving asunder all that it strikes. (Eph. 6:17; Rev. 1:16; 2:12,16; 19:15)
- The Word of God is said to *pierce to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow...* (Lit., *to pass through and partition, etc...*). This simply means that when the Word is applied in the power of the Spirit, it penetrates to the very core of a person's being, bringing clear conviction of truth, of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. It is impossible to escape the powerful effects of God's Word when it is so applied by the Holy Spirit. It is the Word of the living Sovereign God spoken by the Almighty One himself, to the hearts, minds and consciences of those who hear and whom the Holy Spirit is addressing in God's Word. (Isa. 55:11; Jer. 23:29; John 16:8; Acts 2:37)

(Incidentally, there is no allusion here to a trichotomy of being (body, soul and spirit). The writer is merely illustrating the intensely penetrating power of God's Word on a person's mind).

Again, the Word is said to *discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart*. The same Word by which the Holy Spirit brings conviction of sin also exposes that person's innermost thoughts, inclinations, motivations and deepest secrets of his or her heart (or mind). The eternal Word makes clear to the individual just what God thinks of his thoughts and attitudes, of his motivations and desires, of his dispositions and designs. Though no other living person knows the truths of an individual's heart, God knows—and by the penetrating power of his Word, he makes it absolutely clear to the individual exactly what the Lord thinks of his thoughts, inclinations and plans. Like a blazing spiritual arc lamp or laser beam that penetrates to the very core of a person's being, so the Word of God shines in all its power into the hearts of the people, exposing the most secret counsels of their minds or hearts. (Cf. Ps. 139:2; Jer. 17:10; Rev. 2:23)

Hebrews 4:13

This verse makes it abundantly clear that no human being can hide his innermost thoughts and secrets from God. Every thought, inclination, disposition, motivation and design is known to God. It is impossible to conceal or hide anything from God, for the Lord sees into the deepest recesses of a person's mind and can read his every thought. Thus, the verse says that everything a person thinks is naked—or completely exposed—to God. And, to the same God, we must give account—and not only must we give account to God for our words and deeds, but also for the very thoughts and inclinations of our hearts or minds.

Concerning the phrase, *'...but all are naked and exposed...'* (KJV, *'...but all things are naked and opened...'*) Adam Clarke wrote:

It has been supposed that the phraseology here is sacrificial, the apostle referring to the case, of slaying and preparing a victim to be offered to God.

1. It is slain;
2. It is flayed, so it is naked;
3. It is cut open, so that all the intestines are exposed to view;
4. It is carefully inspected by the priest, to see that all is sound before any part is offered to him who has prohibited all imperfect and diseased offerings; and,
5. It is divided exactly into two equal parts, by being split down the chine⁸ from the nose to the rump; and so exactly was this performed, that the spinal marrow was cloven down the centre, one half lying in the divided cavity of each side of the backbone...

Thus, these Jewish believers ought to have realised that the Lord God was fully aware of everything that they were planning to do, of what they were thinking about the Lord himself or about the teachings of his Word, and about what they were thinking about other believers. Nothing was hidden from God—and to that same God, each one of these believers must one day render an account of their thoughts, together with their words and deeds—or lack of them. (Cf. Matt. 12:36; 18:23; Rom. 14:12)

Holding Fast our Confession
Hebrews 4:14-16**Hebrews 4:14**

The writer of Hebrews now begins to apply all that he has been saying up to this point. He had shown already the superiority of the Lord Jesus over angels and over Moses—the Jews' much revered leader and teacher. Now, the writer reminds these believers that they have a Great High Priest who is superior to all other priests who ever lived and served the God of Israel. Furthermore, this Great High Priest—having made an offering of himself to God—then passed through the heavens into the very presence of God. There, now, he is interceding with God on the believers' behalf, based on his finished and victorious work at Calvary.

The exalted Lord Jesus—our Great High Priest—is superior to Moses, to Aaron and to the Levitical priesthood in the following ways (and more):

⁸ *chine*: a cut of meat that includes part of the backbone.

- No other high priest ever lived beyond his natural life span; and, when he died, he could not intercede for the people any longer.
- No other high priest could ever offer to God his own life as a sacrifice for sin, for no other high priest was perfect or sinless himself.
- No other high priest could ascend to the very presence of God, there to mediate for his people and to present to God their sanctified sacrifices of praise and worship.

Therefore, these Jewish believers had a Great High Priest—great, or superior to all others who ever lived. For this reason, these believers ought never to become discouraged or despondent, or to lose heart because of their present pressing difficulties, sufferings or persecutions. The same exalted Great High Priest, who had gone into heaven and was now ministering before God on their behalf, would watch over their every step and would protect them by his almighty sovereign hand. (1 Sam. 2:9; Ps. 91:11; 121:3,5,8; Prov. 2:6-8; 1 Pet. 1:5)

Those for whom he had died could never perish, for he had purchased them with his own blood and that blood had been sprinkled before the mercy seat in the heavenly sanctuary. Thus, these believers were to be greatly encouraged by all that the Lord had done—and would continue to do—for them. Thus, too, they were being given every possible reason to hold fast steadfastly to their confession—their original profession of faith in Christ, and their absolute confidence in his person and work on their behalf. This was no time to be losing heart or to think of returning to the old Jewish priesthood. Their Great High Priest in glory had rendered that priesthood obsolete, and he alone could act as their Mediator before God—and he would never fail to do so for all his own. (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 9:15; 12:24)

Hebrews 4:15

But did not the Lord Jesus, their Great High Priest, fail to understand the people's sins and weaknesses since he himself was perfect and had never experienced sin?

Not so, counters the writer of Hebrews. It is true that the Lord Jesus was perfect and that he never sinned. (1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5) However, although no sin was found in him, yet—when he became incarnate—he was tempted in every respect as are we. He was tempted most severely, and with the most deceptive, alluring and wicked temptations imaginable. Yet, never at any time did he yield to these temptations. Rather, he dismissed them from his mind and applied the truth of God's Word to the deceptive lies of the devil. He never sinned. (Matt. 4:1-11)

Nevertheless, by being exposed to the most severe forms of temptation, the Lord Jesus suffered intensely. He endured mental and spiritual anguish during those moments when temptation assailed him. Thus, the Lord Jesus knows what it means to suffer temptation as we do. He knows how intense—how severe—temptation can be. Yet, he also knew how to resist temptation—even although it involved him in a bitter struggle with evil; a struggle that nevertheless the holy sinless Son of God was bound to overcome and to prove himself victorious to the last degree. (Heb. 2:18; 4:15)

Yet, since the Lord suffered these evil temptations of mind or soul, he not only knows what the believer must endure when tempted, but also he is touched—emotionally—by our weakness, faults, failings or infirmities. He knows what it is to be tempted just as we are, although of course he never yielded to temptation. He never sinned.

Hebrews 4:16

(Cf. Heb. 10:22)

Thus, these believers ought to realise that even although Jesus was their Great High Priest in heaven—yet he understood every pain, sorrow, suffering and temptation of his beloved people on earth. He was touched with their agonies of heart and soul, although never becoming contaminated in any way by their shortcomings or sins. Yet, since he knew their sufferings from personal experience, he knew how to sustain them in their hour of need, and how and when to deliver them when they sought his help and power. He is a Great High Priest—one who is actively involved before the Father in mediating for his people and in providing them with grace to help in time of need.

Armed with this assurance and confidence in the High Priest of their confession, therefore, the writer urges these believers to draw near to the throne of God on high, and to do so with boldness or confidence. Their confidence, of course, lay not in themselves but in the One who had made the way of approach to God possible and permanent through his atoning blood. Because of the Lord's substitutionary and atoning sacrifice at Calvary and of his present exaltation to God's right hand and intercession for all his saints, these believers were to come boldly into the immediate presence of God, through the mediation of his Son and by intercession of the Holy Spirit. Their Great High Priest in glory would never fail to hear and to heed the prayers of his redeemed and beloved children. He would accept them, he would answer them in accordance with his sovereign will and purposes, and he would bless them with every spiritual blessing from above. In all their times of difficulty, distress, anguish of soul, suffering, pain or grief, the Lord would extend the compassionate hand of love and mercy to them and provide them with grace to help and grace to deliver or sustain them in the conflict or in their adversities. (Heb. 7:25; 10:19-23; 13:6; cf. Eph. 3:12; see also Matt. 7:7-11; Phil. 4:6-7)

HEBREWS CHAPTER 5**Jesus as Intercessory High Priest****Hebrews 5:1-10**

In the Jewish religion, the priests interceded for the people before God based on the offerings and sacrifices to God that they had made on behalf of the people. And, once every year, the high priest would enter the most holy place behind the veil and sprinkle the atoning blood on the mercy seat representing the throne and meeting place of God on earth.

These Jewish believers were very familiar with the practises of their former Jewish faith. However, now that they had been called to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, they needed to realise that their new Great High Priest superseded and excelled everything that had gone before, including the means of atonement for sin and approach to God. Thus, in verse 1 of chapter 5, the writer begins by asserting:

Hebrews 5:1

Under the Old Testament arrangement, a priest was selected from among the people in accordance with God's will and purposes. This meant that—being one of the people himself—the priest was able to sympathise to some extent with the people's weaknesses, failures and sins. However, as a member of Adam's fallen race, the priest himself was susceptible of many sins and liable to errors of judgment and conduct. Consequently, when he served in the sanctuary, he was obliged to offer to God not only sacrifices and offerings for the sins of the people but also sacrifices and offerings for his own sin. (Lev. 9:7; Heb. 5:3; cf. Heb. 7:27)

In marked contrast to the earthly high priest, the Great High Priest of the new arrangement or New Covenant was chosen, appointed and sent directly by God from the heavenly sanctuary itself. (Heb. 5:4; 7:28) He came into this world in accordance with the Father's express will and purposes for his Son and for the people for whom his Son would die by offering up his own sinless life as a perfect sacrifice for sin. Furthermore, our Great High Priest is able to sympathise fully with the temptations, faults and failings of the people—having thus suffered in his own Person as his people have suffered, yet without sin. (Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15)

Hebrews 5:2

Because of his many personal weaknesses, failures and sins, the Jewish high priest was able to understand to some extent, and to sympathise, with the sins of the people. Where they fell, he also had fallen—if not in deed, then certainly in word or thought. Where they had strayed, he also had strayed before the Lord had sought him and brought him back to the fold. Thus, in these and many other ways, the earthly high priest was able to understand the people's weaknesses and treat them with mercy and compassion, without however condoning or approving of their sins.

Hebrews 5:3

Like the people, the high priest was a sinner in the sight of God. Although the LORD had called and sanctified him, and set him apart to the priestly office and service, yet the earthly high priest was still a sinful human being. As such, he had to offer to God not only sacrifices for the sins of the people, but also sacrifices for his own sins and iniquities. This should have kept him humble in his office, and

kind, considerate and understanding toward the people of God. (Lev. 4:3-12; 9:7; 16:11; Heb. 9:7; cf. Heb. 7:27)

Later, however, some of these priests and high priests abused their office, showed little sympathy or concern for God's people, and otherwise mistreated the flock of God. In this context, we observe that many of these later offenders had not been called or appointed to the priestly office by the Lord God, but had been appointed to that office by men with little or no regard for God's will and purposes, or for his express instructions concerning the nature and the office of the priesthood. (Cf. Jer. 5:31; 6:13; Ezek. 22:25-26; Zeph. 3:4)

Hebrews 5:4

No one, however, ought ever to have assumed the office of the priesthood of his own accord, nor ought anyone or any group of people to have appointed a priest to this office. Those who served at the sanctuary had to be called to this office by the Sovereign Lord God himself. Only those called and appointed by God were authorised to act on behalf of the people before God, and to offer the necessary sacrifices and offerings required by the law—including those sacrifices that God had appointed for the sins of the people. No other persons but the God-appointed priests and their elected sons could serve in the sanctuary in this capacity; and no other person but the God-appointed high priest could enter the most holy place (or holy of holies) once every year with the blood of the atoning sacrifice. (Ex. 28:1; Lev. 8:2; Num. 3:3)

Thus, we see that only those whom God has called specifically, and appointed to his service, have any right to serve in his name. Only those whom the Lord has called specifically, and equipped for his service, are authorised by him to exercise the duties, responsibilities and privileges of their particular God-appointed office or sphere of service. This is an honour that no individual has the right to arrogate to himself, or to accept from the hands of men. Unless the Lord God has called and appointed an individual to his service, that individual is not at liberty to assume any office, duty or responsibility that requires a specific divine calling, such as the priestly or prophetic offices of the Old Testament or the pastoral or other similar offices of the New Testament. Thus was Aaron called by God to the priesthood, and thus must everyone be called of God who serves in a similar capacity; whether as a priest or prophet under the Old Covenant or as a minister, pastor or other form of church shepherd and teacher under the New Covenant.

Hebrews 5:5

We see how necessary it was for the servants of the Lord to be called and appointed to their respective offices or forms of service by God himself. In keeping with this principle—and although he was the Son of God from eternity—the Great High Priest of the New Covenant did not assume the priestly office by himself. Rather, God the Father appointed his Son to this supreme office—an office immeasurably far above the earthly forms of priesthood. Thus, even the holy spotless Lord Jesus Christ did not exalt himself to this high office, or claim it as of right. On the contrary, the Lord Jesus received this office by appointment from his Father, and he assumed the place and position of Great High Priest—the sole Mediator of the New Covenant—only because this office had been bestowed upon him by God his Father. (John 8:54; Heb. 10:5-9)

The reference to the passage where God acknowledges Jesus as his only begotten Son probably is not intended as a direct proof of the Lord's appointment to this priesthood, but rather as an indirect reference. (Ps. 2:7; Heb. 1:5) In acknowledging the Lord Jesus as his one and only Son, God was formally verifying to the people not only the Lord Jesus' divine calling and appointment but also his divine person and work in all its aspects. Thus, in effect, God the Father was demonstrating to the

people that his Son had been appointed to act as Prophet, Priest and King, performing all the duties and responsibilities of the divine and divinely appointed representative before God in relation to the people. (Cf. Mic. 5:2; Acts 13:33)

Hebrews 5:6

Unlike the Jewish high priests, the office of high priest to which the Lord Jesus had been appointed was destined to last in perpetuity. Not that our Great High Priest would be required to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people in perpetuity, for he did this once-for-all when he offered up his own life as a sacrifice of atonement for sin. Rather, the priestly office that the exalted Son of God now holds enables him—not to repeat redundant sacrifices—but to intercede or mediate for his people before God. This he does based on the blood that he shed once-for-all at Calvary, and which provides a permanent sacrifice and remedy for the sins of the people. (Heb. 7:25,27; 9:26)

The writer likens the Lord Jesus' priestly office to that of Melchizedek (the 'other place' referred to being Ps. 110:4). The writer will have more to say about Melchizedek later. (Heb. 7:1-28). For the time being, however, we will merely state here that—just as Melchizedek was reckoned without beginning of days or end of life, and so was considered to serve as a priest 'forever'—so the Lord Jesus *actually* serves as a Priest forever, since he holds the priestly office in perpetuity. (Heb. 7:24) We will have more to say on this in its proper place.

Hebrews 5:7

Since the Son of God became incarnate and took upon himself the form of a man (yet without sin), Jesus was able to sympathise with the sins, weaknesses and failings of mankind. Similarly, being weighed down with the limitations and weaknesses of the human body, the Lord suffered as only human beings can suffer. Thus, with these limitations imposed upon him in consequence of his incarnation, the Lord Jesus needed to agonise in prayer when petitioning his Father. Not that he needed to agonise on his own behalf—for, in this respect, the Lord Jesus did always those things that pleased his Father. Rather, he agonised in prayer on behalf of others: those whom he had come to redeem. He agonised in prayer with his Father over the dreadful prospect of bearing the punishment for their sin, and of suffering—the just for the unjust—the wrath of God against sin when, in excruciating pain, he would hang upon the cross. (1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18)

Because of all these things and more, the holy spotless Lamb of God offered up the most fervent prayers and supplications to his heavenly Father. He knew that God was able to deliver him from the agonies of suffering on the cross and from subsequent physical death—but not if he was to offer up his life as an atoning sacrifice for sin. He knew that he could have called upon ten thousand angels to destroy the world and set him free—but not if he was to shed his blood as a ransom for sinners. (Matt. 26:53)

Thus, the holy One of God needed to suffer. He needed to agonise in prayer with his Father. For, although he knew that his sufferings, death and resurrection were central to God's plan of salvation, the Lord Jesus nevertheless endured great torments of soul in the Garden of Gethsemane as he anticipated the dreadful time ahead when he would suffer at the hands of his own beloved heavenly Father—and that not for himself, but for sinful men and women. (Mark 14:36; Luke 22:44; John 12:27; cf. 1 Cor. 15:3)

But did the Father in heaven hear the anguished pleas and supplication of his Son? Most certainly he did. He was heard because of his reverence—his utter respect for and obedience toward God in everything. He was heard—and God answered his intense pleas. (Cf. John 11:42) Yes, the Father pos-

sessed—and could have exercised—the power to deliver his beloved Son. However, this would not have accorded with his plan of redemption formulated from before the beginning of creation. Even so, it must have caused the Father indescribable agony to decline the pleas of his beloved Son, knowing that—in consequence, and in accordance with his holy nature and with justice and righteousness—he would need to lay upon his own Son the full punishment for our sin. This, in turn, meant abandoning his Son while he endured that punishment and bore God’s wrath against our sin. Yet, this was the cost of redemption. This was the only way in which God’s justice and righteousness could be satisfied in full, and in which sinners could be forgiven and reconciled to God. This was the culmination of the sacrifices made by the priests to atone for sin. This was the one and only Sacrifice that could atone for and take away sin once-for-all. Therefore, the Lord Jesus had to die to provide that sacrifice of atonement for sin. (Ps. 22:1-2,24; Matt. 27:46)

Hebrews 5:8

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus was *'made perfect'* (v.9) and here, in verse 8, that he *'learned obedience'*. Neither of these expressions implies that the holy Son of God needed to make progress in matters divine. As God the Son, Jesus was in all respects equal with his Father. This means that all his characteristics or attributes were perfect from eternity and could never be improved upon or augmented. However, *as the incarnate Lord Jesus*—or Son of Man—Jesus progressed through life from infancy, to childhood to manhood, learning as he grew and matured.

Although, as the Son of God (or in regard to his deity), his attributes or characteristics were perfect and impossible of improvement, yet, as the Son of Man (or in regard to his humanity), the Lord Jesus was said to be thirsty, to be weary, to suffer and to be tempted, etc. Similarly—through his sufferings as a perfect human being—the Lord Jesus learned to remain steadfastly obedient to his Father—something that he never needed to learn as the eternal Son of God. And, by his sufferings and unflinching obedience to God, the Lord Jesus was to complete the task that God had given him; and, in voluntary submission and willing obedience, to lay down his life as a sacrifice for sin.

(Concerning some of the limitations that the Lord assumed voluntarily as a true human being, see such passages as Matt. 4:2; Luke 2:40,52; John 4:6-7; 19:28; Phil. 2:6-8; Heb. 2:10)

Hebrews 5:9

Having been made perfect as described above—or having proved himself as the only Man who ever lived a life of perfect, complete and unflinching obedience to God—the Lord Jesus demonstrated that it was possible to fulfil all righteousness when there was no sin or sinful nature to intervene. What the first Adam lost by his fall, the Second Adam retained by remaining unflinching obedient to his Father in heaven. Thus, having fulfilled the law of God perfectly, and having no sin of his own for which to atone, the holy Son of God was fully qualified and equipped to lay down his life as a substitutionary sacrifice of atonement.

Thus, too, from this perfect sacrifice, the Lord Jesus became the wellspring, source or outflowing of the benefits of that salvation to all who trusted in his person and work, and who became obedient to the faith. These benefits include the unmerited and boundless love, mercy and grace of God toward repentant and believing sinners; his willingness to forgive them freely on account of his Son’s obedient and perfect sacrifice of atonement, and to justify or declare these redeemed sinners righteous in his sight through their faith and in virtue of his Son’s resurrection from the dead and ascension to glory. Furthermore, one of the most significant benefits or blessing of this salvation is the gift of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon all those whom the Spirit has effectually called and regenerated, to seal them unto God, to guarantee their final salvation in glory, and to sanctify them unto holiness of life.

The verse refers to Jesus as the source or author of our salvation. This is a clear declaration by the Word of God that there is only one way or source of salvation in relation to God, and that this way is through faith in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ alone. There is no other author or source of salvation. There is no other means of being forgiven and reconciled to God in heaven, except through faith in Christ. (Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5; see also Acts 3:15)

All the manifold blessings of salvation are available to everyone who is obedient to the Lord Jesus Christ, in the sense of believing upon him by hearing the Gospel preached or reading the word of salvation through repentance and faith in Christ and responding to that message as the Spirit enables. Those, however, who disobey the Word and despise the message are disobeying God and despising the Spirit of grace. If they remain impenitent and unbelieving to the end, such individuals will face the righteous and holy condemnation and wrath of God against unconfessed sin and upon unrepentant sinners: a punishment that those who prove finally impenitent will endure throughout the eternal ages.

Hebrews 5:10

The connection here with Melchizedek is as follows: Since there was no record of Melchizedek's beginning or end of service to God, he typified—although he did not actually become—a priest forever. Unlike Melchizedek, however, the Lord Jesus is actually a Priest forever. Since the Lord Jesus holds the priesthood in perpetuity, then he is able for all time to save all those who come unto God through him. The same Great High Priest—who made salvation a reality—lives forever to bestow that salvation upon all whom God calls to believe on him. Hence, God the Father designates or names his Son as a high priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek, because his ministry and mediation on behalf of his people can never end so long as this age endures.

Spiritual Immaturity among Believers

Hebrews 5:11-14

Hebrews 5:11

There was much more about these matters that the writer could have discussed or expounded to these Jewish believers. However, he found it hard to explain to them in words that they could understand. They had become spiritually dull of hearing: i.e., although by this time they ought to have made significant spiritual progress, they were still in fact at the elementary stages of their faith and of their knowledge of Scriptural truths. Instead of feeding on the meat of God's Word, they were still drinking the milk of God's Word. Thus, they had failed to mature spiritually—and, for this reason, they were unable to comprehend deeper spiritual truths. In this respect, they had become dull of hearing, or incapable of understanding, the more advanced teaching of God's Word.

In the ESV, the word rendered 'dull' (Gk., *νωθρός*) is a word that can also mean 'lazy', 'sluggish' or 'slothful'. Instead of being like faithful and industrious spiritual workmen who were qualified to rightly divide or interpret the word of truth, they had become lazy or idle workmen in relation to God's Word of truth. They had failed to pursue the truth diligently, and to search the Scriptures daily to learn from that eternal living Word. Indeed, they had become sluggish or slothful in the faith, hindered from progress by their own indolence and causing them to neglect the study and application of God's holy Word. (Cf. Heb. 6:12) Hence, the reason for the writer's earlier admonition: *How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?* (Heb. 2:3a ESV) But, by their present attitude toward God's

Word, and by their distinct lack of spiritual progress, some of these individuals were coming very close to neglecting the solemn truths of salvation.

Hebrews 5:12

After all the time that these believers had spent in the Christian faith, they ought to have advanced to the stage of being able to teach or instruct others in that faith. They ought to have been able to open the Scriptures of truth and expound their meaning to those who were new in the faith, as well as to the more spiritually mature members of God's church. (Cf. Heb. 6:1)

However, being still at the elementary stage in their own spiritual experience and understanding of God's Word, they were in no position to teach that Word to others. Even worse, they needed someone to teach them again the very first principles of God's Word; for, clearly, they had forgotten the instructions that had been given to them already, or they had failed to understand this most basic teaching from the outset. (Cf. Gal. 4:3,9)

For this situation, there could be no excuse. To forget previous teaching was an example of spiritual laziness or sloth, since they should have followed up all teaching by their own searching of the Scriptures. (Cf. Acts 17:11) To have failed to understand the most basic truths was also inexcusable, since they should have sought explanation of these truths instead of neglecting to ask or to learn for themselves.

Hebrews 5:13

Clearly, then, some of these believers needed once more to receive instruction in the most elementary truths of the Gospel. They could be fed only on the milk—the most easily digested or assimilated parts of Gospel teaching. They were not yet ready for the meat or solid food of God's Word, for this kind of food was suitable only for those who had learned from the first principles and who now were more spiritually mature. (Cf. 1 Cor. 3:1-2)

Instead of making progress, some of these believers had remained at the lowest level of their spiritual education. Like spiritual children, they were yet unskilled in the Word of Truth, including the teachings about righteousness, sanctification and holiness of life. Yet, they needed to learn, to apply that learning and to grow consistently in their faith.

Hebrews 5:14

The solid food of God's Word can be fed only to those who have advanced sufficiently in their knowledge of the truth to benefit from this stronger meat. To others, such as spiritual babes in Christ, it would prove completely unpalatable and wholly unsuitable to their present spiritual state. Solid food is essential at the appropriate stage of spiritual growth and development—and every believer ought to reach that stage in due course, depending on their ability to learn and progress because of their assimilating and benefiting from teaching that is more basic.

We must bear in mind, of course, that a believer is taught by the Holy Spirit to understand or to comprehend aright the Word of God. If he or she is not making progress in the things of the Spirit, then clearly that person is not yielding to the control of the Holy Spirit over his life, or he is neglecting to hear and read from God's Word, through which the Spirit of God teaches the people of God and builds them up in their most holy faith.

Again, there is another possible reason why some people do not progress beyond the most elementary truths of God's Word—and the writer of Hebrews has hinted at this possibility earlier: Some of those professing faith in Christ do not in fact belong to Christ. Consequently, they do not have the Holy Spirit indwelling them, and therefore they cannot benefit from the Spirit's teaching in their hearts and lives. (Rom. 8:9) This is true of all those who profess (falsely) to belong to Christ, but who have never been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. They are still in spiritual darkness. Without the indwelling Spirit of God, they cannot comprehend God's Word—for this Word is spiritually discerned. (1 Cor. 2:13-14)

Those, however, who know the Lord, and in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, must endeavour to learn God's Word and to understand its teaching, as the Holy Spirit enlightens them. As he did with the first disciples or apostles, the Holy Spirit will lead the believer into all truth: i.e., into everything that is necessary for a believer to know for making constant progress in life and godliness. (John 16:13)

Being thus instructed from the Word of God by the Holy Spirit, the believer then finds that—in course of time—his powers of understanding and discernment become honed or sharpened by constantly searching and applying the truths of the Scriptures. Thus, ultimately, he is able to distinguish clearly between good and evil, between right and wrong, between truth and error, and between sound doctrine and false teaching. Then, he has become a workman, rightly dividing (or interpreting) the Word of Truth. Then he is ready to teach others, and to be a blessing to the church by edifying, encouraging, challenging, correcting and exhorting the flock of God. (2 Tim. 2:15; see also 1 Tim. 4:6; Titus 1:9; 2:1)

HEBREWS CHAPTER 6**Exhortation to Advance****Hebrews 6:1-3**

In this chapter, the writer of Hebrews expands on his earlier remarks concerning the lack of spiritual progress among some of these believers. He shows also the possible consequences or dangers of failing to show any significant signs of advance in the things of God and of the teaching of his Word. He begins, however, by dealing with the necessity of pressing on in the faith and building on the teaching received already.

Hebrews 6:1

These believers ought to have been very familiar with the first principles or elementary teachings of their faith. (The word translated 'doctrine' in the ESV and KJV is 'logos' (meaning, 'word' or 'speech', etc.), and refers to the words, speech or teaching of the Lord Jesus and his apostles which formed the basis for these believers' initial faith in Christ.)

These teachings had been imparted to them faithfully by the Lord's servants; and—by this time—these Jewish Christians ought to have advanced significantly in their understanding of the Scriptures. For spiritual growth to maturity, it was essential that they leave—in the sense of building upon and progressing beyond—the basic or foundational doctrines of salvation. These believers needed to press on in their knowledge and understanding of the truth, as the Holy Spirit led them, so that they would become much more mature in the faith and capable of teaching, exhorting or comforting others from the sacred and imperishable Word of God. (Heb. 5:11-14)

These believers were familiar with the basic truths concerning such things as repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The writer of this letter refers to this as '*a foundation of repentance from dead works*'. (ESV) We must remember, of course, that—when they had been practising their Jewish faith—these believers had been accustomed to perform a variety of rites, regulations and ceremonies, together with numerous man-made traditions, in connection with their former religion. Indeed, their religion had become a works-based or law-based form of worship, with little emphasis on grace or faith—apart from works. As the writer says, however, these works were dead works. (Cf. Heb. 9:14) A person was never justified in God's sight by his good deeds, meritorious actions, observance of rituals, laws and ceremonies, or by works or deeds of any other kind. Rather, as with Abraham, a person was justified by faith. Therefore, in calling upon people to repent—both of their sins, and of their supposed works of righteousness—the Gospel was calling on them to return to God's original and only way of justification through faith. (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38)

This much, these believers had learned already, and had accepted when they repented of their former works-based mode of worship and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. As a gift of God's grace, and through their faith in Christ, they had received that righteousness that God required, but which could never have been merited by their works or righteous deeds (so-called). This was a foundational truth. However, having accepted salvation by grace through faith, these believers ought to have continued to walk or live by faith. Yet, some of them had scarcely advanced from the very starting point of their salvation. They were still standing just inside the threshold, wondering whether they should go any further by faith or whether they should return to their former works-based religion—especially since the latter was not associated with the persecution that they were now experiencing because of their faith in Christ. (Cf. Heb. 10:32; 12:3; 13:13)

In view of the teaching received already, however, there should have been no need to repeat these basic instructions—or to lay again the foundation of repentance—since these Christians ought to have been thoroughly familiar with these most elementary doctrines.

Hebrews 6:2

What was true of repentance from dead works was true also in relation to washings or 'baptisms'. The reference here is not to baptism as such, but to the ceremonial washings or immersions associated with the Jewish religion under the terms of the Old Covenant. It had been made abundantly clear to these converts that the former ablutions and other washings that once they had been required to observe fastidiously as Jews, were no longer applicable or relevant. If connected with religious worship, these ceremonies had now been superseded and replaced by the washing or cleansing blood of Christ and the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit in their inner lives. (Heb. 9:10; cf. Mark 7:4) Now, outward washings related only to matters of hygiene, not to ceremonial or religious observances. Since they had been washed or cleansed inwardly by the atoning blood and by the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration and sanctification, there was now no further need for external signs, symbols or types of cleansing. Furthermore, and among other things, Christian baptism now typified—although it did not effect—their cleansing before God. It typified what the Holy Spirit had effected already, and what had become theirs through faith in Christ—the forgiveness of sin or the cleansing of their soul, or heart and conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

The laying on of hands was associated with the bestowal of blessing, with healing, with ordination to service, and with certain other matters. These Jewish believers were familiar with this procedure from their former religion, and they had been instructed clearly in its use within a church context. Therefore, they should not have needed further instruction in these elementary matters. (Cf. Acts 6:6; 13:3; 19:6; 1 Tim. 4:14)

Concerning the resurrection of the dead, this matter—although taught in the Old Testament—was not revealed so clearly then as it was now under the teaching of the Lord Jesus and his apostles. (Cf. Isa. 26:19; Heb. 11:35; Ezek. 37:1ff; Dan. 12:2) However, these believers had now been taught very extensively and thoroughly about the resurrection of the dead. (John 5:29; 11:24-25; Acts 4:2; 17:31; 1 Cor. 15:13-57; 1 Thess. 4:14-18) It was essential that they understood this truth, and its implications, both as it related to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and as it related to the resurrection of mankind—the just and the unjust. Without a clear understanding of the resurrection of Christ, these believers could not have a firm or assured foundation for their faith. Thus, it was essential that they understood and believed this fundamental doctrine. However, since they had been well instructed in these matters already, they should not have needed further teaching on the basics but should have been advancing to understand further related truths, such as that concerning eternal judgment.

Eternal judgment, too, had been familiar to them from the Old Testament Scriptures (Eccl. 12:14), and it had been explained to them much more clearly when they had become Christians. (Matt. 25:31-46; Rom. 2:5-10,16; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Pet. 3:7; Jude 1:14) However, without a clear understanding of the resurrection of mankind, some of these believers were apparently uncertain about the final judgment and about the state of the righteous and the unrighteous subsequent to this judgment at the last day. Thus, it was essential that these children of God leave behind the first principles of their salvation and start making some real progress in learning further truths of God's Word. Only as they searched the Scriptures diligently and prayerfully would the Holy Spirit be able to teach them all things relating to life and godliness, and show to them everything that God had revealed in his Word.

Hebrews 6:3

The writer of Hebrews is confident, however, that these believers do indeed desire to make progress in the things of God and in their knowledge of God's Word. He does not doubt their sincerity. However, he is concerned that they have been exhibiting a certain amount of spiritual laziness, carelessness or neglect insofar as they have not been prepared to spend the time or effort getting to know these truths better. Perhaps this was due in part to the severe persecutions to which they had been exposed. However, the writer does not see this as an acceptable excuse, for they had been called not only to believe on Christ but also to suffer for his sake. (Phil. 1:29) Furthermore, many other believers had been persecuted severely for their faith in Christ, but this had not hindered them from advancing in their faith. Rather, it had stimulated them to learn more and to apply their understanding of God's holy and unchanging Word to their present situations. (2 Tim. 1:12; Heb. 11:35-40)

This, then, is what we will do, declares the writer—if God permits. So long as God grants us life, we will persevere in the faith; we will come to know the Lord Jesus and his teaching much more fully, as the Holy Spirit grants to us an understanding heart and a believing mind. We will continue to learn, so that we will be able to stand in the day of adversity. We will continue to learn, so that we will become assured or confident in our faith, resting that confidence on the Rock of our salvation. We will continue to learn, so that—by God's grace—we may become a blessing to the church, as we are able to instruct others and to guide them in the way of truth and righteousness. All this we will do—if God permits. For our times, or the number of our days, are in his hands.

Impossible to Restore to Repentance**Hebrews 6:4-8**

(Cf. Heb. 10:26-29)

Hebrews 6:4

The writer of this epistle now reaches the point where he will draw the logical conclusion to his foregoing arguments and exhortations. It makes sense that those who have professed faith in Christ must continue to live by faith, and must progress in their faith and calling from day to day. To this end, the Holy Spirit instructs them from the Word of God, helping them to understand and interpret God's Word correctly. By thus progressing in the faith, a believer is making his calling and election sure. (Rom. 1:17; Heb. 10:38; 11:9; 2 Pet. 1:10)

However, on the supposition that no such progress is being made, and that a professing believer remains consistently at the most elementary level of 'faith' in Christ, then that person must question whether indeed his profession was genuine. If not genuine, then that person is still in his sins, and yet alienated from God. Such a person may have experienced many (external) blessings and privileges by having been constantly under the sound of the truth; by having heard the Word preached; by having benefitted from the outward work of the Holy Spirit, and by having experienced something of the fellowship of believers within the church. However, if—in all this time, and under such blessed circumstances—he continues to neglect or to respond to the truth with all his heart, then the possibility now of genuine godly repentance and faith is very remote indeed. Those who have come to such a point in their lives and experiences generally have steeled or hardened their hearts or minds against further knowledge of the truth and against the work of the Holy Spirit.

This was the situation with many in Israel throughout their history. They knew God's Word and God's way. They acknowledged the truth outwardly or superficially. They claimed to be the children of God

and participants in the covenant made to Abraham. However, their hearts were not right with God. For all their claims to belong to God, God did not recognise them as his children. These were not the children of Abraham, for they did not possess the faith of Abraham.

This, too, was the situation with Judas Iscariot. This man professed himself a follower of Jesus. He associated with the people of God, and worshipped in the sanctuary with the genuine believers. Judas, too, proclaimed the Gospel (although he did not believe the Gospel). He performed miraculous signs in the name of the Lord Jesus (although he did not belong to the Lord Jesus). He shared in the ministry of the Holy Spirit (although he had never been regenerated or sanctified by the Holy Spirit). Although he had experienced many spiritual privileges, Judas Iscariot was an imposter. By apostatising ultimately from his profession of faith, after the Lord Jesus had identified him as the betrayer, Judas showed himself in his true colours. (Matt. 7:21-22; Mark. 14:10; Luke 22:3; (As '*the son of destruction*' or '*perdition*' see John 17:12; cf. 2 Thess. 2:2-3.))

For those who are genuine believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, there can be no repetition of their original profession of faith or of their repentance from sin and dead works. This was accomplished when—by the Holy Spirit's work in effectual calling and regeneration—they responded to the message of the Gospel, repented of their sin and believed on the Lord Jesus. Those called and adopted into God's family belong to him permanently, and need not—and cannot—repeat their original experience.

However, among those professing faith in Christ are some who are false professors—with no experience of regeneration, repentance or saving faith. Like many in Israel, and like Judas, they may have experienced many outward privileges of associating with the true people of God. For example, they heard the Word preached. They knew what God required. They experienced something of the Holy Spirit's work in common grace, and they saw the effects of the Holy Spirit's work in regenerating and sanctifying grace in the lives of true believers. They witnessed the power of the Lord to save, and they heard the testimonies of those whose lives the Lord had transformed.

In all these things and more, these nominal professors had been enlightened concerning the Gospel and concerning the truths of God's Word more generally. To that extent, they had tasted something of the heavenly gift—the gift of grace and repentance, together with faith, and the resulting blessings flowing from this gift. However, although they had witnessed the effects of this gift in the lives of others, it had not affected their lives. Yes, they had shared in the Holy Spirit—insofar as they had been among the people of God and had witnessed, or had experienced the external influences of, the Spirit's work of grace in the church and in the lives of individual believers. These false professors may even have shared in the means of grace, and have sensed something of the Holy Spirit's presence within and in the midst of God's people. In these ways and more, they had tasted of the Spirit's grace and power, but they had remained strangers from God and alienated from the life of God that comes to his people only through the regenerating and sanctifying power of his Spirit. They knew so much about God and about his Son, but they had failed to benefit from knowing God and knowing his Son personally and savingly through the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts and lives.

Many such people are to be found in our churches today: perhaps proclaiming assertively their (professed) allegiance to Christ and to his Gospel. Yet, these same people have never experienced the grace of God in regeneration, or the power, presence or indwelling of the Holy Spirit in sanctification.

For false professors such as these, there can be only one outcome. Having been so enlightened, and yet having failed to seek further light that might have led to their genuine conversion, they have placed themselves in a position where they can no longer repent or seek the mercy of the Lord. They are convinced either that they have no need of repentance, or they have so steeled their hearts and minds against the essential truths of the Gospel, that they have placed themselves outside the pale of

God's salvation. These people have demonstrated that—notwithstanding their profession of faith—they have no part or lot in the kingdom of God or of his Christ. They are still in their sins. (Cf. Matt. 12:31-32; Luke 11:24-26; John 15:6; 2 Pet. 2:20-22)

Hebrews 6:5

They have tasted of the Word of God—and yet they have not responded with a sincere and contrite heart to the teachings of the Word. They have learned of the truths of God's Word, and understood many of the basic elements of the Gospel—but they have not permitted the truth of God's Word to take root in their hearts or lives, nor have they responded with a true and honest heart to the claims of God's Word on their lives. Their learning and their knowledge has been superficial. It is an intellectual acquaintance with certain elements of the truth, but devoid of the associated and transforming power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. (Matt. 13:20-21; 2 Pet. 2:20; see also Heb. 2:3)

They have understood, too, something of the glories of the coming age. They have heard of the majestic powers with which the Son of God has been invested and which he will demonstrate on a coming day. They have heard of the new creation, of the new heavens and the new earth in which righteousness dwells. Yet, that righteousness that comes as a gift from God has never found a place in these people's hearts. (Matt. 19:28; 2 Pet. 3:13)

Hebrews 6:6

If, after having experienced so much of God's Word and of the Holy Spirit's operations, these people should then fall away from—or abandon—their (falsely) professed faith in Christ, no hope of repentance or salvation remains. Like many in Israel who fell in the wilderness—after having professed faith, and like Judas Iscariot who forsook the fellowship of believers and abandoned his profession—so too those who profess faith falsely, ultimately, will abandon or forsake their former profession.

Having come so far and known so much (without actually having experienced true salvation), it then becomes impossible to restore such people again to a true and godly repentance—even although, like Esau, they seek it with tears. (Heb. 12:14-17) To do so, would be to crucify the Son of God afresh, because they knew already why the Lord Jesus had been crucified, and yet they did not consider his crucifixion necessary to their salvation or essential for their acceptance into God's kingdom. They had repudiated the cross, and with it the blood of the atonement. There therefore remains for them no more sacrifice for sin. (Cf. Heb. 10:26-29; see also Isa. 1:28)

Christ was crucified once-for-all, and put to shame once-for-all on behalf of all those who would believe on him. To neglect or despise the offering that has been made once-for-all is, in effect, to require that Christ be crucified and shamed over again—so that this individual may be afforded 'another opportunity' or a 'second chance' to repent. This, however, is impossible for this individual, since he has repudiated the grace of God already extended to him.

Hebrews 6:7

Here, the writer makes use of an agricultural analogy. When a farmer sows his seed in the ground, in the normal course of events that seed is nourished by the nutrients of the soil and watered by the frequent showers from above. Thus benefiting from these forms of sustenance, the seed develops eventually into plants, and ultimately the plants grow and produce a bountiful crop. Thereby, many are benefited and blessed by this useful crop. Thereby, too, such good land producing such a bountiful harvest demonstrates that it has received the blessing of God.

In the same way, those in whose lives the seed of God's Word falls and takes root in good soil (or an honest and sincere heart) are benefiting by receiving and believing the Word, and by nurturing the seed of the Word in their hearts. By seeking to increase their understanding of the truth by learning more, or by being fed and watered by the living Word of God as it is taught and expounded, they themselves grow in the faith. Ultimately, they begin producing a spiritual crop, as their faith and knowledge of the Word starts to benefit others. The fact they have grown and matured spiritually to such an extent is evidence that they have been blessed by God, and that they have been benefiting from the inward work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. This, in itself, is proof that these are the people of God, and that they belong to the Lord Jesus. (Luke 8:8,15; 1 Pet. 2:2; see also John 15:4,8)

Hebrews 6:8

If, however, the seed sown in the ground ultimately produces thorns and thistles instead of a crop beneficial to those for whom it was planted, then it is clear that this seed has been sown in unproductive and worthless ground. Such a crop is of absolutely no value to the farmer and is fit only to be written off or destroyed. At the time of its first appearance, its worthlessness becomes evident and it is thus very near to being cursed or placed under an anathema for destruction. In due course, this worthless crop will indeed be burned by fire—to its utter destruction. (Luke 13:9)

In the same way, if a person who received the seed of God's Word in his heart, ultimately failed to bring forth the good fruit of that Word, then his acceptance of God's Word would be questionable. However, if after receiving the teaching of the Word, he then proceeded to bring forth from his life nothing but a succession of corrupt fruit—evil words, expressions, and actions springing from a corrupt heart and mind—this would be evidence beyond doubt that this person had never accepted the teaching of God's Word in his own heart and life. Although he may have professed belief in Christ, the evidence of his life demonstrates that his profession was false and that he is still in his sins.

Such a person has proved himself already as spiritually worthless, potentially extremely harmful to the church of God, and consequently very near to coming under the curse of God. Ultimately, this curse will fall upon all false professors and other unregenerate men and women, and it will be especially severe toward those who in any way attempted to mislead, deceive or entice into sin the genuine children of God. The end of these deceivers and false professors is to be burned or to be punished eternally by the flaming fire of God's wrath. Ultimately, these individuals will stand before God to hear that sentence that condemns them and consigns them to the lake of fire for the eternal ages. (Mal. 4:1; Matt. 3:10; 7:19; 25:41; John 15:6; Heb. 10:27; see also Ezek. 15:2-7)

Impossible for God to Lie

Hebrews 6:9-20

Hebrews 6:9

The thought that anyone to whom this letter was addressed could fall into such a category is abhorrent to the writer. He is not suggesting for one moment that any of these Jewish believers were in fact false professors who ultimately would apostatise or deny the faith. Yet, when deceivers arose within the church, or infiltrated the church from outside, such things could and did happen among the people of God. Thus, the writer is anxious to make very clear to these Jewish Christians (and to us) the possibility of such imposters arising in their midst and attempting to corrupt others by their evil lives and false interpretations of God's Word. (2 Pet. 2:1-2)

Concerning those to whom he is now speaking, however, the writer remains confident that they are indeed the true children of God by regeneration and adoption. He is convinced that the Holy Spirit who regenerated them and called them to repentance and faith in Christ is now indwelling them and sanctifying them. This is evident by the fruitfulness of their lives. Although some of them may not have progressed nearly as far as they should have done, yet they were still anxious to learn and to apply the teaching of God's Word to their hearts and lives. Some of them indeed were yet babes in Christ. Nevertheless, they were *'in Christ'*.

Yet, in case he should be mistaken in regard to a few who had showed very little if any signs of spiritual progress, and these particular individuals were indeed still without Christ (although they may have professed otherwise), the writer issues this solemn warning, both in this place and later in this letter.

Hebrews 6:10

But what practical evidence does this writer possess concerning the spiritual state of these Hebrew Christians? To begin with, he refers to the firstfruit of the Spirit in their lives—the practical outworking of their faith by love. They have demonstrated the reality of their faith and their confidence in Christ by their practical demonstrations of real Christian love, compassion and kindness toward others. They had shown their love toward God by sharing practically with the Lord's saints, thereby showing also their love for their fellow-believers. However, they had done this not only on one occasion, but they were continuing to do this even at the present time. (Cf. Acts 10:4,31; 1 Cor. 13:4-7; 1 Thess. 1:3; Heb. 13:16; see also 1 John 3:17-18)

Therefore, declares the writer, God will not overlook or pass by this kindness toward his people. Such demonstrations of love toward God's people are a signal demonstration of love toward Christ; for whatsoever is done unto others out of love for him is in effect done unto the Lord Jesus Christ himself—for all believers are members of his body. (Matt. 10:42; 25:40; John 13:20)

Thus, those who showed such love to others demonstrated the presence of the Holy Spirit within. And those who were being indwelt by the Spirit of God could not fall away from the faith or deny the Lord Jesus. (John 10:28; Rom. 8:9)

Hebrews 6:11

Lest, however, any of these believers should show signs later of flagging or faltering in their zeal for God, the writer exhorts each one of them to persevere in their faith. Having made a good beginning

in the things of the Spirit, they were to continue in their love for, and service to, the Lord and his people. (Gal. 6:9; Phil. 1:9-11; 2 Pet. 1:5-8)

As they continued to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit in their lives, they would be showing unmistakably that they were the redeemed and holy people of God. Thus, the writer encourages each one of these believers to press on in their faith, that they might experience in their lives that assurance that comes to all those who are resting in the Lord Jesus, trusting in his Word, and doing his will faithfully until the day that he comes or calls them into his glorious presence. (Matt. 24:13; Heb. 3:6,14; 6:18-20; 2 Pet. 1:10; Rev. 2:26)

Hebrews 6:12

Yet, the writer of this letter realises that there is within each of us a tendency to laziness, apathy or sloth, and that this tendency must be countered constantly and assiduously. Those who yielded to spiritual apathy or laziness would cease to make progress in the faith, and therefore would cease to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. This would call into question the reality of their faith and conversion, especially if their conduct began to show signs of ungodly and unspiritual behaviour. Such individuals may have backslidden in their faith—as did King David. However, like David, such individuals could be forgiven and restored to God upon genuine heartfelt contrition and repentance. (Matt. 25:26; Rom. 12:11)

Yet, the possibility remained that some individuals who were now exhibiting ungodly and worldly behaviour were not in fact the children of God by regeneration and adoption, but were merely false professors. To ensure that such could never be said of them, the writer encourages these believers to avoid sluggishness or laziness in all its forms and to press on steadfastly in their faith and calling. They were to imitate those who had gone before, those whom they knew had truly honoured God by their faith and conduct, and who later had inherited the promises and blessings of God. They were to emulate the faithful saints of the Lord, even although this might cost them dearly in the lives. (Heb. 10:32-35; 12:1; 13:7; Jas. 5:10-11) However, they looked forward to their great reward in heaven, where they would dwell in the eternal city forever—together with all those who had proved faithful to God while on earth.

Hebrews 6:13-15

(Cf. Gen. 22:1-18)

But of whom specifically was the writer thinking when he spoke of imitating those who through patience and faith inherited God's promises? In this verse, it becomes apparent that Abraham was uppermost in the writer's mind. This patriarch demonstrated by his faith in the Word of God and his perseverance in believing the promises of God that he was faithful to him who had called him in his grace. And by his continuing faithfulness and perseverance, Abraham inherited the blessings that God had promised him.

But what promises specifically had God made to Abraham? Firstly, God had promised to make of Abraham a great nation, which no one could number. (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-5) Abraham believed God's promise, and the LORD counted his faith to him as righteousness. (Gen. 15:6) Abraham's faith in God's promise was the more outstanding, since—at the time the promise was made—Abraham had no child and heir, and both he and Sarah his wife were well advanced in years. Yet, Abraham believed God, and God honoured his faith by granting Sarah in her old age the ability to conceive and bear the child that he had promised Abraham; namely, Isaac. (Gen. 21:1-8)

But in what way is an oath connected with this promise?

Many years later, when Isaac had grown to young manhood, the LORD tested Abraham's faith. God instructed Abraham to take his beloved son Isaac and to offer him up on Mount Moriah as an offering to the LORD. Abraham obeyed. However, when he raised the knife to slay his son on the altar, the angel of the LORD intervened. God commanded Abraham to cease from his intended action. The patriarch had proved that he had been willing to obey God, even if it cost him the son that God had promised. Instead, and as directed, Abraham offered to God the sacrifice of his providing—a ram that had been caught by its horns in a nearby thicket. (Gen. 22:1-14)

Because of his unreserved trust in God and obedience to his express command, the LORD made a renewed and strengthened promise to Abraham; this time, confirming the promise with an oath. The LORD would make of Abraham's descendants an immense multitude, described as being like the stars of the heavens or the sand of the seashore for number. Through this great multitude of Abraham and Isaac's descendants, all nations on earth would be blessed; for through Abraham and Isaac's descendants would come the promised Seed or Redeemer.

Thus, it is written:

Genesis 22:15-18 (ESV)

(15) And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven (16) and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, (17) I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, (18) and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

The LORD was said to swear this solemn and irrevocable oath by himself; i.e., in his own name. Since, of course, there existed no higher or greater name, power or authority than that of God himself, and since a solemn oath had to be pronounced in the name of the highest power or authority available, then God swore by himself. Since it was impossible for God to fail to fulfil his sworn promise, then the promise itself was inviolable. It could not fail of fulfilment, and indeed subsequent events demonstrated that God did bless Abraham and did make of him a great and mighty nation. From that nation, too, came the promised Messiah or Saviour of his people. (Gen. 22:1-18)

Abraham endured as believing implicitly in the promises and Word of God. Ultimately, he was greatly blessed and rewarded by seeing God's Word and promises fulfilled; partly, while on earth and much more fully when in heaven. (Heb. 11:8-16)

This, then, is the example being used by the writer to encourage and exhort these Jewish believers to imitate the faith and perseverance of those who inherited God's promises and God's blessings. Other examples of faith and perseverance could have been cited, but the writer will leave these until he reaches chapter 11 of this letter.

Hebrews 6:16-17

In the normal course of events, and to pledge the truth of a certain matter, men take their solemn oaths by someone higher and greater than themselves. Pagan or heathen nations took their oaths in the names of their deities or false gods, or in other powers that they considered superior to themselves. Those who believed in the true God did not take solemn oaths lightly or as a matter of course;

but when they did—e.g., to testify to the truth in a court of law—they did so in the name of the Sovereign Lord God whom alone they recognised as the highest and greatest power and authority in heaven and on earth. Thus, in the event of any disputes, these men could appeal to the one in whose name the solemn oath had been taken to testify to the fact and to the veracity of their pledge or promise. (Unfortunately, for those who swore in the name of false gods or deities, this left them with no effective remedy.)

However, since the Sovereign Lord God was indeed the highest power and authority in the universe, and since he alone was the eternally existing One, then there was no one greater by whom God himself could take an oath. Thus, God took his oath by his own Name; i.e., by his own eternal character or glorious and unchanging attributes. This oath was taken to pledge to the heirs of his promises the absolute certainty of their fulfilment in every respect. Thus, what God had promised on oath to Abraham was fulfilled through Abraham's seed, and what was promised on oath to all of the heirs of salvation is being fulfilled according to the promises of God. God's oath was the solemn guarantee that what God had promised he would fulfil. (Cf. Isa. 45:23; Jer. 22:5; 49:13; Luke 1:73)

Hebrews 6:18

Therefore, says the writer, we see that God has pledged himself to fulfil his purposes for his people by two immutable or unchangeable things: his *promise* (based on the counsels of his own immutable and sovereign will) and his solemn *oath* (based in the immutability of his character or attributes).

It is, of course, impossible for God to lie. However, the sense here is that it is impossible for God to prove false to his word, his promises or his oath. They are irrevocable. What God has declared, must come to pass. (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; Titus 1:2) However, by confirming his word and promises with an oath, God has given to the heirs of salvation a solemn assurance based on his own holy and righteous character that he will not alter his will and purposes concerning his people, and that he will not fail to bring each and every one of them into the benefits and blessings of his solemn and immutable promises. Therefore, the people of God possess an unassailable shelter or refuge in Christ their Redeemer—the One of whom God's sworn promise to Abraham foretold. Furthermore, in virtue of the unchanging promises of God's Word, the saints of the Lord are strongly encouraged to hold fast to their profession and to persevere in their faith. (2 Cor. 1:20)

The expression, '*we who have fled for refuge...*' probably alludes to the cities of refuge found in the Old Testament. This is a concept that would be familiar to these Hebrew Christians. They knew that the LORD had set aside certain cities to which a manslayer could flee for refuge, taking hold of the horns of the altar in that place of safety. So long as the offender remained within the city of refuge, he was safe from judgment. (Num. 35:11-12, 26-28; cf. 1 Kings 1:50-51; 2:28)

Calling this to mind, the writer is speaking of an immeasurably greater place of refuge for those sinners who have believed on Christ, and who have sought deliverance from judgment on their sins through him. So long as they continue to abide in him, they are safe from judgment—eternally.

Hebrews 6:19

The promises of God's Word, therefore, together with the solemn oath by which God bound himself to fulfil his word and promises for his people, provide for them an unshakeable foundation for their faith in Christ. He is their Rock. He is the One who came into the world in fulfilment of God's solemn oath to Abraham. He is the One whom these Jewish believers had come to trust as their Messiah. He was their Great High Priest above all others.

What was true for these Jewish believers is true also for all of God's redeemed and holy people—for there is one flock and one Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ. These too possess the word and the promises of God; promises that have been, are being, and will be fulfilled in their lives according to God's solemn oath. This is the solid foundation for their faith in Christ. This is their sure and steadfast anchor for their soul. This foundation is immovable, for it is resting on the Rock of Ages—the Son of God himself. (Rom. 9:33; 1 Cor. 3:11; 10:4; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:8)

As our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus has entered into the most holy place in heaven with the atoning blood. And into that holy place behind the veil, each of God's blood-bought people may come with confidence, yet with reverence and awe. (Heb. 9:3,7,11-14; 10:19-22)

Hebrews 6:20

The Lord Jesus has entered within the veil in the heavenly sanctuary as the representative of his people. As the One who offered his own life a perfect sacrifice of atonement for sin and brought that sacrifice behind the veil in the heavenly sanctuary, the Lord Jesus never needs to repeat that sacrifice or offering for sin—for he did this once-for-all. However, as our Great High Priest, the Son of God continues to intercede with the Father on behalf of his people, and applying to them the full measure of the benefits and blessings of their redemption. (Heb. 4:14; 8:1; 9:12,24; see also Rom. 8:34)

Again, Jesus is said to act as a priest after the order of Melchizedek: i.e., in perpetuity, or for as long as the present age endures. The writer of this epistle will have more to say about Melchizedek and his priestly ministry in the next chapter. (Ps. 110:4; Heb. 5:6,10)

Furthermore, the exalted and glorified Lord Jesus has returned to his Father's presence to prepare a place for all his redeemed people. (John 14:1-3; Heb. 2:10)

HEBREWS CHAPTER 7**Jesus Greater than Melchizedek****Hebrews 7:1-28**

In this chapter, the writer to the Hebrews deals at some length with the priesthood of Melchizedek, and demonstrates how that Old Testament priest typified the eternal priesthood of the exalted Lord Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 7:1-2

Melchizedek is recorded as having encountered Abraham (then known as *Abram*) returning from the slaughter or defeat of the kings. The kings involved were the four kings who had formed a coalition against the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and their allies, successfully defeating the latter kings in battle. Among the captives taken by the victors however was Lot the kinsman of Abraham, and his family. When Abraham learned of this, he and 318 of his specially trained men set off in pursuit of the victorious kings. When he had caught up with the armed company and their captives, Abraham divided his men into two groups. Attacking by night, and taking the company completely by surprise, Abraham and his men succeeded in scattering and defeating these kings and their men. Then, Abraham rescued Lot and others members of his family together with all their possessions.

While returning from this encounter with the kings, Abraham met Melchizedek. Melchizedek bestowed upon Abraham a blessing from God, or declared formally and solemnly that the patriarch was blessed of God. (Gen. 14:1-20) As it is written:

Genesis 14:18-20a (ESV)

(18) And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.)

(19) And he blessed him and said,

"Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
 Possessor of heaven and earth;
 (20a) and blessed be God Most High,
 who has delivered your enemies into your hand!"...

Only a priest appointed by God Most High possessed the authority to invoke such a blessing on a person. Indeed, this function formed part of the priestly office, and later was enshrined in the Mosaic Law for the benefit of the Levitical priests. To this end, God's Word says:

Deuteronomy 21:5 (ESV)

(5) Then the priests, the sons of Levi, shall come forward, for the LORD your God has chosen them to minister to him and to bless in the name of the LORD, and by their word every dispute and every assault shall be settled.

After Melchizedek had bestowed God's blessing upon Abraham, the patriarch gave to the priest a tenth (or tithe) of everything that he had acquired as the spoils of war. In effect, therefore, Abraham

was recognising Melchizedek as a lawfully ordained priest of the true and living God, in clear distinction from the numerous pagan priests.

Furthermore, by yielding a tenth of his gains to this priest, Abraham was acknowledging that Melchizedek had been appointed by God Most High to receive tithes and offerings for use in the LORD's service and for the support of the LORD's servants. We should note, however, that—on this occasion—the reference is to a tenth of the gains acquired from the defeat of the kings, not to a tenth of Abraham's personal wealth or possessions. This is a separate issue. From this, it becomes evident that the institution of tithes predated the instructions concerning tithes recorded in the Law of Moses. As with other matters—such as sacrifices and offerings that were acceptable to God—the LORD must have revealed his will to the people long before he had set down these matters formally in the written Law (including the Ten Commandments)

The author of Hebrews adverts now to the meaning and significance of the name, Melchizedek. *Melchizedek* means 'king of righteousness', from the Hebrew *melek* 'my king' and *zedek* 'righteousness'. Melchizedek is known also as 'king of Salem' or 'king of peace.' (Salem, apparently, was an ancient name for Zion or Jerusalem (Ps. 76:2), and it predated the other ancient name, 'Jebus'.) In addition to his regal or kingly office, Melchizedek was priest of the Most High God. Therefore, in this respect, he typified or foreshadowed the Lord Jesus Christ, who is Prophet, Priest and King. (Heb. 6:20)

Hebrews 7:3

Concerning the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood, each priest from this tribe had to be able to prove his genealogy beyond the least shadow of doubt before he was permitted to serve in the sanctuary as a priest of God. Anyone who could not trace his lineage was forbidden from engaging in the sacerdotal office. (Cf. Ezra 2:62; Neh. 7:63-64)

Melchizedek, however—who predated the Levitical priests—was called and appointed directly to the priestly office by God. Unlike many other characters found in God's Word, no record exists of Melchizedek's family line or genealogy. Thus, he typifies one who has had no beginning of days and who will have no end of life. Furthermore, since no record exists of his birth or death, Melchizedek typifies a priest who continues in office forever or in perpetuity. In this respect, he resembles the Son of God who indeed is a Priest forever or perpetually, without beginning of days or end of life. (Heb. 5:6; 6:20; 7:24,28)

This, of course, stands in complete contrast to the position held by the Levitical priests, who ceased to act as priests on behalf of the people when their service in the sanctuary came to a close; either temporarily, or permanently on their retirement from office. Therefore, no priest from the tribe of Levi ever served continually for the full duration of his lifetime. However, in virtue of his indissoluble life, the Lord Jesus never ceases to act as a Priest, continually interceding with the Father on our behalf. (Rom. 8:34; 7:25)

Hebrews 7:4

The verse begins with the word, '*See...*' (or '*Consider...*') The writer is calling upon his readers or hearers to give the closest attention to what he is about to say.

Abraham was the man chosen by God to inherit his promises. He was the one to whom the LORD had promised on oath that he would bless his seed and make of him a great nation and a numerous people. (Gen. 12:2-3) Abraham had been specially favoured by God to receive his blessings, and to be the one through whom the Christ would come. (Gen. 15:1-6) Nevertheless, when Abraham met Mel-

chizedek, the patriarch yielded willingly to Melchizedek's superior position and office *as priest of the Most High God*. If, in his day, Abraham was considered great, then Melchizedek must have been considered even greater since he was the appointed priest of God Most High. By submitting to Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils, Abraham was acknowledging this priest's office and position in the sight of God, and his right to claim such tithes to be presented to the service of God.

The expression, '*Abraham the patriarch*' stands in an emphatic position in the Greek (LXX) text. The sense being that if even one so honoured and favoured as the patriarch should yield to Melchizedek, then—in his religious, spiritual or priestly capacity—Melchizedek must be possessed of even greater honours and offices. In addition, since Melchizedek is a type of Christ, then Christ himself must be unspeakably greater than both the Jewish or Levitical priesthood and the superior priestly offices of Melchizedek, of whom the Lord Jesus was the antitype.

We should note, also, that in connection with the tithe the reference is to the best of the spoils (lit., '*of the top of the heap*'). Abraham gave to Melchizedek a tenth of the very best of the spoils, since the patriarch realised that he was yielding this offering not to man but to God.

Hebrews 7:5

Levi (i.e., the sons of Aaron) was the tribe appointed by the LORD to serve at the sanctuary. The Levites, or assistants to the priests, were commanded in God's law to take tithes from the people. These tithes were intended for the support and services of the sanctuary. All tithes given to the Levites in this manner were considered as offerings given to the LORD. From the tithes given to the Levites, a tenth of the amount (i.e., a tithe of the tithe) was deducted for the support of the priests who served in the sanctuary. (Num. 18:26-32; Deut. 14:27-29; 2 Chron. 31:4-6)

Acting in accordance with God's law, the Levites accepted tithes from their own brothers or fellow Israelites, all of whom were descendants of Abraham. This contrasted with Melchizedek who accepted tithes from Abraham the patriarch, even although Melchizedek did not belong to the Israelite people. Nevertheless, Abraham recognised Melchizedek as the priest of God Most High (in addition to this priest's regal position as king of Salem). Therefore, in respect of his spiritual or priestly offices, Abraham acknowledged the superiority of Melchizedek.

Now, argues the writer of Hebrews, since—as a priest of God—Melchizedek was superior to even the patriarch Abraham, and since this same Melchizedek typified Christ in his priestly office, then Christ (the antitype) and his offices must be infinitely superior to both the Aaronic priests and to Melchizedek. Furthermore, Melchizedek held the offices of priest and king. The exalted Lord Jesus is superior to Melchizedek in this respect too, for he holds in perpetuity the offices of Prophet, Priest and King.

Hebrews 7:6

Melchizedek bore no lineal relationship to Abraham, yet the priest of God received tithes from the patriarch of Israel. Although Abraham was the chosen of God and the possessor of God's promises to make of him a great nation, yet Abraham acknowledges Melchizedek's position as his spiritual superior and as priest of God Most High. This is shown by the fact that Abraham gave to Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils. It is shown also by the fact that Abraham received the blessing of God from Melchizedek. Both instances indicate that Melchizedek was acting as a superior to Abraham, insofar as his priestly position and offices were concerned. (Gen. 14:18-20)

Hebrews 7:7

This verse confirms the spiritual or priestly superiority of Melchizedek over Abraham. The blessing of God can be imparted to an individual only by one who holds a superior office in God's service. Furthermore, such spiritual blessings—when bestowed upon a person of Abraham's standing—can be bestowed only by one who stands above even Abraham; the forefather of the entire Israelite nation.

Hebrews 7:8

Later, the descendants of Aaron (i.e., Levi and his sons) would be set apart by God to the service of the sanctuary; originally, in the tent of meeting or tabernacle, and later in the temple. As part of their duties, the law of God instructed the Levites, or assistants to the priests, to collect tithes from their brethren, the people of Israel. In this case, the tithes were received by mortal men (the Levites and the priests). Ultimately, however, these men would die and their priestly office would be assumed by other men from the same tribe. Such was the nature of the Levitical priesthood, and of any office occupied by mortal men.

In the case of Melchizedek, however, it is testified that tithes or offerings to God are received by one who lives: because, in Melchizedek's case, no record exists of his genealogy or of his beginning or end of priestly service before God.

The fact that Melchizedek appears to have continued indefinitely in God's service is used by the writer of Hebrews to make Melchizedek a type or figure of Christ. Of course, the difference lies in the fact that Melchizedek did cease to serve God and did die, although this is not recorded. Again, the difference exists in the fact that—concerning his deity—Christ had no beginning of days and will have no end of life, since he lives forever as the eternal Son of God. Yet again, and for the same reason, Christ continues as a Priest forever, highly exalted above Abraham, the Levitical priesthood and the priesthood of Melchizedek. Yet, this Great High Priest, of whom the writer of Hebrews speaks, does not now offer blood sacrifices to God. This he did once-for-all at Calvary, and then entered into the heavenly sanctuary to 'sprinkle' the atoning blood once-for-all before and upon the mercy seat. Rather, this Great High Priest lives eternally to intercede with God the Father on behalf of all his blood-bought people, and because of the work that he completed perfectly while on earth, which culminated in his sufferings and death on Calvary's cross. (Heb. 6:20; 7:25; 9:24-25)

Hebrews 7:9-10

The writer continues to demonstrate the superiority of Melchizedek over Abraham and over the Levitical priesthood. He makes the point that Melchizedek was serving as a priest of God Most High before Aaron was born or the Levitical priesthood was established by God. Indeed, at this time, Aaron, Levi and the entire Levitical tribe were 'still in the loins' of their forefather Abraham. Thus, says the writer, we may surmise that Levi himself paid tithes to Melchizedek. This is true if we consider that—in this regard—Abraham was acting representatively on behalf of all his progeny.⁹

⁹ A similar situation exists where Adam—acting representatively for all mankind—involved every human being in his fall, and consequently brought upon all mankind a fallen sinful nature resulting in alienation from God.

Hebrews 7:11

Clearly, the Levitical priesthood could never bring about, or lead to, perfection: i.e., in and of itself, it did not and could not bring a person to a fully assured state of salvation and sanctification in relation to God. The law made nothing perfect—and the Levitical priesthood was enacted under, and tied inseparably to, the law of commandments and ordinances. It was connected to those rites and ceremonies, which—although performed religiously by the priesthood on behalf of the people—could never take away sin. Nor could these ceremonies, offerings or sacrifices cleanse the conscience of the worshipper or create within his heart true and lasting peace with God. This is because these sacrifices and offerings had to be repeated continually, and therefore the worshipper was aware that—although his sins had been covered—they had not been removed finally and completely from the sight or memory of God. (Heb. 10:1-4, 11)

From the foregoing examples alone, it can be seen that perfection in spiritual and moral matters, and full assurance of God's grace and salvation, could not be attained through the ministrations of the Levitical priesthood, for these ministrations were of necessity repetitive and temporary. Again, the Levitical priesthood was a priesthood 'of the letter' (or, of the law), and the letter of the law brought only death because of a person's total inability to observe the law of God unto perfection—as God required if one were to attain to life by that means. (Rom. 7:6)

This is not to say, nor is it to suggest, that no one living during the era of the law ever experienced the full salvation of God. Patently, this would not be true. Abraham is noted as a man of faith, and as a friend and child of God. (Heb. 11:8-13; Jas. 2:23) Throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, very many men and women are denoted as the true children of God. Although this was not true of the entire nation of Israel, it was true certainly of a remnant within Israel. All these were men and women of faith, and all of them enjoyed a personal saving relationship with God. However, their salvation had not come to them through the observance of the law (or through the observance of law more generally, since—before Moses—the law of commandments had not been given). Rather, and like Abraham their forefather, these Old Testament saints experienced God's salvation by his grace and through their faith in God and in his promises.

The law of sacrifices and offerings that the LORD introduced later, and which was administered by the sons of Aaron or the Levitical priesthood, typified the removal of the people's sin and guilt but it did not actually take it away in God's sight. This could not be accomplished under that type of priesthood, or with such imperfect offerings or sacrifices. Rather, the removal of sin permanently from God's sight had to await the inauguration of another priesthood represented by another (and sinless) Priest. It had to wait, too, for the presenting by that sinless Priest of another—and perfectly unblemished—sacrifice for sin. For this and other reasons, therefore, another priesthood had to be instituted, and the people represented by another Priest. However, it was essential that—although intended to fulfil the law's demands to the letter—this new priesthood was not associated with the imperfect and temporary priesthood of Aaron. Therefore, this priesthood could not be represented by any of Aaron's descendants: i.e., it could not be associated with any member of the priestly tribe of Levi.

Thus, God instituted a new order, inaugurated under a New Covenant, where the Priest (or Priest-King) did not arise from the tribe of Levi but from that of Judah. (cf. Gen. 49:10; Heb. 7:14; cf. also Isa. 11:1; Micah 5:2; Zech. 6:12-13; Matt. 2:6; Rev. 5:5)

The Lion of Judah was to become the appointed Priest of God. Furthermore, and unlike the Aaronic priesthood, this Priest was appointed after the order of Melchizedek. Melchizedek typified one who had had no beginning of days or end of years. Again, Melchizedek typified a priesthood that continued to serve God in perpetuity. The Priest of the New Covenant, therefore, resembled Melchizedek in

these respects, and by contrast differed correspondingly from the Levitical priesthood. Unlike Melchizedek, however, the Son of God is actually without beginning of days or end of years, since he is the Eternal One. Again, Jesus, our Great High Priest, continues to represent and intercede for his people throughout the ages, since his priesthood endures forever. The priesthood of Aaron was a temporary and imperfect priesthood. The priesthood of Christ endures unchanging under One Perfect Person, and for as long as such an office will be required by the people of God.

Hebrews 7:12

A change in the priesthood, however, of necessity brought with it a change in the law. This change did not relate to the essentials of the moral law or law of commandments, but to all those aspects of the law that related to offerings and sacrifices for sin. The entire body of ceremonial and ritual law would require to be abrogated if another priesthood of a different and perfect order were to be introduced. Hence, not only would the Priest of the New Covenant be required to *minister* under the new arrangement, he would be required also to *fulfil completely* and to abrogate all the requirements of the former law, insofar as these laws or ordinances related to sacrifices and offerings for sin or for the expiation of sin and guilt. (Matt. 5:17; Heb. 8:1-13; see also Rom. 10:4)

This, of course, was what Christ did when he himself became both the Priest and the Sacrifice of atonement under the terms of the New Covenant. Thus—and thus alone—was God’s law fulfilled unto perfection. Thus—and thus alone—could sinners be forgiven for all time, their sins atoned for and remitted completely and forever, and they be reconciled to God through the blood shed on the cross—the perfect and once-for-all Sacrifice providing a perfect and final redemption for all of God’s people. (Heb. 10:5-10)

This final sacrifice for sin applied not only to the believers of the writer’s day and of believers in every age since, but also to believers living before the coming of Christ. All those who, like Abraham, were justified by faith had been justified in anticipation of Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice; and, by the efficacy of that perfect sacrifice, their salvation had been secured. The animal sacrifices predating the coming of Christ merely typified or foreshadowed the necessity of an unblemished life sacrificed to atone for sin. These animal sacrifices could not and did not actually take away sin. (Heb. 10:4) Since it involved the sacrifice of the life of a perfectly righteous, holy, just and sinless Man, however, Christ’s sacrifice removes sin from God’s sight completely and forever. And since this sacrifice was offered vicariously—as a substitute for others—all those who receive Christ receive also the full benefits of justification, sanctification and eternal life. They are considered to be clothed with the very righteousness of Christ their Redeemer, and thus they are seen in the sight of the Most High and Holy God—their Father in heaven. (Rom. 3:22-26; Phil. 3:9)

Hebrews 7:13-14

The One of whom these things are spoken, of course, is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Great High Priest appointed by God after the order of Melchizedek. However, as is well known, the Lord Jesus was not a descendant of the priestly tribe of Levi. Rather, the Lord was from the tribe of Judah. Yet, nothing was ever mentioned in the Mosaic Law about a priest arising from the tribe of Judah. Indeed, the law states specifically that every Jewish priest must be a member of the tribe of Levi. The priestly office devolved upon the first-born son on the death of a serving priest.

Yet, Melchizedek was not of the tribe of Levi, nor indeed of any Israelite tribe. Furthermore, in Psalm 110, the Lord God had declared that his Anointed was a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (rather than that of Aaron). Christ, therefore—the Anointed of God—became the Great High Priest of

a new order and of the New Covenant—a covenant that would endure forever, just as surely as Christ's priesthood would endure forever. (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:8-13; 12:24)

Hebrews 7:15-16

The priests of the Old Covenant (or Old Testament) were required by the law of God to be descendants of Aaron: i.e., members of the tribe of Levi. No one outside that tribe could ever serve at the altar or minister in the sanctuary: for no one other than those from the tribe of Levi had been sanctified unto God for this express purpose. Anyone who attempted to minister unto the LORD, without being appointed expressly by him to that service, would face the judgment of God. This, precisely, is what happened in the case of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Korah was a Levite who wickedly usurped his position, and together with Dathan and Abiram (both Reubenites) and another 250 rebellious leaders of the congregation, they rose up against Moses and Aaron. For their presumptuous arrogance in intruding upon things most holy and for desecrating the sacred office of the priesthood, God sentenced these rebellious individuals to death. (Num. 16:1-40; cf. Num. 3:4; 2 Chron. 26:16-21)

The Levitical priesthood, however, could minister only in relation to the law as it was enacted under the terms of the Old Covenant. Their service was of a temporary nature, instituted by God until the time of reformation: the time when God would establish a New Covenant between himself and the people. (Heb. 9:10) This New Covenant would inaugurate a new order—an order that fulfilled in every detail all the requirements of the Mosaic Law. Consequently, this new order rendered obsolete and unnecessary all the ritual and ceremonial offerings and sacrifices mediated by the Levitical priests on behalf of the people. For the Priest appointed under the New Covenant would make one complete and final offering as a sacrifice for sin, then sit down at the right hand of God—there being no further need to stand ministering daily at the earthly altar. (Heb. 10:9-14) From his position in glory, the Lord Jesus Christ now intercedes for his people based on his once-for-all sacrifice of atonement on their behalf.

A primary difference between the priesthood of Aaron and that of Christ is that the Aaronic or Levitical priests could not continue in office indefinitely. Eventually, those priests died, and they were succeeded in office by others from the same tribe. In the case of Christ, however, death cannot intervene. He lives eternally, and therefore as the same unchanging Great High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, he is able to intercede for his people for all time—guaranteeing to them by the fact of his indestructible life the certainty of their complete and final salvation.

Hebrews 7:17

This is why the Scriptures assert that Jesus has been appointed a High Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Those priests who were appointed after the order of Aaron died, and they were replaced by other men from the tribe of Levi. However, Melchizedek is considered as a priest who is without beginning of days or end of life—and therefore (apparently) a priest forever in the service of God.

Now, of course, Melchizedek was only a type, foreshadowing the eternal priesthood of Christ. Melchizedek himself died (although his death is not recorded) and must therefore have ceased to serve as a priest. Christ, however, cannot die. He lives forever, and he fulfils to perfection the office typified by Melchizedek. Christ is the High Priest of our profession. He can never change, nor can he be replaced by any other. Furthermore, he is the One above all others who will never fail to represent and intercede with the Father for all his people. For, on his hands and in his heart, our names are graven: and—as signified by the high priest's breastplate—our Great High Priest bears them forever close to his heart into the presence of God the Father. (cf. Ex. 28:29-30; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25)

Hebrews 7:18

In saying that the former commandment is set aside (by the introduction of a new priesthood after the order of Melchizedek), the reference is not to the commandments expressed in the moral law, for these are immutable. Insofar as fallen sinful mankind is concerned, these commands cannot lead to life. Nevertheless, they are essential to declare or to show forth God's required standard of righteousness, to condemn sin, and to show sinners their need of salvation.

Rather, the commandment to which the writer is referring in this verse is the law of commandments pertaining to the Levitical priesthood, and to the regulations for offerings, sacrifices, rituals and ceremonies connected with that priesthood. Unlike the moral law, which is enduring, the ritual and ceremonial laws connected with the priesthood were temporary. For the Levitical priesthood itself was a temporary institution, as were the associated cereal and animal offerings and sacrifices. All of these were wholly ineffective or useless insofar as the removal of sin was concerned. They merely typified or foreshadowed that Sacrifice which would indeed effect the removal of sin; and, in this sense, they were essential. However, the typical sacrifices did not themselves achieve satisfaction or atonement for sin in the eyes of God. Nevertheless, the LORD was pleased to cover his people's sins during this period and to grant them forgiveness. However, their forgiveness had not been granted to them because of these animal sacrifices (which could never take away sin) but because of an unspeakably greater Sacrifice that was yet to come, and that would take away sin forever.

This immeasurably greater Sacrifice was offered to God by the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek—in other words, an unceasing, unchanging and eternal High Priest. This office is filled to perfection by our Lord Jesus Christ. The Son came into the world in accordance with the Father's will and purposes. Part of the Father's will was that Jesus should be anointed a High Priest under a New Covenant; a better covenant with a perfect Priest—one who was fully able to meet the law's demands, not only for himself, but also for others. Christ fulfilled all the requirements of God's law to the letter, and he set aside or abrogated the entire law of rituals and ceremonies connected with the Levitical priesthood and with the temporary offerings and sacrifices for sin that had been carried out during the preceding centuries.

Hebrews 7:19

The law made nothing perfect, for the law required perfect obedience to every one of its stipulations. However, fallen and sinful mankind was incapable of rendering perfect obedience, and therefore of satisfying the law's just, holy and righteous demands. For this reason, no human being could be saved or justified in God's sight by observing the law. Rather, by the law, every human being in the world stood condemned; and that justly—for all had sinned and come short of the glory of God. (Rom. 3:19,23; 8:7-8; Gal. 3:10)

One Person, however, did keep the law of God unto perfection; and he did so not only on his own account but also on our account. The Lord Jesus Christ obeyed every precept and principle of God's law; and, by his perfect life, sufferings, death and resurrection, he obtained a full and free salvation for all his people.

This is the better hope of which the writer speaks here. (cf. Heb. 6:18-20; see also Rom. 5:2-5) The Lord Jesus, who is our Great High Priest, has made a perfect and final atonement for sin. God the Father has exalted his Son to his own right hand, and there he *sits* (since his atoning work on earth is finished) interceding with the Father on behalf of his saints, and based on his finished work on earth. Through him, and through his perfect work on their behalf, all who believe are forgiven; fully and forever, and receive from the Lord the full blessings and benefits of an eternal salvation, including the

gift of the Holy Spirit. They have been reconciled to the Father in heaven by means of the blood shed on the cross. This blood has secured their eternal redemption, for it has been shed vicariously, and once-for-all, as a perfect sacrifice for their sin.

Thus, because of this final and unrepeatable sacrifice for sin, and because of the perfections of Christ's Person and work, the redeemed or blood-bought believer can draw near to God. Under the Old Testament arrangement, this was impossible. The saints of the Old Testament could not approach God directly or come near to his most holy sanctuary. Neither, indeed, could the priests. Only the high priest could enter the most holy place behind the veil, and this but once a year with the blood of the atoning sacrifice sprinkled on and before the mercy seat (or the covering of the ark) inside the veil. When Christ died on the cross, however, the veil of the temple was rent in two—from top to bottom, signifying that the hand of the Almighty had torn aside the curtain separating the people from himself and himself from the people, within the holiest of all. (Matt. 27:51)

Furthermore, the heavenly sanctuary also has been opened to the people of God. Now, in virtue of the atoning blood, and of Christ's endless life and intercession on behalf of his people, they can draw near to their Father in heaven. (Heb. 10:22) Now, in a spirit of humility, contrition, worship and prayerfulness, every one of God's redeemed and holy children can enter the holiest of all, where God dwells enthroned amidst the glorious cherubim. Now, the saints of the Lord can come boldly or confidently to the throne of grace, for through Christ their Redeemer, the Father is most certain to hear and to heed the prayers and petitions of his children and to answer them according to his will and purposes. Indeed, the people of God will find grace to help them in their time of need—abundant and sufficient grace for every eventuality, and more than sufficient to sustain them through every sorrow, suffering, pain and grief. (Heb. 4:16)

Hebrews 7:20

Those who were appointed priests under the Levitical order were appointed in accordance with God's law concerning this office. By that law, priests were to be appointed only from the tribe of Levi (the sons of Aaron), for that tribe alone had been set apart by God for service in the sanctuary. Again, and of all the tribes of Israel, the tribe of Levi alone did not receive any inheritance in the land. Rather, the Lord God was their inheritance, and their support came from a share in the gifts and tithes given by the people to the LORD. (Deut. 10:9; Jos. 13:33; 14:3)

However, at no time, did the LORD establish or confirm the Levitical priests in their office by means of a solemn oath, Nor did the LORD ever swear on oath that the Levitical priesthood would be a perpetual office. No single priest could ever have occupied that office indefinitely. By its very nature, this priesthood was temporary and of a definite—although prolonged—duration.

Hebrews 7:21

Unlike the priests of the Aaronic or Levitical order, however, the Great High Priest of the new order or New Covenant was appointed to this office by a solemn oath. For, in the Psalms, the LORD had solemnly sworn concerning his Anointed: "*You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.*" (Psalm 110:4) Here, it was being asserted on oath that the high priesthood of Christ (God's Anointed) would never end, and that his intercessory ministry would never cease. What Melchizedek typified or foreshadowed in being (apparently) a priest forever who was without beginning of days or end of life, Christ actually fulfilled. The Lord Jesus is indeed without beginning of days and he will have no end of life, since he is the ever-living One. (Heb. 7:25; Rev. 1:18) Again, Jesus' priesthood will indeed continue unceasing throughout the ages, and until the culmination of all things at the end of this age.

Furthermore, there is no possibility that God the Father will ever change his mind concerning the eternal nature of his Son's priesthood. To this end, we may consider the following points:

- Firstly, God cannot change his mind, nor can he revoke the words of his solemn oath. (Num. 23:19-20; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:17-18)
- Secondly, and from eternity, God has elected a people for himself and he has given every one of these elect individuals to his Son, so that none of them should be lost. (John 10:27-30; Eph. 1:4-5)
- Thirdly, God vouchsafed to bring all his redeemed children to glory; and, for this purpose to be achieved, they need the continuing intervention of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Mal. 3:16-17; John 14:1-3; Rom. 8:15-39)

Thus, when the Father swore on oath to appoint his Son a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, he did so with the full intention of making his Son's appointment to that holy office immutable and irrevocable. Thus, God's people can be assured for all time that the Lord Jesus will always be present to mediate and intercede for them and to present their prayers and petitions to the Father. He will never leave them nor forsake them, for his priesthood continues forever and he is a Priest who loves his people with an everlasting love. (Deut. 31:6; cf. Heb. 13:5)

Hebrews 7:22

Because the Lord Jesus holds his priestly office permanently throughout this age, and is being sustained in that office by the will, and on the solemn oath, of his heavenly Father, then Jesus' priesthood is of a far superior nature than the Levitical priesthood—although this priesthood too had been ordained of God.

To begin with, Christ's priesthood cannot fail or cease to be. The Lord's priesthood is superior in every respect to the Levitical priesthood, for by it sins are forgiven and removed entirely and forever. By Christ—our Great High Priest—God's people can draw near to him, even although he is exalted to the highest place in heaven. By Christ, our unchanging and enduring High Priest, we can make known to God our prayers and petitions, in the knowledge that they will be heard by the Father through the intercession of the Holy Spirit and by the mediation of the Son on our behalf.

Thus, Jesus not only effects a better and far superior covenant, but he guarantees it to all his people. That is, God's people can be assured infallibly that all those whom the Father has covenanted to redeem, and whom he has given to his Son, will be brought to full salvation through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, they will be kept secure in their salvation by virtue of God's covenant and in virtue of their election from eternity—and in which God will keep them secure throughout the coming ages.

Hebrews 7:23-24

Under the Levitical priesthood, numerous men serving at different times occupied the priestly office. They served God and ministered to the people for as long as the law permitted. However, when they had reached the end of their priestly tenure, or when they had died in office, these priests had to be replaced by other men from the tribe of Levi. There was, therefore, no real continuity on the part of any one priest. All of them ceased from serving God and the people at one time or another.

Christ's priestly ministry, however, will never cease. Again, this Priest will never—and can never—be replaced by another. He will remain a Priest forever, mediating on behalf of—and interceding for—his people.

Hebrews 7:25

For this very reason, the Lord Jesus Christ is able to save to the uttermost (i.e., to the utmost degree, and for time and eternity) all those who draw near to God through him. By implication, of course, this means that there is no other way or means of access to God the Father except through his Son. Again, no other priest or mediator is acceptable to God the Father except that Priest and Mediator between God and man whom the Father himself has appointed by solemn oath to that office: viz., our Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 9:15; 12:24)

However, the Father guarantees unequivocally to accept all those who by faith draw near to him through the mediation of his Son. Through their union with Christ, the redeemed children of God have been guaranteed a full salvation. By that union, the Lord will keep them secure in their salvation throughout their lives on earth, and until that day when—meeting with him in his glory—they are conducted by the Lord Jesus into the very presence of their loving and almighty heavenly Father.

The reason why all these blessings can be guaranteed to God's people is that the Son of God ever lives to make intercession for them. As a High Priest forever, the Lord Jesus pleads the merits of his perfectly righteous life, his atoning and vicarious sacrifice for the sins of his people, and his finished work on earth on their behalf. Christ is our righteousness. This is how his Father looks upon every one of his redeemed children. The Father considers his redeemed people as those who have been clothed with the perfect righteousness of his own Son; for that perfect righteousness was imputed to them when—by the work of the Holy Spirit—they were regenerated and brought to repentance and faith in Christ, and were justified by God the Father.

Thus, the Scripture assures us of this solemn and greatly encouraging fact:

- Christ *can* save to the uttermost;
- Christ *has* saved to the uttermost,
- Christ *will* save to the uttermost...

...all those who draw near to God through him.

And all those whom the Father has given to the Son will indeed draw near to the Father through his Son.

Hebrews 7:26

It is fitting, indeed, says the writer of Hebrews, that we should have such a High Priest.

The Levitical priests, with their continual sacrifices and offerings, could never be the means of reconciling us to God. Their ministry effected only a temporary covering for sin, but it could not remove sin finally and completely from God's sight. However, Jesus, our Great High Priest is *such* a High Priest. His finished work on earth has taken away sin forever; and, by his mediation, we have been reconciled to God. Unlike the Jewish priests, whose lives were tainted by their own personal sins, Jesus is the only High Priest whose life is wholly without sin. Indeed, says the writer, the following is true of the Lord Jesus alone:

- He is **holy**. The word here used is not the usual word meaning 'set apart' or 'consecrated'—although this was certainly true of the Lord Jesus in relation to his Father. Rather, it is a word meaning 'pious'. The Lord Jesus was utterly reverent in his relationship toward his Father, and godly in every respect. This characteristic of absolute holiness, however, includes also the concept of mercy toward others. Although completely holy in himself, the Lord Jesus is a Priest who is able to sympathise with our weaknesses. He is One who is completely merciful and compassionate toward those who have fallen. Yet, he remains forever apart from, and uncontaminated by, the sins of men and women.
- He is **harmless** (or guileless): This High Priest is completely innocent and free of all evil, malice or ill will toward others. He cannot think, say or do evil, nor does he think evil of others or desire them any harm. Rather, and although we are sinners, the holy Son of God desires only to do us good and to bless us with the full benefits of his salvation.
- He is **undefiled**: This High Priest is without spot or blemish, and wholly pure in heart. Nothing within him, and nothing from outside, could contaminate his soul or his perfectly holy life, in any way whatsoever. Nothing ever existed in his life that was questionable or unbecoming. He was and is wholly without sin and in every respect unblemished.
- He was **separate** (or separated) **from sinners**: Not in the physical sense—for the Lord Jesus associated with sinners and ate with them—but in the moral sense. In this sense, the Lord Jesus was set apart completely from, and exalted above, fallen and sinful mankind. As the Son of God, he was as far above—and separated from—sinful men and women as the highest heavens are above the earth. However, as our Great High Priest, Jesus became the Mediator between God and men. Although remaining wholly separated from sinners (morally), the Lord Jesus effected these sinners' forgiveness and reconciliation to God by his perfectly obedient life and by his atoning and substitutionary death on the cross. Now that his Father has raised his Son from the dead and has highly exalted him, the Lord Jesus sits on his glorious throne, forever separated from sinful mankind, yet interceding for his own redeemed and holy people. On a coming day, the Lord will judge the world (of sinful mankind) in righteousness. Even then, however, he will remain morally separated from sinners and from their sin.
- **Made higher than the heavens**: To demonstrate something of the majestic glory of Christ in his office as Priest, and to show the infinite superiority of the Lord's Person and offices to that of the Levitical priesthood, the writer reminds his readers that Christ has been exalted above the heavens. The Father has bestowed upon him the name that is above every name, and has exalted the Lord Jesus to his own right hand in heaven. This places the Lord Jesus far above all created beings, including the best and most honourable of men (who are but sinners), and the highest and most glorious of holy angels (who have never sinned, and have served God faithfully since their creation). Jesus has been exalted far above them all. He rules over all; and, from this highly exalted position, he intercedes with his Father for his people as the Great High Priest *par excellence*. No greater, worthier, or more exalted Priest could be required by the people of God. This Priest alone can effect and guarantee our full and final salvation, for this Priest alone ever lives to plead the merits of his finished work at Calvary and to represent the people of God continually before his Father in heaven. It is no wonder, then, that—in Revelation—the apostle John could record this magnificent scene:

Revelation 5:9-14 (ESV)

(9) And they sang a new song, saying,

"Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, (10) and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."

(11) Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, (12) saying with a loud voice,

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!"

(13) And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,

"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever!"

(14) And the four living creatures said,

"Amen!"

and the elders fell down and worshipped.

Hebrews 7:27

Although instituted by God, one of the great weaknesses of the Levitical priesthood was that—by necessity—all the ceremonies, offerings and sacrifices were repetitive. They were never completed. Sacrifices for sin never ceased to be offered; and these sacrifices culminated every year on the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) when the high priest entered the most holy place to make atonement for his own sins and for those of the people—a solemn ceremony that had to be repeated once every year.

None of these sacrifices could ever make satisfaction or atonement for sin, or take away sin permanently and forever. This, of course, was due:

- to the human frailty and sinfulness of the priests, and
- to the inadequacy of the offering or sacrifice.

Although outwardly and typically unblemished or 'perfect', these were nonetheless animal sacrifices—and the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin. To atone for the sins of men and women, a *fully equivalent, perfect, and sinless life* had to be offered in sacrifice to God. This meant the life of a perfect man, but no such man had ever existed until the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus, under the Levitical system, the priests had to *stand* ministering before the altar—for their work was ongoing and never finished. Therefore, these priests could never sit down in the presence of God. Rather, they had to remain standing—daily offering the same sacrifices that could never take away sin (but which God required of his people, in order to show the seriousness of, and penalty for, sin; and to symbolise the covering over of sin until the Redeemer should come to take away sin forever). (Heb. 10:11) Furthermore, these Levitical priests had to kill and offer up two sacrifices each

day: one in the morning and another in the evening. (Ex. 29:38-42) Again, in making these blood sacrifices to God, the priests were symbolising the atonement necessary for their own personal sins and for the sins of the people. (Lev. 16:6,11; Heb. 5:3; 9:7)

In contrast to all this, however, the Lord Jesus does not need to stand before God, offering repeated daily sacrifices at the sanctuary. He offered one sacrifice for sin forever, and then *sat down* at the right hand of God, signifying the end of the ritual, ceremonial and Jewish sacrificial system for all time. His was a perfect sacrifice—unblemished, spotless, pure and holy. It was a fully adequate or sufficient sacrifice; for the life of the only Perfect Man was sacrificed to God and his blood shed to make full and final atonement for the sins of all his people. This atonement is effective for the sins of everyone who belongs to the Lord from the creation of the world to the end of the age. Again, by this one perfect sacrifice of atonement, sin has been removed—not just symbolically or typically, but actually, completely, finally and forever. (Heb. 9:12,25,28; 10:11-12) Thus, the Lord Jesus has finished once-for-all the system of daily and yearly sacrifices for sins. Now, as our exalted and glorified High Priest, he *sits* at the right hand of God, interceding for his people based on his perfect and completed sacrifice of atonement on their behalf.

The great distinction between Christ our High Priest and the Levitical priests was that—unlike those priests—the Lord Jesus had no need to offer sacrifice to God for any sins of his own; for he is, and always has been, utterly sinless—or holy, harmless and undefiled. When he laid down his life as a sacrifice for sin, it was for the sins of the people alone that he suffered the wrath of God and died in agony upon the cross—not for any misdemeanours or imperfections of his own. (Isa. 53:1ff) And, because of this, the Father was pleased to accept his sacrifice of atonement as being fully and finally sufficient to remit forever the sins of his people, to justify them by his grace—reckoning Christ's perfect righteousness to their account—and to promise never to recall to his remembrance their former sins or misdeeds.

Hebrews 7:28

In the Law of Moses, all the regulations for the appointment and service of priests were stipulated precisely. These priests could be appointed from no other tribe than that of Levi; i.e., the sons of Aaron. Like all other human beings, however, the sons of Aaron were fallen, sinful, mortal men. They were subject to many faults and failings. Thus, when these men were acting as priests, or as the high priest, they needed to make atonement for their own sins as well as for the sins of the people. Furthermore, because these priests were subject to failure, sin, and ultimately to death, their priesthood could never be a perfect priesthood, nor could it be an everlasting priesthood.

Such were those priests (including the high priest) appointed by and under the law. However, the Priest appointed by God's solemn oath came much later than those appointed by his law, and this priesthood was intended to replace and abrogate the former imperfect priesthood. Unlike the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood, this new priesthood was based on the order of Melchizedek: in other words, it was to be an endless priesthood. Since the One who would fill this office was the Son of God, it would be a perfect priesthood.

It is perfect in the following senses:

- The Lord Jesus Christ, whom the Father appointed to this office, is (and forever remains) absolutely perfect in his character or attributes. He is completely without sin, and untouchable by sin. His life and character is the epitome of holiness, justice, righteousness, truth, love, grace, mercy and compassion, etc. This is *moral and spiritual perfection*, and this perfection has been, and remains, an attribute of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit from eternity to

eternity. The *moral and spiritual perfections* of the Godhead can neither be increased nor diminished. They are immutable.

- Although he is the holy, sinless and perfect Son of God, Jesus had to experience personal human suffering, and so be perfected (or 'made perfect' or mature) in relation to these sufferings. As the eternal Son of God, he had never experienced in his own Person the sufferings endured by mortal human beings. But, as the incarnate Son, or the Lord Jesus Christ, he was made perfect or mature in relation to all of mankind's sufferings, while at the same time remaining completely apart from, and free from, sin and its effects. We should note, however, that this perfection had nothing at all to do with Jesus' unchanging character or attributes. Here, we are not speaking of moral or spiritual perfection, for the Lord Jesus was already morally and spiritually perfect—and had been always. Rather, when the Scriptures speak of the Lord Jesus being 'made perfect' they are speaking of his being made perfect in his experience of human life, including development, pain, suffering, distress, and anguish, etc. In other words, when used in this context, the Scriptures are speaking of *physical, psychological or emotional perfection*, not of moral or spiritual perfection.
- Again, the Lord Jesus was 'made perfect' through obedience. Although, *as the eternal Son*, he never needed to 'learn' obedience, yet—*as the incarnate Son*—the Lord Jesus learned by his sufferings what it was to endure and to obey the will of his heavenly Father. Moreover, since he obeyed faultlessly, he was said to have been 'made perfect' in his obedience to God. Of course, in reality, the Lord Jesus could not have disobeyed his Father, Nevertheless, as the incarnate Son, Jesus had to demonstrate his obedience as a Man and thus show himself absolutely perfect in respect of obedience and righteousness. This he did by fulfilling all righteousness, for himself and on our behalf.

Yet again, the priesthood of Christ is a perfect priesthood in the following respects:

- It is perfect insofar as it can never be subject to contamination by sin, or to human failings, weaknesses, or ultimately to the death of the High Priest.
- It is perfect insofar as it is an eternal priesthood.
- It is perfect insofar as the High Priest of our profession can never change or be changed, but remains a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.
- It is perfect insofar as our Great High Priest intercedes for his people unceasingly before the throne of grace.
- It is perfect insofar as that—through the mediation of this same Great High Priest—all his redeemed people will be brought to eternal glory in the presence of God and of the Lamb.

HEBREWS CHAPTER 8**The New Covenant Priesthood Superior to the Old****Hebrews 8:1-13**

In this chapter, the writer applies the main point of his theme, relating the New Covenant priesthood specifically to the exalted and glorified Lord Jesus, and showing how the temporary old order of the Levitical priesthood merely foreshadowed the eternal and glorious priesthood to follow.

Hebrews 8:1

In this verse, several English translations render the Greek word, κεφάλαιον (*kephalaion* from *kephalē*, head) as 'sum'—meaning 'summary' or 'recapitulation' (of what has been discussed previously). Although this word can bear the meaning of 'summary' or 'synopsis', this may not have been the intended meaning here. It is more likely that the alternative meaning of the Greek word was intended: viz., the 'chief', 'principal', or 'most important' point of the matter under discussion. This rendering is supported by a number of commentators, both ancient and modern.

The writer of Hebrews now explains why he has gone to such great lengths to explain in detail the nature of the New Covenant priesthood, and of its immeasurable superiority over the old Levitical priesthood. We who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, infer the writer, have such a High Priest as the one just described in the foregoing discourse. Moreover, being appointed by God's solemn oath as a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, we have a High Priest who ministers continually in the presence of God on our behalf, and whose intercession for his people will never cease.

The Lord Jesus Christ himself is our Great High Priest, fulfilling and surpassing all the offices and offerings of the old order, abrogating all the ceremonial and ritual requirements of the old order, and replacing it with his new everlasting ministry. However, unlike the high priests of the Levitical order who *stood* daily ministering before the altar, our Great High Priest *sits* ministering unceasingly in the presence of God the Father; for—again unlike the Levitical priests—his work has been accomplished by the offering and sacrifice of himself once-for-all. (Heb. 1:3; 10:12)

Again, this High Priest of our confession (or profession) not only *sits* in the presence of God, he sits also in the most highly exalted position in glory—that of the right hand of the Majesty on high; or the Majestic Glory (of God the Almighty). (1 Chron. 29:11; Job 37:22) Of course, God does not possess human or bodily parts such as hands or arms, etc. The expression 'on the right hand' is a figurative expression denoting full and complete equality with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. The 'right hand' of God denotes or symbolises also the place of highest honour, power and glory in heaven, or the place of supreme sovereignty throughout and over the entire universe. (We must remember that the exalted Lord Jesus Christ occupies the offices of Prophet, Priest and King over and above all others in all creation—excepting, of course, his own Father.)

Hebrews 8:2

The exalted and glorified Lord Jesus is described as '*a minister in the holy places...*' No distinction is being made between the holy place and the holy of holies, because—by his perfect sacrifice, his atoning blood through which the way into heaven has been opened and sinners reconciled to the Father—the separating veil between these two places has been rent asunder forever.

However, the reference here is not to the earthly tent, tabernacle or temple but to the perfect most holy place or sanctuary in heaven of which the earthly buildings were only shadows or types. In this perfect and glorious heavenly sanctuary, Christ sits to minister on behalf of his people. (Heb. 9:24)

Again, the earthly tent, tabernacle or temple, were buildings set up by men (following God's express and detailed instructions). To some extent, these earthly sanctuaries were contaminated by man's sin (hence, the necessity for the ceremonial cleansing of all the furniture and utensils used within the earthly sanctuary). However, the sanctuary or most holy place in heaven is a perfect sanctuary. Unlike the sanctuary on earth, the heavenly sanctuary has been set up by the Lord himself, and therefore is free completely from any defects whatsoever and from the contaminating or defiling effects of sin. Not only is it a perfect sanctuary, it is also a glorious sanctuary and therefore the only most holy place that is fit for the presence of our Great High Priest.

Hebrews 8:3

It is of the nature of the priestly office to be engaged in offering gifts and sacrifices to God: usually, on behalf of the people. Therefore, anyone appointed to the office of priest or high priest took upon himself no other work but ministering in the sanctuary and offering to God those sacrifices expressly required of God's law from the people.

The following is required of a priest of God:

- He must be *chosen, called and appointed* to the priesthood by God.
- The priest is divinely appointed *to represent* the people and to minister on their behalf.
- He is divinely appointed *to offer sacrifices* to God on behalf of the people.
- He is divinely appointed *to intercede* for the people with God.

The title 'priest', therefore, pertains exclusively to those who have been appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices—including sacrifices of atonement for sin—in accordance with the law. This office and this title are not appropriate for any servant of God under the terms of the New Covenant. Furthermore, since ministers or pastors do not offer gifts or sacrifices for sin to God on behalf of the people, these servants should never be referred to as 'priests'.

Just as it was essential that the high priest of the Old Covenant was in a position to offer the necessary gifts and sacrifices for sin, so it is with the High Priest of the New Covenant. As a Priest, the Lord Jesus too had to approach God with the necessary offering and sacrifice for sin: which, indeed, he did, once-for-all. (Heb. 10:9-12)

Hebrews 8:4

Following the offering up of himself at Calvary as a sacrifice of atonement for sin, the priesthood of Christ is appropriate now only within the heavenly sanctuary. The Lord Jesus could not occupy the regular priestly office on earth, since these priests had been appointed by the law from a different tribe. Furthermore, at the time Hebrews was written, it was probable that the temple at Jerusalem was still standing, and that the sons of Aaron (the Levitical priests) were still standing at the altar offering sacrifices for sin to God.

Indeed, these sacrifices and offerings had been superseded and abrogated, and the Levitical priesthood replaced by a far superior one in heaven—in the true temple not made with hands. The High

Priest in heaven had fulfilled all the requirements of the law, including those requirements relating to offerings and sacrifices for sin. Therefore, the exalted and glorified Lord Jesus is the High Priest of an infinitely superior Covenant. This New Covenant far excels the Old Covenant and the ministrations of the law with its multitudinous ordinances, rituals and ceremonies—all of which were only shadows or types of the glorious priesthood of Christ.

Hebrews 8:5

The earthly form of the tabernacle or tent of meeting was intended only to be a copy or example, or an outline or representation, of the real sanctuary already established by God in heaven. Consequently, although correct in every detail, the earthly sanctuary and the earthly priesthood were only shadows of the reality in heaven. Nevertheless, they acted as types or examples of that real and glorious celestial sanctuary. Both the earthly priesthood and the earthly sanctuary were essential for that time to manifest something of the glory of God on earth, to show the requirements of God regarding satisfaction and atonement for sin, and to provide a place of worship for the people. The difference between the earthly and the heavenly sanctuaries being that—in the latter—God's glory is revealed in all its magnificence and power, atonement for sin has already been made once-for-all, and his people continue to praise and worship God and the Lamb throughout the eternal ages.

Again, the earthly tabernacle was a shadow of the heavenly. However, a shadow has no substance, no reality, and no permanence. (Cf. Col. 2:17) This contrasts sharply with the heavenly tabernacle or sanctuary. This sanctuary is substantial; it is real, and it is not only permanent but also eternal.

Yet, the Lord required that the sanctuary on earth, that was to act as a most hallowed place where he would meet with his people through the mediation of the high priest, was to be constructed in a very precise manner, with materials specified by the Lord himself and furnished only with those items that the Lord commanded. Thus, exact instructions concerning all these matters were given to Moses on Mount Sinai, and the servant of the LORD followed these instructions to the letter when supervising the construction and assembling of the tabernacle or tent of meeting. (Ex. 25:9,40; Acts 7:44)

Furthermore, the Levitical priesthood (the sons of Aaron) was a temporary institution. It was not perfect, and it was not effective for the complete or final removal of sin. Inevitably, it had to pass away, to be replaced by a new and better institution. Of this new order, inaugurated under the terms of the New Covenant spoken of by Jeremiah the prophet, the Lord Jesus Christ is God's Anointed (as were the Levitical high priests before him). However, the Lord Jesus is the Anointed of God in a sense that is infinitely superior not only to any priest on earth but also to any created being throughout the entire universe. Consequently, as the High Priest of our profession, he is the most highly exalted High Priest and Mediator that has ever existed, or that ever will exist. In the heavenly sanctuary, the Lord Jesus performs to perfection all those duties required of him as our Mediator and High Priest, to satisfy the requirements of the Father to the last degree, and to save to the uttermost all those that come unto him by faith. (Heb. 7:25; 9:23; 10:1; 13:10)

Hebrews 8:6

Christ has obtained a much more excellent ministry than that which preceded it. This ministry is of an infinitely higher order because the one who ministers as Great High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary is so highly exalted. The Levitical priesthood was transient, temporary and destined to pass away. This heavenly priesthood is real, enduring, and—because it is eternal— it will never pass away. The services of the Levitical priesthood were conducted within the earthly tabernacle, while the ministry of Christ is conducted now in the heavenly tabernacle.

Again, it is not merely an *excellent* ministry, but a *more excellent* ministry; and it is more excellent in every respect. The writer adds the superlative to demonstrate the superiority of Christ's priesthood over the Levitical priesthood. It is more excellent insofar as everything about it is real and substantial (in contrast to the shadows or types of the earthly priesthood). It is enduring and eternal, which the earthly priesthood never could be. It secures a perfect and final salvation based on the Lord's once-for-all sacrifice of atonement; an atoning sacrifice for sin that the blood of bulls and goats never could achieve.

In this verse, the word used for 'covenant' is *diatheke*, a word often used for a will or testament, or a compact or contract. This word refers to the covenant or compact established by God alone and known as the New Covenant or New Testament. Under the terms of this covenant or testament, the Lord Jesus Christ has been appointed as the one and only Mediator between God and Man. There can be no other acceptable intermediary, either in heaven or on earth, who can mediate between the Father and fallen and sinful men and women. This is because no other person can make a satisfactory offering for sin or remove sin from God's sight once-for-all. Christ, therefore, must be forever the only Mediator between God and mankind, and the only One through whom fallen and sinful individuals can approach the most holy God in heaven. There is no other way of access to God, and no other way of salvation throughout the entire world, except through Jesus Christ—God's one and only Son, the One who has brought to us everlasting righteousness. (Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 9:15; 12:24)

Again, this New Covenant or New Testament is enacted on better promises. To begin with, it is undergirded by God's solemn oath, which appointed his Son a High Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Then, it is distinguished from the Old Testament insofar as the promises connected with that covenant related largely to material blessings and benefits to be experienced on this earth. Eternal and spiritual blessings were not excluded, but many of the promises of the Old Covenant related to purely earthly matters. By contrast, and while not excluding certain earthly benefits and blessings, the better promises on which the New Covenant is founded relate to the full and final salvation secured by the Lord Jesus through his perfect work on earth and his substitutionary atonement. These better promises relate to all the spiritual benefits and blessings accruing to the believer because of the Lord Jesus Christ's atoning work, and all the eternal blessings and benefits that follow from this perfect and completed work.

Hebrews 8:7

In this verse, the word 'covenant' (*diatheke*) is not in the Greek text, but is understood from the context of the passage.

In stating that the first covenant was not without faults, it is not to be considered that the fault lay with the covenant itself. That covenant had been established by the LORD God himself, and therefore could not be defective in any way whatever. On the contrary, it was a perfect, holy and just covenant.

That part of the Old Covenant that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai, and that related specifically to the law of commandments, set forth to the people the glory of God. It revealed to them the standard of righteousness that God required of his people—in other words, the requirement for perfect obedience to the law of God. However, in his fallen and sinful condition, no one on earth was capable of meeting these requirements. All failed to attain to God's holy standard. Therefore, by their failure and sin all mankind fell short of God's glory. (Rom. 3:23) The law, therefore, that could have led to life for perfect obedience, ultimately was the instrument through which all mankind found themselves utterly and justly condemned. The law of the old covenant, therefore, could never be the means of salvation for anyone. Nevertheless, it was used of God to challenge mankind, to teach them his requirements, and to lead them to Christ and to salvation by grace. (Gal. 3:23-24)

Although the old covenant was perfect in itself, it was imperfect insofar as it could never be the means of providing atonement for, or forgiveness of, sins. Fallen and sinful mankind found it impossible to meet the terms of God's law. In being unable to remedy this situation and incapable of being the means of reconciling men to God, the LORD found the first covenant imperfect, inadequate, or incomplete. Therefore, the LORD himself declared that this old covenant would be superseded and replaced by a new and superior covenant.

Hebrews 8:8

The LORD God himself finds fault in the original covenant insofar as it was wholly inadequate to bring men and women into a saving and sanctifying relationship with himself. Therefore, in order to make this possible, the LORD declared through the prophet Jeremiah that a day would come when he would establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 11:19; 36:25-27)

Now, of course—as the apostle Paul tells us—not all who call themselves Israel actually belong to Israel. (Rom. 9:6-7) There were many false professors among the people of God in that day, just as there are today. The promise of blessings via the New Covenant, therefore, does not apply to those who profess (falsely) to know the Lord while their hearts are far from God, but to those only who know the Lord personally and savingly. By God's grace, and by the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, it is this latter group alone who have been led to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. It is they who have experienced the promises and the blessings of the New Covenant—promises and blessings that will never pass away, for they are Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus. (2 Cor. 1:20)

Therefore, whether a believer belonged formerly to the house of Israel or to the house of Judah is now irrelevant. In Christ Jesus, both houses are now one. Similarly, in Christ Jesus, all Jewish believers share together with all Gentiles believers on exactly the same ground. (Rom. 10:12; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11)

This is the very essence of the New Covenant—perfect spiritual unity in Christ. Through this Mediator alone, and by his atoning blood, men and women from among every ethnic group, creed or colour of people on earth are forgiven and reconciled to God. (Cf. Acts 17:26-27) Now, this Mediator is their Great High Priest, continually interceding for each of his redeemed people in the presence of God the Father.

Hebrews 8:9

After spending the greater part of 400 years in Egyptian bondage, the LORD God delivered his people by his almighty arm. He judged the Pharaoh and the Egyptian nation for their sin; he afflicted them

with plagues, and he delivered his people from the avenging angel and brought them safely beyond the borders of Egypt.

God promised his people many material and physical blessings following this deliverance, including their inheritance in the land '*flowing with milk and honey*'; i.e., the rich and fertile land of Canaan. It was only because of Israel's persistent unbelief and wilful disobedience that they failed to enter the land that God had promised and failed to inherit many of God's blessings. Indeed, that entire adult generation perished in the wilderness because of their sin. It was their young people (under 20 years of age) and their children alone—led by faithful Joshua and Caleb—who, eventually, entered Canaan.

In part, the promises that God made to Israel, and the covenant that he established with them, related to blessings and benefits of this earth: i.e., physical and material abundance in the land of plenty, blessings of the field and of the womb, etc. Of course, all these temporal blessings came from the hand of God: i.e., they were bestowed by God's providence and grace. As such, they portrayed or typified the far greater (spiritual and eternal) blessings that the LORD had reserved for those who loved him, who walked in his ways, and who embraced the covenant promises that God had made to Abraham.

Nevertheless, the old covenant could not be the means of dealing once-for-all with people's sins or of reconciling people to God. However, the people's forgiveness, reconciliation and inheritance in heaven was granted to them on the basis of the final and perfect Sacrifice yet to come, and which would be enacted under the terms of the new covenant. The LORD would establish this perfect and enduring covenant many centuries later.

Hebrews 8:10

The covenant that God made with Abraham was based on God's grace and Abraham's faith. (Gen. 15:1-6; Gal. 3:9) By faith, God reckoned Abraham righteous in his sight; and, by faith, every true child of God living before the time of Christ was also reckoned righteous in God's sight. In this sense, therefore, the old covenant was a covenant of grace and required only the simple faith in God and obedience to God that Abraham and other faithful believers exemplified in their lives. (Heb. 11:1ff)

Nevertheless, although God had called them out from among other nations, the greater part of Israel failed to follow the example of Abraham's faith and obedience. Repeatedly, they broke the covenant that God had made with their forefather. They demonstrated little or no faith in the LORD who had delivered them from slavery in Egypt, and—wilfully and consistently—they rebelled against the LORD and against his servant, Moses.

The LORD gave his holy, just and righteous law to Moses on the mount. (Ex. 20:1ff; Deut. 5:1ff) However, this law only magnified the people's unfaithfulness to God, their persistent sin, and their rebellion against God. By this law, therefore, the people stood condemned. Yet, the law had not been provided to be a means of their salvation and life. Rather, it was intended to show forth the glory of God and to act as a regulator and teacher or tutor to turn the people back to God and, ultimately, to lead people to Christ. (Gal. 3:23-24) Even so, the people of Israel failed to turn back to God, and broke the law wilfully, repeatedly and inexcusably. They forsook the original terms of the covenant that God had made with Abraham (salvation and life by grace through faith), and insisted on earning and demonstrating their own 'righteousness'—a righteousness (so-called) that was wholly unacceptable to God.

Salvation by works of the law, however, was never a possibility and was never God's intention for his people. The external set of rules, regulations, rituals and ceremonies that God required to be fulfilled

in the law could have led to life only if the law had been kept perfectly from the very beginning of a person's life to the very end—and if that person had not inherited a sinful nature from Adam. For, even if it had been kept perfectly, the law could do nothing to remedy a person's inherently sinful nature. (Gal. 3:10-11)

However, the new covenant that God was to establish would not be like the old covenant. It would not be a covenant that had been interposed by the law. Nor would it be a covenant that was connected externally to a plethora of rules, regulations, rituals and ceremonies. The rituals and ceremonies of that era emphasised the necessity of redemption by means of a vicarious and atoning sacrifice. However, they could not effect redemption but merely typified the new and greater covenant to follow, through which full and final redemption would surely come. (Gal. 3:17-19)

The new covenant would be the reality to which the old covenant laws, ordinances and ceremonies pointed. The new covenant would be, and would remain, a covenant of grace alone. Again, it would be an internally applied covenant: for the requirements of God's law would be written—not on tablets of stone, as with Moses—but on the hearts, the minds, and the consciences of the people. (Jer. 31:33) This new covenant would be a covenant through which men and women would be led to faith in Christ. By the gracious terms of this new covenant, people would experience forgiveness of sins and true and lasting peace within—peace with self, and peace with God. (Rom. 5:1)

Again, the new covenant would be brought into being by the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on behalf of all his elect people, and ratified through his perfect obedience to God for his people, and because of his perfect and substitutionary sacrifice of atonement on their behalf. It would be a covenant that guaranteed to all who belonged to Christ the gift of eternal life, as well as manifold blessings and benefits bestowed upon them and their families during this life, together with trials and tribulations for the sake of Christ's name.

This was to be the New Covenant, or New Testament, that God would establish—and has now established—for his people. The full terms of this New Covenant are proclaimed or set forth in the Gospels and expounded in the Epistles of the New Testament. Under the terms of the New Covenant, all those who belong to Christ are sealed by the indwelling Holy Spirit as belonging to the Father and to the Son for all eternity. Therefore, the Scripture is fulfilled which says that the Lord will be their God, and that they shall be his people.

Hebrews 8:11

Under the terms of the new covenant, it would be no longer necessary for people to receive their teaching principally from the priests and elders. This was essential under the old covenant, as the priests had to instruct the people in the ways of the LORD. They had to teach the people how to approach God in worship, and they needed to explain to the congregation of Israel in detail what the LORD required of his people by way of sacrifices and offerings. Again, under the old covenant, none of the people could ever approach God directly, nor could they enter his most holy presence behind the veil. At that time, the Aaronic priests needed to intercede with God on behalf of the people. Similarly, only the high priest could enter the most holy place behind the veil, and this but once a year on the Day of Atonement with blood to be sprinkled on and before the mercy seat. (Heb. 9:7-8)

Now, however, under the terms of the new covenant, God's redeemed people have direct access to the most holy presence of their Father in heaven. This way of access was provided for them through the blood shed once-for-all by their perfect Sin-Offering, and by the living and eternal mediation of their Great High Priest—the Lord Jesus Christ. Granted, God's people today are still be guided by teachers, shepherds or pastors appointed by the Lord. Nevertheless, under the new covenant of the

Spirit, believers are now in a position to teach one another the ways of the Lord. These ways are made known to them through God's living Word, and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in each believer's heart and life.

To this end, the LORD had declared through the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 54:13 (ESV)

(13) All your children shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the peace of your children.

Again, the Lord Jesus declared:

John 6:45 (ESV)

(45) It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me—

And, in his first epistle, the apostle John wrote:

1 John 2:27 (ESV)

(27) But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything—and is true and is no lie, just as it has taught you—abide in him.

The Holy Spirit brings (eternal and abundant) life to a person's heart and soul by regenerating them and by leading them to repentance and faith in the lord Jesus Christ. These blessings and benefits, however, come only through the grace that God bestows under the terms of the new covenant, and through the blood shed on the cross of Calvary by the Lord Jesus on behalf of all those who would believe on his name.

In this verse, the word translated 'neighbour' is a word that more generally means 'citizen' or 'fellow citizen'; and it includes anyone, near to God or far from God. It would no longer be necessary for people to depend on external teaching alone to know and to learn the ways of the Lord God; for—to all those who sought him—God would reveal his ways to them by his Spirit. Nor would God's mercy be restricted to a select group of people or to one particular nation, as in previous eras. Now, under the terms of this new covenant, the grace of God would be extended to people of all nations anywhere in the world. Anyone who was drawn by the Spirit of God to seek the Lord would most certainly find the Lord. (Isa. 55:6; Acts 15:17; 17:27)

Nor would any particular class of people be excluded from the mercy and grace of God. Everyone of whatever class, category, colour or creed, who called upon the name of the Lord, would find his grace and mercy sufficient for them, and would find that he would accept them just as they are. (Matt. 11:28; Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:13)

Hebrews 8:12

That God would forgive anyone who came to his Son through faith is confirmed in this verse. In this verse, the Lord makes it abundantly plain that he will be merciful toward their iniquities. Then, it says that he will remember their sins no more. God cannot forget. However, he has determined never to bring to his remembrance the sins of anyone whom he has forgiven, cleansed and justified through

their repentance and faith in his one and only Son. He will remember their sins no more. (Isa. 43:25; Heb. 10:16-17; see also Jer. 50:20; Micah 7:19)

Hebrews 8:13

Of course, in speaking about this new covenant—the covenant through which the grace and mercy of God is extended to all who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ—God was making it plain that the old covenant was no longer valid. Now, the old covenant was obsolete. When this epistle was written, the old covenant had been fulfilled and abrogated. The entire system had passed away.

The old covenant had been superseded by the new covenant that the Father had inaugurated and put into effect through his Son and by the Holy Spirit. Following his incarnation, his life of perfect obedience to God, his substitutionary and atoning death on the cross, and his resurrection and exultation to glory, this new and everlasting covenant has been ratified. This new covenant renders null and void the old covenant with all its shadows and types, and ceremonies and rituals performed in accordance with the law. The new has come. The old has passed away.

At the time this letter was written, the rituals, sacrifices and offerings of the old covenant were still being practiced by the Jewish priests. These priests still stood daily at the temple, ministering in the name of the Lord. Nevertheless, their ministry belonged to a past era; an era that had come, that had served its purpose, and had gone forever. To make it abundantly plain that these ceremonies were no longer valid, or acceptable in his sight, the Lord God would soon bring about the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. The very place where—for so many years in the past—God had caused his name to be remembered. Now, the Lord would meet with his people in spirit and in truth: Not, however, in one central location or sanctuary, but wherever his people gathered in the name of his Son—the Lord Jesus Christ. (John 4:21-24)

HEBREWS CHAPTER 9**The Superiority of Christ's Priesthood****Hebrews 9:1-28**

In this chapter, the writer contrasts the old and the new priestly offices, and demonstrates clearly the immeasurable superiority of the Lord Jesus' permanent priesthood over that of the former and temporary Aaronic priesthood.

Hebrews 9:1

In this first sentence, the word 'covenant' is not in the Greek text. It has been provided to make the sense of the sentence.

The first covenant that God instituted was given with a complete set of rules and regulations for the performance of the priestly duties under the terms of that old covenant. Every ritual, ceremony, offering and sacrifice had to be performed to the letter, exactly in accordance with the instructions given by the LORD God to Moses. However, these regulations pertained to the earthly tent or temple: the place where God had deemed to meet with his people. Under this arrangement, the anointed high priest functioned before God as the people's representative. (Heb. 8:7,13; 9:10)

Although meticulously constructed and furnished, the earthly sanctuary was merely a copy, type or shadow of the glorious sanctuary that existed in heaven. The tabernacle or temple on earth merely reflected something of the magnificent dwelling place in the heavenlies where the Lord God Almighty sits enthroned throughout the eternal ages. Yet, even in the earthly sanctuary, no one could approach the presence of the most High and holy God except through the mediation of the high priest: Nor could the high priest approach God's presence within the most holy place without the blood shed to atone both for his own sins and for the sins of the people. (Heb. 9:7-8)

Hebrews 9:2

To this end, the Lord God instructed Moses to prepare an earthy sanctuary where he would meet with his people through the mediation of the high priest. Within this tent or tabernacle was the most holy place or holy of holies. There, before the mercy seat that covered the ark of the covenant, and beneath the outstretched wings of the gold cherubim, the LORD would reveal something of his effulgent and majestic glory (the *Shekinah*).

The inner area of the tabernacle was divided into two main sections: firstly, there was the holy place, and secondly, behind the veil or curtain was the holy of holies or most holy place.

In the outer sanctuary, or *holy place*, stood the lampstand or candlestick. The lampstand was made of pure gold, and bore six branches—three on either side of the centre shaft. Therefore, in total, there were seven lamps on the one lampstand or candlestick. These lamps were fed with pure olive oil, and the lampstand itself stood on the south side of the holy place (Ex. 26:35). The lampstand represented both light and life.

Again, on the north side of the tabernacle, outside the veil, stood the table. This table was constructed of acacia or shittim wood, overlaid with gold. Placed on this table, and renewed every Sabbath, were the twelve loaves. This was the bread of the presence or 'showbread'; i.e., the conse-

crated bread.¹⁰ All these items were to be found within the holy place of the sanctuary: i.e., outside the veil. (Ex. 25:23-39; Lev. 24:5-9)

Hebrews 9:3-4

Inside the veil, or beyond the second curtain, was another section known as the *most holy place* or *holy of holies*. (Ex. 26:31-37; 36:35-38; 41:21 cf. Heb. 10:20) This was the inner sanctuary. Within this inner sanctuary or holy of holies stood the incense altar, which represented the prayers of the saints. (Lev. 16:12; 1 Kings 7:50; Rev. 8:3)

Also, within the inner sanctuary, stood the ark of the covenant. The ark of the covenant was overlaid on all sides with gold, and on top of the ark was laid the mercy seat or cover (Gk., *ἱλαστήριον*, *hilastērion*, 'propitiatory' or place of propitiation). (Ex. 25:10-16; 37:1-5; Lev. 16:2,13; cf. Heb. 4:16)

Inside this ark, was the golden urn or vessel that held the manna (Ex. 16:32-34), and Aaron's rod that budded. (Num. 17:5,8,10) Also within the ark were the tablets or tables of the covenant (The Ten Words or Ten Commandments) that the Lord God had given to Moses on Mount Sinai. (Ex. 40:3,20; Deut. 10:2-5; cf. 1 Kings 8:9)

Hebrews 9:5

Set above the ark, and overshadowing it with their outstretched wings, were the cherubim of glory—or glorious cherubim. These representations of powerful celestial beings spoke of the highest order of God's creation—the holy angels—who worshipped and served the Lord continually in his heavenly dwelling. Psalm 80:1 speaks of the LORD being enthroned upon the cherubim: in other words, the most high and holy God, the Sovereign Lord God, sits enthroned above his entire creation, including the highest of the holy angels in heaven. (1 Chron. 28:18; Ps. 80:1; 99:1; Isa. 6:2-3; Ezek. 1:5-10; Rev. 4:6-8)

These majestic and holy angels worship, praise and glorify God continually, and act as his servants to accomplish his will and purposes throughout the heavenly and earthly realms. These holy angels are ministering spirits; and from their vast number, the Lord sends forth a multitude of these celestial messengers to minister to the heirs of salvation. (Heb. 1:14)

The details of both the ark of the covenant, and the cherubim, are summarised in the following passage from Exodus:

Exodus 25:10-22 (ESV)

(10) "They shall make an ark of acacia wood. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. (11) You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and outside shall you overlay it, and you shall make on it a moulding of gold around it.

(12) "You shall cast four rings of gold for it and put them on its four feet, two rings on the one side of it, and two rings on the other side of it.

(13) You shall make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold.

(14) And you shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to

¹⁰ literally, "the setting forth of the loaves," that is, the loaves set forth: "the show of the bread" [Alford in JFB].

carry the ark by them. (15) The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it.

(16) "And you shall put into the ark the testimony that I shall give you.

(17) "You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth.

(18) "And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the mercy seat. (19) Make one cherub on the one end, and one cherub on the other end. Of one piece with the mercy seat shall you make the cherubim on its two ends.

(20) The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be.

(21) "And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. (22) There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel."

The writer, however, makes it clear that this was not the time or place to enter into further discussion of these matters. For the moment, he is intent in describing the nature, purpose and termination of the old covenant priesthood.

(In passing, we might observe that 'cherub' is the singular form of the word, and 'cherubs' or 'cherubim' is the plural. The rendering 'cherubims' in the KJV/AV is erroneous.)

Hebrews 9:6

At least twice every day, the priests would enter the holy place to carry out the various rituals and ceremonies prescribed by the LORD. Morning and evening, the priests would attend to the oil and wicks in the branched lampstand or candlestick. Again, every day, the priests would burn fragrant incense on the altar of incense while attending to the lamps. (Ex. 27:21; 30:7-8) The strong aromatic incense counteracted the pungent fumes of the sacrifices. (Ex. 30:34-35; Num. 28:3) The pleasant and acceptable fragrance of the smoke rising upward from the incense represented the prayers of the saints. (Rev. 5:8; 8:3-4; cf. Luke 1:10) No blood was to be sprinkled on the altar of incense, except the blood of atonement offered once every year for the cleansing of this altar. (Ex. 30:10) The altar itself stood in front of—but outside—the veil, which screened the way into the holy of holies.

These rituals and ceremonies were typical of the priest's daily duties within the sanctuary. These and many other duties relating to sin offerings, etc., had to be performed continually throughout the generations for as long as the old covenant remained in force.

Hebrews 9:7

Behind the veil, however, lay the holy of holies—the place where God met with his people (represented by God's anointed mediator, who alone entered this most holy place on their behalf).

No ordinary priest could ever enter into the holy of holies. This was hallowed ground, and only the anointed high priest could enter this most holy place. Yet, even he could enter only once every year

on the Day of Atonement (now called *Yom Kippur*), taking with him the atoning blood to sprinkle on the veil and on and before the mercy seat, both for his own sins and for the sins committed unwittingly (or in error or ignorance) by the people.

However, although the high priest could enter the most holy place only on one day every year, he was required to enter and leave the most holy place on several different occasions during that day in order to complete the various requirements of the law. (Lev. 16:1-34; contrast Heb. 7:27; 9:12)

Hebrews 9:8-9

The presence of the separating veil between the holy place and the holy of holies was intended to indicate that—at that time—no one could approach God's holy presence directly. Because of their sin, God would not permit the people to appear in his immediate, glorious and holy presence. Rather, the people had to be represented in God's presence by the high priest of his appointing. Even the blood shed for the atonement of the people's sin did not open up the way into his presence. It would take the blood of a perfect sacrifice—the Lamb of God—and a far superior Mediator than the Jewish high priest to effect immediate entry into the presence of the most high and holy God.

Yet, the rituals and ceremonies of the old covenant priesthood showed symbolically that atonement must be made for sin, and that people could be reconciled to God only through the blood shed for the forgiveness of their sin. However, for as long as the veil remained in place, separating the holy place from the holy of holies, the Holy Spirit was indicating that sin was only covered over or concealed. Since the sacrifices offered for sin could never actually atone, or provide satisfaction, for sin, the people's sin was never removed completely or finally from the presence of God. Even the people themselves were aware of the deficiencies and inadequacies of these sacrifices. They remained ever conscience of their sin, since these sacrifices could not cleanse their conscience or offer them the complete assurance of true and lasting peace with God. (Heb. 10:1-4)

Yes, God had accepted his people as forgiven. The animal sacrifices typified or foreshadowed atonement and purging of their sin. However, God did not accept them on the basis or effectiveness of the animal sacrifices, since these could never remove sin, but because of the one perfect sacrifice of atonement that—one day—would remove sin once-for-all.

This sacrifice of atonement was offered by the Lord Jesus Christ himself, the perfect, spotless Lamb of God. Through his voluntary, atoning and substitutionary death, the veil separating the people from God has been rent asunder, typified by the rending of the veil in the temple. (Matt. 27:51) Now, the way into God's immediate, most holy and majestic presence has been opened wide for all who come unto him through faith in the resurrected, exalted and glorified Redeemer. By him, our Great High Priest, the believer now experiences a conscience cleansed in the sight of God (Heb. 9:14), and the assurance of true and enduring peace with God. In addition, through the atoning work of the Lord Jesus, and by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, the believer experiences direct access by prayer into the very presence of God Almighty. (Heb. 4:16; 6:19-20)

Hebrews 9:10

The reference here is to those things that were lawful to eat or drink; those things that were designated as clean or unclean under the law; and in respect of the various drink offerings. It refers also to the various washings or ablutions relating to outward and typical cleansing; the rules, rituals and regulations associated with the washing of hands, the cleansing of cups, plates and other utensils (observed meticulously by the Pharisees), and the washing or 'baptisms' of the tabernacle utensils

and furnishings. All these were ceremonies and rituals relating to that which was outward and physical: the body, and other material objects. (Ex. 30:18-21; Mark 7:1-4)

These rituals and ceremonies had been given by God, but they had been imposed only for a specific period, and until the time of reformation. The duration was the period that God had ordained for the old covenant and the Levitical priesthood to continue—and no longer. This was because God had determined to replace the Levitical priesthood and the associated old covenant by a far superior and enduring priesthood and covenant. Then, the LORD would carry out a full and final reformation of the mode and method of worship, including everything relating to offerings and sacrifices. However, he would do this by fulfilling completely everything of which the old covenant spoke, and to which all the rituals, ceremonies and ordinances of the old covenant pointed.

Under the new covenant (or New Testament), the Lord Jesus would act as a High Priest after the unending order of Melchizedek—an order that predated that of Aaron. By his sinless, holy and righteous life, Jesus would fulfil the law of God to the letter, and would abrogate the entire system of laws relating to sacrifices and offerings for sin. Again, by laying down his sinless life voluntarily at the cross, the Lord Jesus would make full and final atonement for the sins of his people. This he did as the Great High Priest when he offered up himself as a perfect sacrifice on his people's behalf. Thus, the Lord Jesus fulfils a dual role:

- He is the High Priest who mediates for his people, and who offers up the atoning sacrifice to God on behalf of his people.
- He himself is the perfect, spotless, sinless Sacrifice of Atonement. He is the Lamb of God.

Again, the Lord Jesus is the sole Mediator for his people; and, by his person and work alone, redeemed sinners are reconciled to God. (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:6)

With the coming of the new covenant, all the shadows and types were fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. All the ordinances, ritual and ceremonies of the law found their accomplishment in him. Thus, all these repeated regulations have been brought to an end. Now, God the Father can be accessed directly in his heavenly sanctuary through the mediation of his Son and by the intercession of his indwelling Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 9:11-12

Christ, the Lamb of God, came as the sin offering to lay down his perfect life as a once-for-all atonement for sin. He came to bear the wrath of God on the sinner's behalf. God was pleased to accept his Son's sacrifice and to raise him from the dead. (Heb. 2:17; 1 John 4:10)

During his ascension to his Father's own right hand, the Lord Jesus passed through the heavens into the greater and more perfect 'tent' or 'tabernacle' in glory (of which the earthly tent was merely a shadow, copy or type), and *'into the inner abode of the unseen and unapproachable God'* [JFB]. Unlike the high priest on earth, however, our Great High Priest entered the most holy place in heaven once-for-all. The Lord's sacrifice of atonement would never need to be repeated. Unlike the Jewish sacrifices of atonement that the high priests offered every year, the once-for-all sacrifice of atonement made by the Lord Jesus on the cross made full and final propitiation for sin for all eternity. (Heb. 10:12)

Furthermore, the Father exalted his Son to his own right hand in glory to act as our High Priest and to bestow all the promised good things on his people. The exalted and glorified Lord Jesus is a High Priest in the greater or more perfect 'tent' in heaven, not like the temporary tent or tabernacle or the

stone temple on earth. Jesus serves in the eternal 'tent'—the heavenly sanctuary that can never pass away. This is the sanctuary not built by man but by God. (Heb. 8:1-2)

Christ entered into the holy places to mediate for his people; and, through his mediation and intercession, all his people can approach God most high. We do not come by the blood of goats or calves or with the burnt offering of a heifer that can never take away sin, but by the pure and precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Lev. 16:3,11; Heb. 10:4,11) Again, we do not come with animal sacrifices that must be repeated daily and yearly. Rather, we come through Christ who made one sacrifice for all time, securing for his people an eternal redemption.

Hebrews 9:13-14

The Jewish animal sacrifices typified and pointed forward to the full and perfect sacrifice of atonement for sin that was yet to come. By the shedding of the blood of these animal sacrifices, a person's sin was covered over, and he was considered as sanctified in the sight of God. However, animal sacrifices could never take away sin. Nor could animal sacrifices cleanse the conscience of the worshipper, since the worshipper was aware of the inadequacies and imperfections of these temporary sacrifices. (Num. 19:12; Heb. 9:9,19; 10:1)

Now, however, a full and final sacrifice for sin has been offered once-for-all. This sacrifice need never, and can never, be repeated. If animal sacrifices covered over sin (typically), how much more shall the blood of the Lord Jesus—the Lamb of God, and the perfect, holy Sacrifice of Atonement—remove sin actually and absolutely? By this perfect sacrifice, sin is not only covered it is atoned for completely and forever, and expunged. (Heb. 9:26) The believing worshipper is forgiven and reconciled to God, and his cleansed conscience is at peace with God. Furthermore, he realises that God—who cannot forget or overlook sin—nonetheless has pledged never to remember these sins again. (Heb. 8:12; 10:17)

If, for a time, God was pleased to accept animal sacrifices to symbolise the purification or sanctification of the people, how much more will he accept the life-blood of his Son as a perfect sacrifice for sin? Animal sacrifices could never take away sin. However, Christ has taken away sin forever. It was on this basis that God was pleased to accept his OT saints as forgiven—not because of the supposed merits or efficacy of animal sacrifices, but in anticipation of Christ's actual merits and the efficacy of his perfect, substitutionary and eternal sacrifice for sin.

We have been forgiven and reconciled to God. No longer do we labour under an accusing conscience, which forever reminded us of our own inadequacies in respect of works of the law, and of the inadequacies of the old covenant sacrifices themselves. Now, by the grace of God, our consciences have been cleansed from these dead works, and from the effects of sin and guilt. For the atoning work of Christ is entirely sufficient to pay to the uttermost the price for all sin, to save to the uttermost all those who come unto him by faith, and to cleanse from an evil and accusing conscience. Therefore, with a clear and clean conscience, we can serve the living God in spirit and in truth. With a forgiven heart and a cleansed conscience, we walk in the Spirit, we live in the Spirit, and we receive teaching from the Spirit of holiness, through the living and abiding Word of God.

Hebrews 9:15

The Father has appointed his Son as the one and only Mediator between mankind and God. The Lord Jesus is the Mediator of the new covenant—the eternal covenant. (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24) This Mediator always lives to intercede with God on behalf of his people. (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25)

Unlike the priests of the old covenant who offered up the blood of animals as an atonement for the sins of the people, this Priest offered up his own blood, to make atonement once-for-all for his people's sins. Thus, all those who are called by God to repentance and faith in his Son receive their eternal inheritance through Christ's blood; an inheritance laid up for them in heaven, for which they are being sanctified and kept by the Holy Spirit, and which can never pass away. (Acts 2:39; Eph. 1:11,14; Col. 1:12; 1 Thess. 2:12; Heb. 3:1; 11:8; 1 Pet. 1:4; 5:10)

They receive this inheritance because a death has occurred—the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, who secured their atonement by his blood, and by whose resurrection and exaltation to glory the redeemed of the Lord are now able to draw near to God and to acknowledge that he is their Father in heaven, and they are his children. (Heb. 7:19; 10:22)

Hebrews 9:16-17

Here, the writer likens the new covenant to an ordinary domestic will or testament (although, strictly, the words *'covenant'* and *'testament'* differ in meaning to some extent). A last will or testament cannot come into effect, nor can anyone benefit from the terms of that will, until the person who made the will dies. A will is not valid while the person who made it still lives. He must die, and his death must be established in law.

Christ, however, died. His death, followed by his burial, was established indisputably. Therefore, the new covenant was ratified by God and put into effect. Through this new covenant, the people of God inherited all the blessings, promises and privileges attached to this covenant. However, by his resurrection and ascension, the glorified Lord Jesus implements personally and forever the blessing and benefits of the new covenant, and bestows these blessings upon all his elect people.

Hebrews 9:18

Not even the old covenant could be inaugurated and ratified without death. There had to be a shedding of blood—the sacrifice of a perfect and unblemished life (in this case, an animal life) in order for the benefits of the atonement to be applied. Only by the death of the sacrifice and the shedding of its blood, could a person benefit from the terms of the old covenant and receive forgiveness of sin.

Granted, these sacrifices did not finally take away sin. They merely covered it (although the believer still received forgiveness of sin and justification before God). However, limited in their effectiveness as undoubtedly they were, these animal sacrifices typified or foreshadowed that one perfect sacrifice of atonement that would take away sin forever.

Hebrews 9:19-20

God gave to Moses all his commandments, together with all his ordinances, rules and regulations pertaining to worship and sacrifice. Moses in turn passed on all these commands and instructions to the people, and committed to Aaron and his sons all the ordinances relating to the priesthood and to the offerings required by God for the sins of the people. (Ex. 24:3,7-8; 28:1:1ff)

Thus, in accordance with God's commands, Aaron took the water, scarlet wool and hyssop, together with the blood of the sacrificed animals and he sprinkled the book—or the roll of the book—and all the people. As Aaron sprinkled the atoning blood over the people, he declared that this was the covenant inaugurated by God for the people of Israel. That is, by the shedding of the blood of a perfect and unblemished sacrifice, their sins would be covered and forgiven. However, without the shedding of blood, there would be no forgiveness [of sin]. (Ex. 29:19-21; Lev. 1:5,11; 3:2,13; Heb. 9:22)

Hebrews 9:21

It was necessary to make atonement not only for the people (including the priests and high priest), but also for the tent or sanctuary itself, for all the furnishings of the tent, and for all the vessels and utensils used in the service of the sanctuary. Normally, these sacred items were consecrated and rendered holy to the LORD. (Ex. 30:25-30; 40:9-11; Heb. 9:19) However, when they were defiled or rendered impure, all these items had to be cleansed by the blood of the atoning sacrifice.

The tent, furnishings and utensils were considered unclean—not in the moral or spiritual sense—but in the physical sense. Although part of the sanctuary, they were considered to have been contaminated or rendered impure by contact with the people or by the priests, who themselves were sinful human beings. Thus, the entire physical tent or tabernacle, and everything that it contained, had to be cleansed and purified by the atoning blood. Only then were they fit once more for the service of the LORD. (Lev 8:15,30)

However, since these animal sacrifices could never take away sin finally or completely, they had to be repeated daily and yearly for the sins of the people: daily at the morning and evening sacrifices, and yearly on the Day of Atonement. On that day alone, the high priest would enter behind the veil into the holy of holies to sprinkle on and before the mercy seat the blood of atonement for his own sins and for the sins of the people. (Lev. 9:8-9,18) Again, on that day alone, the high priest would return to the most holy place to sprinkle the atoning blood on the articles within the holy of holies, thus cleansing them from pollution or contamination contracted by his contact with them. (Lev. 16:14-20,33) Therefore, these offerings were made repeatedly over many centuries, until the time of reformation. (Heb. 9:9-10)

Hebrews 9:22

Under the law, almost everything had to be cleansed by the atoning blood. (Lev. 17:11) The sanctuary itself, and everything within or associated with the sanctuary, had to be purified by the atoning blood. This indicated the utter obnoxiousness and abhorrence to God of sin—contaminating not only the bodies and souls of men and women, but also all the physical or material objects with which they had come into contact. Even these physical objects had been rendered impure or 'unclean' by virtue of their proximity to, or contact with, sinful human beings.

The law showed the utter holiness and righteousness of God. It showed the standard that God required of his people. But that standard demanded absolute and perfect obedience at all times for an entire lifetime. However, no fallen sinful man or woman was capable of rendering such perfect and unflinching obedience to God. Thus, God's holy and perfect law condemned sin, and demonstrated to the sinner that he or she could never be justified or forgiven by means of the law—since they were incapable of keeping its commands or fulfilling its requirements. (Rom. 3:19-20,23; Jas. 2:10)

During that period, people could be forgiven and their sin covered only by the offering of a perfect and unblemished animal, sacrificed in accordance with the law, as a substitute (typically) for the sins of the offerer. Thus, the blood of goats and bulls was shed on the altar to make atonement for the

sins of the people. However, these sacrifices could never take away sin, or relieve the people completely of an accusing and guilty conscience. Nor could they grant to the offerer full and complete assurance of peace with God. (Heb. 10:1) Yes, God had forgiven their sins, for the sake of Christ who was yet to come. Nevertheless, the people did not benefit from the assurance of God's blessings to the same extent as his people who have lived since the coming of Christ. (Ps. 32:1-2)

Thus, since no one could be saved or justified by obedience to the law, or by the works of the law, some other means had to be found whereby the people might be forgiven and reconciled to God. However, any other way had to involve the shedding of blood: Not the shedding of animal blood, but the blood of a perfect, unblemished man. No such person ever lived, until God sent his Son into the world to be our Redeemer. By his perfect life of unwavering obedience to God, the complete requirements of God's law have been met and satisfied. By his sufferings and by his substitutionary and atoning death on the cross, atonement has been made for his people, once-for-all, finally and completely. By his resurrection from death and exaltation to the Father's own right hand in glory, his people are justified and set free from the penalty demanded by the law for their sin. (Rom. 5:1, 6-11, 17-18; 8:1-3; Heb. 10:10-17)

Hebrews 9:23

It was essential that the tent and everything within it be cleansed and sanctified from common to holy use, and that atonement be made for all these physical objects to render them pure before God from the contamination of his sinful people. In this way, the earthly copies of the heavenly reality was cleansed and purified. (Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:5)

However, the heavenly sanctuary itself had to be purified by better sacrifices: not in the sense of the impure having to be made pure. Rather, it was necessary for the merits of Christ's atoning blood to be brought into the most holy place in heaven to apply the benefits of redemption from within the heavenly sanctuary to the hearts and lives of God's people through the work of the Holy Spirit and the mediation of Christ our Great High Priest.

Some commentators believe, however, that there is a sense in which the heavenly sanctuary had to be purified more directly. They believe that purification of the heavenly sanctuary was necessary for the following reasons:

- To take away the effects of God's holy and righteous wrath against sin [although this point cannot be conceded, as it would imply that God's righteous wrath was somehow sinful rather than pure, just and holy wrath].
- To cleanse the heavenly sanctuary from God's dealing with a fallen and sinful people (e.g., in hearing and responding to their prayers).
- To purify the sanctuary in heaven from the effects of Satan and the fallen angels' expulsion from that place.

Thus, the heavenly sanctuary has been purified by better sacrifices—or by a once-for-all and an infinitely superior sacrifice—to any of the former animal sacrifices, or to all of them collectively.

Hebrews 9:24

The tent or tabernacle on earth was modelled exactly in accordance with the instructions given by God in his law. These instructions set forth the details for a sanctuary that was based expressly on the real sanctuary in heaven. Thus, the tent or tabernacle on earth was an exact copy or replica of the heavenly sanctuary.

Into this sanctuary on earth, the Aaronic priest entered to minister in the name of the LORD. There, in that holy place, the priest stood offering gifts and sacrifices on behalf of the people, and in accordance with the requirements of God's holy law. Yet, these priests could not minister in the most holy place, but only in the holy place of the sanctuary and in the sanctuary precincts. Only the anointed high priest could enter the holy of holies; and this but once every year, with the atoning blood.

All of these priests, however, could enter only into the *earthly* tabernacle—the copy of the real sanctuary in heaven. None of these Levitical priests or high priests could ever enter into the heavenly sanctuary itself to mediate for the people or to minister before the LORD God. The Lord Jesus, however, has entered the heavenly sanctuary. Unlike the priests on earth who *stand* daily before God, the Lord Jesus *sits* at God's right hand—for his work on earth is finished; his sacrifice has been made, atonement secured for all his people, and the benefits of redemption accomplished for all eternity. Now, he appears in the presence of God on our behalf, to intercede for all his people based on his perfect and completed work of atonement. (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 8:2; 9:11; 12:2)

Hebrews 9:25

In entering the heavenly sanctuary, the Lord Jesus had no need or intention of offering himself repeatedly for the sins of the people. Unlike the high priests on earth who needed to repeat the imperfect and inadequate atoning sacrifices daily, monthly, and yearly, the Lord Jesus made one perfect sacrifice for sin forever, and then sat down at the right hand of God. The precious blood of the Lamb of God was fully sufficient to pay the ransom price demanded for sin. It was (and is) fully sufficient to cleanse the repentant sinner from a guilty and accusing conscience. It was (and is) fully sufficient to grant the redeemed sinner peace with God through the knowledge of sins forgiven completely and forever. It was (and is) fully sufficient to guarantee to every believer the power and presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit, who sanctifies and seals for eternity all those whom God has redeemed.

The fact that the Levitical sacrifices had to be offered repeatedly, demonstrates very clearly the complete inadequacy of these sacrifices. They were unable to take away sin, or to cleanse the conscience of the worshipper. Indeed, such was never their purpose. Rather, when God inaugurated the earthly priesthood together with all its sacrifices and offerings, he was showing forth the following:

- the fact of sin, and that sin is common to all mankind.
- the heinousness of sin,
- the extent of sin,
- the alienation from God caused by sin,
- the absolute necessity of sin being atoned for in order to be forgiven.

Sin, however, is a moral evil; a moral failure for which every human being is responsible and accountable to God. As such, sin could never be atoned for by any amount of animal sacrifices—for the

life of an animal sacrificed upon the altar can never suffice to atone for man's moral evils, nor can it deal with his spiritual death and alienation from God.

The only kind of sacrifice that can achieve the necessary full atonement for sinful human beings is the sacrifice of another human being. That human being however had to be *a man*—corresponding to redemption from Adam's fall. That human being had to be *a perfect and sinless* man. No such person ever existed among all the generations of mankind. God alone could resolve this difficulty; and this he did when his own Son humbled himself and took upon himself the form of a servant. Although truly God, yet he became perfect Man. As perfect Man, born through the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, the Lord Jesus remained morally spotless and perpetually without sin, sinful inclinations, or any contamination inherited from Adam's fallen sinful nature.

Therefore, when Christ offered up his own life as an atonement for sin, he was offering to God the life of the only perfect Man who ever lived—and he was doing so for sinners. When he shed his blood on Calvary's cross, the blood shed was not only the life-blood of a perfect Man, but it was the only kind of blood that could atone completely and finally for the sins of men and women, cleanse them totally from their iniquities and reconcile them to God.

Hebrews 9:26

Thus, because of the perfections of the Person and the perfections of his sacrifice of atonement on behalf of others, this sacrifice need never—and can never—be repeated. Unlike the animal sacrifices, the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus is effective forever.

Thus, there was never any need for Christ to offer repeated sacrifices that would have involved repeated sufferings and death, and would have demonstrated only that his sacrifice had not been able to take away sin. However, the fact that God accepted his sacrifice of atonement as final—and this was demonstrated by raising his Son from the dead and exalting him to his own right hand—is proof that no other sacrifice will ever be required at God's hand.

Hebrews 9:27

'It is appointed unto man to die...' God determines the length of our days and the span of our life. He allots how long a person will live, and in what state or condition. (Ps. 31:15; Job 14:5; 30:23; Acts 17:26,31)

The verse continues: *'It is appointed unto man to die once...'* There is no second chance after this life is over. There are no second or subsequent lives in our present form or in a different form on earth, as is supposed by re-incarnation. (Gen. 3:19)

'...and after that comes judgement...' For, after man dies at his appointed time, comes judgment. Everyone in all creation will stand one day before the Lord God and before his Son on the judgment day. Then, God will render to everyone according to his deeds. He will judge everyone according to whether he had been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, and his sins forgiven, or whether he remained impenitent and still under the wrath of God for unforgiven sin. (Eccl. 11:9; 12:14; John 5:26-29; Rom. 14:9-12; 2 Cor. 5:10; Jude 1:15; Rev. 20:11-15)

Hebrews 9:28

Just as it is appointed for man to die once, so it was appointed for the Lord Jesus to die once. (Rom. 6:10; 1 Pet. 3:18) Just as man will be raised to stand before God in judgment, so Christ was raised to

sit at God's right hand—now, to act as Prophet, Priest and King; but—on the Day of Judgment—to act as Judge of all mankind. (2 Thess. 1:5-9; Heb. 7:26)

Again, just as the Lord Jesus was appointed to bear the sins of many (Matt. 20:28) and to make atonement for them by his death on the cross (Isa. 53:4-6, 11-12; 1 Pet. 2:24), so—now that he has been raised, exalted and glorified by his Father—he will return in his glory to gather his people home. He will appear a second time—not on this occasion to deal with sin—but to save those who have been waiting in eager expectation for his coming. (John 14:3; Rom. 8:23; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2 Tim. 4:8; Titus 2:13; 2 Pet. 3:12; Rev. 1:7)

All those who remain alive at his appearing will be caught up to be with him forever. However, they will not precede those who have fallen asleep or died in Christ. Their bodies will be raised. Then, together with those still living at Christ's appearing, they will be caught up together to join the Lord in the air, and so be with him for all eternity. (Matt. 25:31; 1 Cor. 15:1-58; 1 Thess. 4:14-16)

HEBREWS CHAPTER 10

In this chapter, the writer speaks of the permanent nature of the Lord Jesus' once-for-all sacrifice of atonement. He encourages his readers to draw near to the throne of grace through the blood of the eternal covenant, and he warns them against despising the grace of God and apostatising from the faith.

Jesus Fulfils the Father's Will**Hebrews 10:1-10****Hebrews 10:1**

The law that God gave to Moses provided the people of Israel with commands relating to holy and godly living and to divine worship. Concerning worship, offerings and sacrifices, this law of commands (or commandments) included rituals, ceremonies and ordinances required by the LORD. However, the performance of these rituals and ceremonies did not represent the reality, or true mode or place of worship. Rather, they were copies and shadows (Gk., εἰκῶν, (*eikōn*), likeness, image or form) that merely illustrated and pointed toward the reality—i.e., the true heavenly sanctuary and place of worship in the immediate presence of God. (Col. 2:17)

Nevertheless, God ordained the law of commandments and ordinances to foreshadow or prefigure 'the good things to come'. However, these good things to come would not find their fulfilment in the old covenant, where there was a continual reminder of sin, but in the new covenant whereby sin would be removed once-for-all.

'*The good things to come*' spoke of the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and the proclamation of that Gospel among all nations on earth. This was to be the Gospel promulgated to the ends of the earth under the terms of the new covenant. Through this new covenant, all the blessings of redemption would come to the believer in Christ, who was the promised Seed and Messiah.

This included not only redemption itself (in which the Old Testament believers also shared), but the manifold blessings of the indwelling Holy Spirit in a measure not experienced by earlier saints of God. (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:17-21ff) It included also a full assurance of faith, and the certain assurance of peace with God through a cleansed conscience. Above all, however, the good things to come related to the great blessings laid up in heaven for the redeemed people of God. It spoke of their heavenly inheritance; and this inheritance consisted not only of a place in their Father's home, but also of great blessings, privileges, responsibilities and rewards in his presence forevermore. (John 14:1-3; Acts 20:32; 26:18; Eph. 1:11,14; Col. 3:24; Heb. 9:15; 1 Pet. 1:4)

Concerning the law, however, these could never bring to perfection those who offered their sacrifices to God under its terms, because the animal sacrifices were never able to take away sin. (Heb. 10:4) They merely signified the absolute necessity for atonement by the shedding of innocent, pure and unblemished life-blood. However, they were completely inadequate to act as a satisfactory substitute for man's sin. Yet, they *typified* or *foreshadowed* the removal of sin, as, for example, with the scape-goat on the Day of Atonement. (Lev. 16:8,10,26)

The law required sacrifice and atonement for sin. However, since the law condemned sin *in* the sinner, it could not be the means of providing salvation *for* the sinner. For, only a perfectly holy and righteous human being—with no inherited sinful nature—could obey the law and thus attain to justifi-

cation through keeping the law. With the sole exception of the Lord Jesus Christ, no such person has ever lived. (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 9:8-14; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5)

Hebrews 10:2

Had these legal sacrifices been effective for the removal of sin and the cleansing of the conscience, then they would have ceased to be offered. Had they really effected redemption—the actual, complete and final forgiveness of sin—then there would have been no further need for such sacrifices of atonement. This, however, they manifestly failed to do. Thus, these same sacrifices had to be repeated year on year: not, however, to take away sin, but to show repeatedly the absolute necessity for an atoning sacrifice for sin and to typify or foreshadow the one effective sacrifice of atonement that was yet to come.

Until that time, however, the people remained conscious of their sin and of the powerlessness of animal sacrifices to effect actual atonement. Nevertheless, they accepted that these sacrifices only prefigured the one final sacrifice of atonement who one day would come into the world, and would pay finally, completely and forever the penalty for their sin. All these things, the prophets and others foresaw—albeit, indistinctly. Yet, believing on God and on his promises of redemption, they continued to live by faith and walked in the light of his Word. This, however, was true only of a remnant within Israel, as the majority of the people failed to believe the promises of God and rebelled against his holy Word. (Jer. 23:3; Joel 2:32; Hag. 1:12; Rom. 9:27; 11:5)

Only the sacrifice of a man—a perfect man, a sinless man—would be sufficient to atone for sin and to redeem men and women to God. The Old Testament believers must have been aware of the fact that only like could make atonement for like; only a perfect human life sacrificed could atone for fallen, sinful men and women and reconcile them to a most high and holy God. Thus, until Christ came—and although they benefited from the same grace and forgiveness of God—Old Testament believers did not possess the same assurance of a cleansed conscience at peace with God through the blood of the atoning sacrifice, as do their New Testament counterparts.

Hebrews 10:3

With the old covenant, there was a constant reminder of sin and of the need for repeated sacrifices. This was most especially noticeable on the Day of Atonement. Then, the high priest of God had to take the atoning blood for his own sin and for the sins of the people, and enter into the holy of holies. There, within the veil, he was to sprinkle the cleansing blood on and before the mercy seat that covered the ark of the covenant. On that day, too, the high priest was to atone for all the vessels and furniture within the most holy place.

This sacrifice of atonement was repeated every year; but at no other time was the high priest permitted to enter the holy of holies. Among other things, this signified clearly that:

- a veil—or barrier—prevented the people from approaching the throne of God directly;
- the people's sin alienated them from God and God from the people, and
- for as long as the veil remained, and the people's sin still not finally and completely atoned for, the way of direct access to God remained barred to the people.

Only through the mediation of the high priest on the Day of Atonement could the people be represented before the LORD and an offering made to God for the unwitting sins¹¹ of the people during the preceding year.

Hebrews 10:4

It was, of course, impossible for the blood of animal sacrifices to atone for sin or to take it away. These sacrifices typified or foreshadowed the atoning of the people's sins and the complete removal of their sin, but such sacrifices did not actually achieve it.

The sacrifices portrayed the necessity of blood being shed to make atonement for the sinner. They effectively covered sin, so that the people could rest in the knowledge of their sins forgiven in the sight of God. (The LORD God, however, did not see their sins forgiven because of the animal sacrifices, but because of—and in anticipation of—the perfect sacrifice of atonement to be offered once-for-all by his Son.)

Hebrews 10:5

(Ps. 40:6-8; cf. LXX)

In his law, the LORD made it abundantly plain how his people should worship him, and how and why sacrifices should be offered on their behalf. It was essential that these laws regarding gifts and sacrifices for sin be observed meticulously. Nevertheless, although he commanded them for a time, and because of man's sin, God did not desire such offerings. Had Adam not rebelled against God and fallen from grace and righteousness, such offerings for sin would never have been necessary. (Isa. 1:11; Hos. 6:6).

The Lord knew from the outset that none could atone for or remove sin but the sacrifice of his own beloved Son. Nevertheless, until the time of reformation, when he would send his Son into the world, God commanded that these animal sacrifices be made to remind the people of the enormity and heinousness of sin and of the necessity of redemption by the blood of a spotless and innocent victim.

Only the sacrifice of a perfect human being could actually atone for sin and remove it completely. To this end, God prepared a body for his Son: i.e., he sent his Son into the world, taking upon himself the form of a man, humbling himself as a servant. (Phil. 2:6-8)

Christ assumed true human form, but completely without sin and without any contamination from an inherited sinful nature. He alone was the perfect Man; the sinless Man; the spotless Man, and yet he was true Man—wholly qualified to act on behalf of sinful men and women and to make a complete and final atonement for their sin. (John 1:14; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 2:14-18)

His was the only life fit for a sacrifice of atonement, and his was the only body and mind so absolutely pure and holy that his vicarious sacrifice of atonement was effective for all his people in all ages from the beginning of creation to the end of the present age.

Hebrews 10:6

Burnt offerings and sin offerings afforded no pleasure to God. (Jer. 6:20; Amos 5:21) None of these could ever atone for man's sin or pay the penalty demanded for sin by the law. That penalty was

¹¹ *unwitting sins*: sins committed, not wilfully, but unintentionally or in ignorance.

death—the death of the sinner, or of the sinner’s perfect substitute. No animals could ever act as a perfect substitute for a sinner (although the scapegoat typified the principles of substitution). Only a perfect, spotless, sinless human life could act as a substitute for sinful men and women.

Hebrews 10:7

Thus, the Son of God came into the world as it had been written of him in the roll of the book (or scroll). (Ps. 40:7) As prophesied by Isaiah when speaking of the suffering Servant of the LORD (Isa. 52:13—53:12), or by Malachi when speaking of the Messenger of the LORD who would come to his temple (Mal. 3:1), and by many other OT prophets.

In total obedience to the will of the Father, and yet voluntarily, the Son came into the world, assumed the form of a man (without sin), in order to become the perfect sacrifice of atonement: the holy, pure and spotless Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. (John 1:29; Heb. 9:26; 1 John 2:2)

Hebrews 10:8-9

The sacrifices offered under the law were inefficient, ineffective and wholly inadequate to provide true atonement for sin. Therefore, in and of themselves, they could not provide the means of forgiveness for a person’s iniquities. Thus, the Lord God said that he took no pleasure in these sacrifices and offerings, nor in burnt offerings or sin offerings; all of which were offered according to the law.

God did not desire such physical and materials sacrifices, for these could never take away sin. What God desired was the sacrifice of a far higher order in relation to sin, and for the atonement and removal of sin. To this end, the Scripture continues by saying, “*Behold, I have come to do your will.*” From eternity, God had ordained that One who would offer a perfect sacrifice for sin should come into the world to make atonement once-for-all, for the sins of the people. Thus, the Saviour declares that he had come to do the Father’s will (v.9).

Taking upon himself the form of a man (true, holy and righteous Man, completely without sin), the Lord Jesus had come into the world to fulfil the will of his Father in heaven. Unlike all the previous offerings for sin, which could never fulfil the Father’s will, intentions, plans or purposes in relation to the salvation of lost men and women, the Lord Jesus was fully able and completely willing to fulfil to the uttermost the will of his Father concerning atonement for sin. Therefore, God abolished the first (or old covenant) in order to establish the second (or new covenant). (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 7:18-19; 8:7-13)

In abrogating the old covenant, God was also setting aside for ever the Levitical priesthood. In doing so, he abolished the system of offerings and sacrifices, and everything else associated with the law concerning burnt offerings and sin offerings. In its place, God established a new priesthood, of which Jesus Christ alone was to be the High Priest, and his redeemed people were to be priests unto God to offer up spiritual (rather than physical or material) sacrifices to God. (Rom. 12:1; Heb. 13:15; 1 Pet. 2:5-9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10)

The high priesthood of the Lord Jesus was based on his once-for-all offering and sacrifice for sin, where he laid down his life voluntarily in fulfilment of the Father’s will and on behalf of all those who would call upon his name for salvation. This one sacrifice for sin for ever is effective for the sins of all God’s redeemed people, from the very beginning of creation to the very end of the present age. (Heb. 9:11-14)

Nothing can ever be added to this sacrifice of atonement. Nor need it ever be repeated. To attempt to add anything is to imply that Christ's sacrifice was insufficient or inadequate. To attempt to repeat it is to imply that Christ's sacrifice was limited in its duration and ineffective for the sins of all the ages. Both assertions imply that Christ's sacrifice was imperfect; therefore, both assertions must be repudiated as false.

Hebrews 10:10

The Son of God came into the world to fulfil the will of the father. This he did when he led a holy, perfect life, not only on his own account, but also on account of all those who would believe on him. Again, the sinless, spotless Lord Jesus fulfilled the Father's will when he suffered and died vicariously, shedding his bloods on the cross to make atonement for the sins of his people. By that one sacrifice, all God's people have been sanctified once-for-all.

The sense in which the word '*sanctified*' is being used in this context refers to the once-for-all act of justification and to the ongoing process of sanctification; a process that continues throughout the believer's life. (Zech. 13:1; 1 Cor. 1:30; 6:11; Heb. 13:12)

The writer of Hebrews is not implying that once a person is brought to repentance and faith in the Son of God, he then becomes perfect in all manner of life. In saying that he has been sanctified once-for-all, he is merely expressing God's view of the believer's salvation. The believer has been saved and justified through regeneration, repentance and faith in God's Son; and the Holy Spirit is now in the process of sanctifying him daily, and he will continue to sanctify the believer until the day that his sanctification culminates in his glorification, and he is presented before God in heaven.

No Further Offering for Sin

Hebrews 10:11-18

Hebrews 10:11

Looking back on the old covenant, it is evident just how inadequate and ineffective were the sacrifices of the law. Under the law, the priest stood daily within the precincts of the tent or tabernacle, offering every day the same sacrifices from the flock or herd. However, by the very fact that these sacrifices had to be repeated daily, it was clear that they could never remove sin or cleanse the conscience of the worshipper. These sacrifices were no more than tokens, symbols or shadows of the sacrifice that alone could pay the price of sin—once-for-all. (Ex. 29:38-39; Num. 28:3)

Similarly, the high priest of God entered the most holy place only on one day every year—the Day of Atonement—to make atonement for his own sins and for those of the people. However, this solemn ceremony had to be repeated every year throughout Israel's history; for even this most special and solemn of sacrifices could never take away sin or provide remission of sins. Such sacrifices could never make peace with God or reconcile man to God. (Isa. 1:11; Heb. 10:4)

Hebrews 10:12

In complete contrast to the ineffective sacrifices of the law, the Lord Jesus Christ offered up one completely effective sacrifice for sin when he yielded up his own life, shedding his own blood, on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for sin. In this case, the sacrifice was that of a Man—a true, perfect and sinless Man. Thus, the sacrifice that he offered was wholly unblemished, wholly free from sin, pollution, or contamination of any kind.

Again, the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus' life was the sacrifice of a life that had been wholly and unflinchingly obedient to God throughout all his days on earth. Therefore, Christ alone was fully qualified to sacrifice his life and shed his blood as a substitute for others. He, and he alone, was fully qualified to effect complete and final salvation through his spotless life, perfect and unblemished sacrifice, and the voluntary yielding up of his life to the sufferings of the cross and the wrath of his Father, on account of every sinner whom he died to save. (Rom. 5:9; Gal. 3:13)

Unlike the sacrifices of the old covenant, however, which remained dead once they had been slain and offered up for sin, the Lord Jesus Christ arose from death on the third day. This demonstrated unmistakably that the Father had accepted his sacrifice as being fully and finally sufficient for the atonement and removal of sin for all time. It demonstrated also that all the requirements of the law—all its legal demands concerning sacrifices and offerings—had been met fully in Christ; thereby rendering null and void the ordinances, rituals and ceremonies of the law concerning sacrifices for sin, and rendering obsolete the Levitical priesthood. Again, it demonstrated that God saw the need of further offerings and sacrifices for sin to be unnecessary or superfluous. Any attempt to make further sin offerings would be to infer that the sacrifice of Christ was insufficient or inefficacious for all his people for all time. (Rom. 4:25; 1 Thess. 1:10)

Again, unlike the priest of the old covenant, our Great High Priest does not need to stand ministering every day in the holy place. On the contrary, God has exalted him to his own right hand; and there he sits enthroned with glory and honour to mediate for and intercede for his saints. (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 1:3; 7:25; 8:1)

Thus, it is evident that the work of the Lord Jesus on earth is a finished or completed work. Never again will he need to offer his life as a sacrifice for sin: for by his one offering for sin he has made perfect forever those who are in the process of being sanctified: viz., his redeemed and holy people. (Heb. 10:18)

Because of this once-for-all and perfect sacrifice of atonement, the Lord God now justifies all those who have faith in Jesus. However, their sin is no longer merely covered over; it is removed completely from the believer's life and conscience. In the same way, God has pledged never again to recall these sins to mind. Thus, now, believers in Christ can enjoy full and free peace with God in the knowledge of sins completely forgiven, of the heart (or mind) and conscience being cleansed from a sense of evil, wrongdoing and guilt—all by the shed blood of Christ, their Redeemer. (Heb. 8:12; 10:17)

Hebrews 10:13

(Ps. 110:1)

Christ will remain seated until, finally, all his enemies are subdued beneath his feet, and he is seen visibly by all to be King of kings and Lord of lords throughout the entire creation. In that day, all evil in the world will be expunged: for impenitent and unforgiven sinners will be removed from God's earthly creation forever. (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16; 21:27)

Again, the principalities and powers in the created heavenly realms, outside of God's holy dwelling place—i.e., Satan and the demons—will be judged and banished forever to that place of torments prepared for them by God. (Matt. 25:41; Jude 1:6; Rev. 12:7-9) Joining them there in the place of endless anguish of body and soul will be all those whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life from before the foundation of the world: i.e., all those who are outside of Christ and who have remained unforgiven and impenitent to the end. (Rev. 20:12,15)

Then, it will be seen that all of Christ's enemies throughout the created universe have become as his footstool. He will have shown himself—visibly—to be the triumphant Victor or Conqueror over not only sin and death, but also over every form of evil, whether human or supernatural, throughout the entire creation. Then, he will be seen visibly and gloriously by all to be King of kings and Lord of lords: the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. (Acts 2:32-36; 1 Cor. 15:25-27; Heb. 1:13; Rev. 1:8; 22:13)

Hebrews 10:14

By his one offering and sacrifice for sin, involving the yielding up of his body and the shedding of his precious blood, the Lord Jesus has made perfect forever those who presently are being sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Clearly, this means those who belong to Christ—those who have been brought to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus through the effectual calling and regeneration of the Holy Spirit, and who now are being sanctified by the Spirit of grace and of holiness. (Heb. 13:12)

As far as God is concerned, all those for whom Christ shed his blood have been justified in his sight. As such, they are considered by God as being clothed with the perfect or flawless righteousness of Christ and therefore perfect (legally or forensically) in his sight.

This is not to suggest that, somehow, the believer has been made inwardly or inherently perfect in his own character. Manifestly, this is not the case, for no believer is inwardly or inherently perfect nor does he become so in this life. Only when he is finally glorified will the believer become faultless and perfect in every respect. In the meantime, God sees—or looks upon—the believer *as though he were already perfect*, since he is looking at him *as clothed with Christ's righteousness* (imputed righteousness). This perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus is imputed to, or reckoned to the account of, each believer because of Christ's substitutionary and atoning work at Calvary.

Hebrews 10:15-16

In saying that the Holy Spirit bears witness to them, the reference is not so much to the *internal* witness of the indwelling Holy Spirit, as to the Holy Spirit's *external* testimony to the Word of God. What the Word of God said was what the Spirit said. Therefore, when the writer refers to the passage in Jeremiah the prophet that speaks of the new covenant, he is saying that the Holy Spirit bears witness or testimony to the truth of the words. The Holy Spirit is asserting and confirming that these are the words of the LORD. (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:9-12)

In these Scriptures, to which the Holy Spirit bears witness, it is written that the LORD would put his laws on the people's hearts... In other words, God's laws would no longer be merely the written letter of the law: laws written *externally* on tablets of stone, or recorded *externally* to be observed in the form of rituals, ceremonies and ordinances. Rather, the laws of God would be written *within*: i.e., written or applied *internally*, on the hearts or in the minds of men and women. (Cf. Ezek. 36:25-27)

Their faith in and obedience to God's law would be a spiritual faith and obedience issuing from the heart: not merely an outward, external or ritual assent to God's ways and obedience to a set of rules and regulations. Thus, by writing or impressing his laws on their hearts and minds, the people would no longer require these external commands, rules and regulations to instruct and guide them. *These, of course, would still apply in relation to the moral law, centred on love to God and to one another.* However, the people would obey the will of the Lord—not because of the outward written law—but because of an inward spiritual and earnest desire to do all that God required in his Word, and as written in their hearts (the 'heart' representing the very core of their inward being).

This does not mean that the people would no longer require spiritual teachers or pastors. God had appointed men to these offices, and he required that his people learn from their faithful and godly ministry. However, augmenting this external ministry of the Word would be the internal ministry or witness of the Holy Spirit. This is distinct from the witness of the Holy Spirit mentioned earlier in this verse, which referred principally to the Spirit's external witness to God's Word, or his speaking through God's Word. In the case of the indwelling Spirit of God within the believer's heart and life, the Spirit would act as teacher, leading the believer into all truth, warning of error, and guiding in the way of truth and holiness. This ministry complements—but does not replace—the ministry of the Word by pastors and teachers. (John 16:13; 1 John 2:27; Eph. 4:11; Heb. 13:17)

Hebrews 10:17

When the LORD God says in Jeremiah that he will remember his people's sins and iniquities no more (Jer. 31:33-34), he is making a very significant statement. Of course, under the provisions of the old covenant, there was a remembrance of sins every year—on the Day of Atonement. Moreover, so long as this ceremony was repeated, sins and iniquities were being called to mind. Furthermore, God could not fail to remember these sins; for no adequate atonement had ever been made for their remission. Only under the provisions of the new covenant would a satisfaction or fully efficacious sacrifice of atonement be made that would remit and take away sin forever.

Again, God *cannot* fail to remember. What he is saying is that he *will not recall* former sins and iniquities by a deliberate act of his will, and based on the perfect atonement. He has pledged never to bring to mind the sins and iniquities that he has now forgiven for the sake of his Son, and because of his perfect and finished work on earth. (Heb. 8:12; see also Ps. 103:12)

Once a debt has been paid in full, it cannot be charged to the debtor again. Christ paid in full the debt that we owed to God. Therefore, God will not require payment from us for a debt already discharged in full.

The verse says that God will not remember his people's sins or iniquities. The reference therefore is not to certain or specific sins merely, or to certain types or classes of sins, but to all sins of whatever nature, degree or extent. By virtue of Christ's atoning blood and substitutionary sacrifice, all sins and iniquities are forgiven, whenever a person is called to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 10:18

Where there is true forgiveness, or full and complete forgiveness, there is no longer any need for offerings or sacrifices for sin. The debt has been paid. It has been cancelled by virtue of the sacrifice that provided full and complete forgiveness, because Another had paid the debt in our place, or as our substitute. He discharged the debt, or rendered the account paid in full, by his own blood shed on the cross.

Under the old covenant, the sacrifices and offerings for sin could never actually or really remove sin, either from the sinner or from the sight of a most holy and righteous God. Therefore, under the old covenant, there could be no real, final or complete forgiveness for anyone based on the blood of animal sacrifices or by means of burnt offerings or sin offerings. God did forgive his people, but not because these sacrifices provided satisfaction for sin—for, manifestly, they did not and could not. Rather, God forgave his people's sin in these days on account of the one final sacrifice that Christ would make for them on the cross, and which the animal sacrifices merely typified or foreshadowed; albeit, very inadequately.

Therefore, where there is forgiveness—full, final and complete forgiveness—of sin, there is no longer any need for further offerings or sacrifices for sin. Since Christ has provided one offering and sacrifice for sin for all time, all other offerings of this nature have been terminated forever. (Heb. 9:25-26; 10:14)

Let us Draw Near**Hebrews 10:19-25****Hebrews 10:19-20**

Under the old covenant, no one—no member of the congregation of Israel, and no priest of God—could ever set foot within the holy of holies or most holy place behind the inner veil of the tent or tabernacle. That place was holy ground, and none but the high priest could ever enter there with the blood of the atonement for himself and for the people: and this only on one day every year. To everyone else, the way into God's most holy presence was barred and forbidden.

The veil symbolised the separation of God from his people because of their sin. However, it meant that none of God's people could approach him directly, but only through the mediation and intercession of the high priest acting on their behalf. Thus, although people could worship God and pray to God, they lacked the direct and immediate access to God's holy presence enjoyed by the Lord's people since Christ's death, resurrection and exaltation to God's right hand.

Again, since no one could come into God's immediate presence—represented by the mercy seat within the most holy place—the people lacked the ability and the confidence to come to God in the full assurance of sins already, fully and finally forgiven, of true peace with God, and of true assurance in their Redeemer. Therefore, although the LORD had promised to be in their midst, his presence was revealed only within the holy of holies, and to the high priest representing the people. Certainly, something of the power and glory of God was witnessed by the people in the cloud and the fire through which the LORD led Israel. However, this was not the same as a personal experience with God, nor did it provide access to the immediate presence of God. Yes, those who exemplified the faith of Abraham were truly the children of God. However, spiritually, they worshipped God from afar insofar as they had to depend entirely on the earthly or human priests to mediate with God on their behalf. (Ex. 40:34-35; Num. 9:15-18)

In complete contrast to this, however, the blood of Christ has opened up the way into the immediate presence of the most high and holy God in heaven. Now, no veil intervenes between God and his people; no unforgiven sin interposes between Almighty God and his redeemed people. The veil has been rent, and the way into God's presence opened up to all his redeemed people, since complete and final atonement has been made for their sin, and since God has pledged never to call to his remembrance his people's former sins and transgressions. (Heb. 4:16; see also Ps. 24:3; Isa. 57:15)

We should note that this access is not merely into the holy place in heaven, but into the holy of holies or most holy place—the immediate dwelling place of God in heaven (there being no separating veil between the holy places in heaven). Into that holy place, we have complete confidence to come before God, making our petitions known, praising his name, and seeking his grace and mercy to help us in our time of need. (Eph. 3:12; Heb. 4:16; 10:19-22) Our confidence, however, is not in ourselves, but in our Lord, Saviour and Great High Priest: not in our works or merits (which are worthless) but in the perfect work and merits of Christ our Redeemer. In him, we stand; and, by him, we approach the throne of grace. We know that he is our Mediator, and that—with the Holy Spirit—our Great High

Priest intercedes for us, making our petitions, prayers and praises a fully acceptable offering to God. (Rom. 8:26-27; 8:34; Heb. 7:25)

This way of access to God's presence is described as a '*new*'...way—new not only in contrast to the old (covenant), but new also in the sense of being 'fresh' (similar to the colloquial expression, 'brand new'). It is described as 'living'—living in the sense that this way of access is direct and vital; that it conducts us into the immediate presence of our Father in heaven; and that it is accessible to any and all of God's truly redeemed and sanctified people on account of Christ's shed blood. (John 10:7-9; 14:6)

In the earthly tabernacle or temple, the presence of the inner veil or curtain indicated that the way into God's presence was completely inaccessible. The separating veil acted as a barrier, signifying that God would not dwell in the presence of sin, or associate with sinners for whom a full atonement had not (yet) been made. Thus, for centuries, the veil stood between God and the people—indicating that the people's sin separated them from full fellowship or communion with God and from immediate access to his presence. When Christ died, however, the veil in the temple was rent in two, from top to bottom, indicating that God was no longer separated from his people. By Jesus' death, sin had been atoned for once-for-all. The barrier between God and man had been removed, and now repentant and believing sinners could be reconciled to God. (Matt. 27:51; Heb. 6:19-20; 9:12,23-25; cf. Heb. 10:5)

The passage says that the veil in the temple or tabernacle was symbolic of Christ's flesh. In speaking here of Christ's 'flesh', it is best probably to understand his body—the body that was abused, pierced and rent on the cross. When that body was rent, and his blood shed, full atonement was accomplished for all God's people who ever lived, or would live, from the beginning of creation to the end of the present age. Thus, when Christ's body was rent on the cross, the veil of the temple was also rent—opening up the way into the most holy presence of God. The earthly temple, however, was a copy of the reality. The real or true sanctuary is in heaven. Therefore, when the veil of the temple on earth was rent, this was indicating not only the end of the earthly temple and its services, but the beginning of access and spiritual worship for God's redeemed people in the heavenly sanctuary. The writer refers to the heavenly sanctuary as the '*holy places*' [plural], because, in heaven, there is no veil separating the holy place from the holy of holies. They are both one.

Hebrews 10:21-22

(Cf. Heb. 4:16)

We who belong to Christ know him as our Great High Priest. However, the Son of God is not merely the priest of God's earthly temple or sanctuary. Rather, he is the High Priest over God's house (or household): i.e., he is the Great High Priest over God's spiritual house—the church, or the redeemed people of God. (Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:19)

This is demonstrated from the following passage:

Hebrews 3:5-6 (ESV)

(5) Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, (6) but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

From his heavenly sanctuary, our Great High Priest mediates and intercedes for each individual within his house or church. Because of his mediation, we are able to approach his Father directly, through the Son, and with confidence or full assurance of faith.

Furthermore, the Lord Jesus has constituted his redeemed and holy people as a priesthood on earth. They are a priesthood of believers; called and ordained of God to offer—not ritual or ceremonial sacrifices, which are no longer valid—but spiritual sacrifices; sacrifices of praise to God and to his Son. (1 Pet. 2:5,9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; see also Ex. 19:6; cf. Isa. 61:6)

In verse 22, we are told expressly to come into God's presence with confidence or boldness. This confidence, of course, is not in ourselves, but in Christ our Redeemer. We approach the Father confidently, in the full assurance of sins forgiven, of Christ's work and merits on our behalf and in faith and obedience to God's Word concerning these very things. We are confident in everything that Christ has done for us. We believe assuredly that he died for us, that by his resurrection and ascension to glory we are justified, and that by his Spirit we are being sanctified and changed from one degree of glory to another. In all sincerity, we have a full assurance of faith, or we are fully assured of our faith in Christ's work and person. By his atoning blood, our hearts and lives have been sprinkled clean from an evil conscience—and from an accusing conscience. We have been cleansed by his blood, regenerated unto new life by his Holy Spirit, and are being sanctified by this same Spirit of holiness. (Eph. 3:12; Heb. 4:16; 7:19; 9:14)

Under the old covenant, all the utensils and vessels of the tabernacle had to be washed in pure water. Also, the hands, feet and bodies of the worshippers had to be cleansed with water. Outward cleanliness, however, did not indicate inward cleanliness or cleanliness of the heart or mind. Such was the situation with many of the Pharisees and other religious rulers in Jesus' day. (Ex. 29:4; Mark 7:3-8)

God, however, requires inward or heart cleanliness. To this end, Christ's atoning sacrifice provides cleansing for the heart or mind, rather than for the body alone. By that sacrifice, we are cleansed 'all over'. This is typified by—but not effected by—water, as in Ezekiel where the LORD says to Israel:

Ezek. 36:25 (ESV)

"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you."

And again, through the prophet Zechariah:

Zechariah 13:1 (ESV)

"On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness."

Here, the water *symbolises* the cleansing and purifying effects of the Holy Spirit in regeneration and sanctification.

Again, water symbolizes the inward cleansing that actually has been applied by the Word of God, by the blood of the atonement, and by the Spirit of God in justification and sanctification. Thus, the writer says that our bodies have been washed with pure water; the water representing the cleansing effects both of the sacred Word and of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. (1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 5:26-27; Titus 3:5)

We may also associate the water here with the water of baptism, but only in a secondary sense in this particular passage. The water of baptism typifies—but does not effect—the inward cleansing achieved already by the atoning blood of Christ, and by the Holy Spirit in regeneration and sanctification. Again, the water illustrates our union with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection to new life and glory above. However, in neither case, does physical water actually regenerate the soul or aid the regeneration of the soul, nor does water cleanse the inward man or woman in any way whatsoever. Water is purely symbolic, as it was in the Old Testament where the LORD spoke of sprinkling clean water on his people or where he spoke of drinking from the wells of salvation (both allusions speaking of the regenerating and sanctifying work of God's Holy Spirit; not to the supposed cleansing or sanctifying effects of water *per se*.)

Hebrews 10:23

We can hold fast—or hold steadfastly to—the confession of our hope: for our hope is in Christ. Our hope is in his perfect Person. Our hope is in his finished work at Calvary on our behalf. Our hope is in his Word and his promises, and in his assurance that he has prepared a place for us in heaven, and that he will return one day to take us to be with him. In all these things and more, we can hold fast to our hope; for it is a certain hope; an assured hope; an unailing hope that can never pass away.

Since we know all these things, we ought to hold fast to our hope without speculating, without doubting, without questioning whether these things will be. God is faithful. He cannot fail to fulfil his Word in every detail, or fail to honour his every promise, until the day that he ceases to exist. Thus, since the word and the promises of God can never be recalled or pass away, we can remain absolutely confident that the Lord will fulfil all his promises concerning salvation, eternal life, and the blessings of heaven to follow. (Matt. 24:35,31; 1 Thess. 5:24; Heb. 6:18; 1 Pet. 1:25)

Hebrews 10:24

Let us think carefully and thoughtfully about how we can stir up one another or encourage one another to love... Firstly, we ought to help one another express our love to God and to his Son with an earnest and sincere heart. Secondly, we should encourage each other to show Christ's love to our brothers and sisters in the Lord. We should help and support our brothers and sisters practically, whenever this is necessary, and for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ by whom they are greatly esteemed and precious. Again, we ought to show love, kindness and consideration to a world lost in sin; caring for the lost as Christ cared for lost men and women in his day, and reaching out to the 'untouchables' as did the sinless Son of God to the lepers, outcasts and 'sinners' of every class. (Acts 11:29; Rom. 12:15; Col. 3:16; Heb. 13:3)

For the believer, the law of God is not to be followed as a law of commandments and ordinances to be obeyed rigorously and meticulously, but as the law of God written within: i.e., impressed on our hearts or minds. No longer do we follow rules and regulations that could never control the body or bring peace and calm to the mind. Rather, now, we follow the law of the Spirit. We walk or live in accordance with the Holy Spirit's teaching, as he opens to us and impresses upon our hearts and minds the requirements of God's Word. To this end, we bring forth the fruit of the Spirit; and, out of that fruit, springs the heartfelt desire to do those things that please and honour the Lord and that benefit others. Thus, we perform 'good works'—works that God has prepared for us from eternity. Such good works benefit not only our own brothers and sisters in Christ, and our own families, but also the outside world—a world in need, in distress and in anguish of soul through the sins of mankind. (Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 2:10)

However, we must realize that none of these good works can ever contribute toward our salvation, or keep us secure in our salvation. Salvation is entirely by God's sovereign grace, and it is bestowed upon whom he will—irrespective of works, deeds of merit, or any other supposed good qualities or actions. To God, all our 'righteousnesses'—all our best intentions and endeavours—are as filthy rags. (Isa. 64:6)

Good works issuing from a regenerated and sanctified life, however, are well pleasing and honouring to God. They can never add to our salvation. Nevertheless, they will be considered by God when we appear before him to be judged and rewarded according to our deeds. The reference here, of course, is not to works or deeds relating to salvation (which is the gift of God) but to judgment or assessment of the way we have lived as Christians on earth. Those who have been faithful to God will be greatly rewarded, in accordance with their deeds or works. Those, however, who have proved less than faithful, will lose part or all of the additional rewards that might otherwise have been theirs in heaven. (Rom. 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 22:12)

Hebrews 10:25

The writer had encouraged these believers to stir up one another to love and good works. Now, he admonishes them against neglecting the services of the church and the means of grace. They were to meet together regularly, not only from house to house, as did the early disciples of the Lord Jesus (Acts 2:46), but also and more specifically in the house of God. There, they were to meet to praise and worship his name, and to engage in prayer to God and fellowship with one another.

The writer infers that there were some who absented themselves from the public worship services, and who neglected to meet together regularly with other believers in God's house of prayer.

No one knows the exact day of the Lord's appearing, or the day when we will be called home to be with the Lord forever. In the meantime, however, we are to found as a worshipping, praising and witnessing people, meeting regularly in God's house for prayer and fellowship. To this end, the believers were to encourage one another daily to love, good works, and to the meeting with one another on a regular basis for the breaking of bread and for the teaching of doctrine in the place of public worship. (Matt. 18:20; Acts 1:14)

Warnings against Apostasy

Hebrews 10:26-39

At this point, the writer turns from addressing those who—by God's grace—were endeavouring to persevere in their faith and calling, to warn any false professors of their very great danger in presuming upon the grace and mercy of God. However, in principle, this warning would apply also to those who were being tempted to abandon the faith and to return to Judaism—probably, because of the intense persecution that they had been enduring.

Hebrews 10:26

(Cf. Heb. 6:4-8)

...If we go on sinning deliberately, after receiving the knowledge of the truth...

According to the apostle John, it is not possible to be a born again believer and still practice sin. (1 John 3:5-10; 5:18) Those whose sins have been forgiven cannot continue wilfully and repeatedly

to live lives characterised by sinful behaviour or attitudes. Thus, it is not possible to belong to Christ while living a habitually sinful life. This is what the writer is saying. No one who continues to live a sinful life, after having been made aware of the truth (or *after receiving the knowledge of the truth*), can have experienced regeneration or the new birth.

Notice that the sentence says, 'after having received *the knowledge* of the truth'—not 'after having received the truth'. Two distinct and contrary things are affirmed here:

- The latter statement infers that this person has received and believed the truth of the Gospel concerning salvation with all his heart, and so is saved.
- The former statement, however, infers that the person may have received only an *external* (intellectual) knowledge or awareness of the truth, without necessarily having believed it wholeheartedly or having received the Holy Spirit in regeneration and sanctification.

If, however, such a person who professes faith in Christ (albeit, without having received the Spirit) continues to live in the deliberate practice of sin, then no sacrifice for sin remains for him. He had received already a full knowledge of the truth, even if he did not fully and wholeheartedly respond to this knowledge and seek the Lord with all his heart. He was aware of the one and only way of salvation through the message of the Gospel and through repentance and faith in Christ alone. If, then—by his expressions, behaviour or attitudes—he were to despise the grace of God and repudiate Christ and his Gospel, he would cut himself off from any hope of forgiveness through Christ's atoning sacrifice. (Heb. 3:12,17; 6:4-8)

This is precisely what Judas Iscariot did. He professed to believe on Christ; he was fully aware of the truths concerning salvation, but ultimately, he despised the grace of God, apostatised from the faith, and betrayed the holy and righteous Son of God.

For all his professions of faith and knowledge of the truth, Judas was not a child of God but rather was the son, or a child, of perdition. (John 17:12; cf. 2 Thess. 2:3 where the same expression occurs)

We might also consider the words of the apostle Peter:

2 Peter 2:20-22 (ESV)

(20) For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.

(21) For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. (22) What the true proverb says has happened to them:

"The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire."

Hebrews 10:27

For anyone who professes (falsely) to belong to Christ, or who professes (falsely) to have been cleansed by Christ's atoning blood, and to have received the Holy Spirit, there remains only a fearful prospect of judgment. The wrath of God—described as 'the fire of God's wrath'—will light upon and consume his adversaries. Every false professor and hypocritical individual will be exposed by God for what he is, and will find himself under the holy, righteous and enduring wrath, fury or anger of the Lord God Almighty. (Matt. 3:10-12; 2 Thess. 1:8-10; Heb. 2:3; 12:25,29; Rev. 6:15-17)

Such is the case with all impenitent sinners or pretending believers (as it was with Judas, the son of perdition). They will suffer utter loss in the place of eternal torments. They will endure forever an ever-accusing conscience. They will suffer the pangs of knowing that they can never again find repentance, forgiveness or the mercy of the Lord for all the ages of eternity. For their apostasy and repudiation of God's Son and for despising the Spirit of grace and of holiness, they will suffer endlessly in that place prepared by God for the devil and his angels. (Matt. 13:42,50; 25:41; Rev. 20:15)

Hebrews 10:28-29

No one who disregarded Moses disregarded Moses alone. On the contrary, they disregarded and despised the One who had sent Moses—the Holy One of Israel. It was He—the LORD God Almighty—who had given his law to Moses to impart to the people. When Moses spoke in the name of the LORD, he was proclaiming God's Word and God's commands to the people. Thus, by disregarding the law given by Moses, the people of Israel were disregarding and despising the law and commandments of God. However, the punishment for despising the law of God was death. Thus, these wilfully rebellious and impenitent people were put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses. In this way, the Lord God extirpated repeated and wilful sin and unrighteousness from the camp and from among his people. (Deut. 13:6-10)

Such was the punishment inflicted on those who despised the word and law of God under the terms of the old covenant. Since this was so, how much worse punishment do those deserve who reject, or show contempt for, his only Son? How much greater punishment is due to those who repudiate the grace of God (perhaps, by their wicked lifestyles) and who profane—i.e., treat as common or unholy—the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified? (Heb. 2:1-3; Jude 1:4-7)

In saying that they had been sanctified by the blood of the covenant, this does not mean necessarily that they had been saved by the atoning blood. We must remember that the verb 'to sanctify' means both to 'set apart' (from common to sacred use), and 'to cleanse' or 'to purify'. It was quite possible to be sanctified in the former sense (as was Israel when she was set apart to God as a nation) without being sanctified in the latter sense. (Cf. Lev. 20:7-8; 27:14-26; 1 Chron. 23:13)

Again, many in Israel were sanctified (externally) by the blood of bulls and goats. In accepting and following the rituals and ceremonies of the Jewish faith, these people professed themselves true believers in the God of Israel. Nevertheless, with many of them, God was not well pleased. Consequently—and despite the fact that they had been sanctified (outwardly) by their association with religious rituals and ceremonies (including the sacrifice of atonement)—they perished. (Num. 14:11-12,28,35; Deut. 2:15-16; Ps. 95:11; 1 Cor. 10:5; Heb. 3:17; Jude 1:5)

Therefore, we see that it is not sufficient to be sanctified externally by close proximity to the cleansing blood. If one has not been sanctified internally—*in heart and soul*—then it is because he has not been cleansed with Christ's atoning blood. However, those who have not been sanctified in heart and

soul ultimately demonstrate by their manner of life that they do not have the Holy Spirit within them and therefore that they do not belong to Christ. (Rom. 8:8-9)

Furthermore, to despise or make light of the atoning blood, is to despise and outrage the Spirit of grace—the Spirit of holiness. Those who profess to belong to Christ, while living vile or sinful lives (overtly or covertly) are despising and repudiating the Spirit's external influences; treating him with contempt, and treading the blood of the covenant under their feet. Such heinous crimes could be committed only by those who are false professors, apostates from the faith, or sinners who are under the controlling influence of Satan as was Judas Iscariot. Nevertheless, as with Judas, this does not absolve them of their responsibility or mitigate their guilt. (Isa. 63:10; Matt. 12:31-32)

Hebrews 10:30-31

It is a dreadful thing to despise the grace of God or wilfully to make a profession of faith in Christ knowing that it is a false profession, and therefore insincere and unreal. Those who despise God's grace and who treat the Spirit of God with contempt invite upon themselves the righteous and holy wrath of God, or God's vengeance. Indeed, on that Day, the Lord will repay according to a person's deeds: according to the true state of his or her heart, and not according to their outward profession. And that judgment will be swift and terrible. (Deut. 32:35; Joel 2:11,31; Nahum 1:2)

In a similar way, God will judge his own redeemed people. Any one of the Lord's own people who have degraded the work of Christ, despised the work or grace of the Spirit, or belittled the blood of the covenant, will be judged accordingly. Since these people belong to Christ, they will not lose their salvation, which they received as a gift of God's sovereign grace. Nevertheless, they may be punished on this earth with loss of health, strength or even life itself—as were some of the Corinthian believers because they despised the sanctity of the Lord's Table. (1 Cor. 11:27-30) Again, they may stand to lose some, much, or all of their rewards in heaven because they proved unfaithful by their lives and conduct to their Lord and Master. They will not forfeit their salvation. However, they may well forfeit the added blessings that might otherwise have been theirs in heaven. (1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:10)

It is indeed a fearful or dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living, sovereign, almighty God, or to be exposed to his righteous and holy judgment because of sin, hypocrisy or unfaithfulness to him and to his Son. (Matt. 10:28; Heb. 12:29)

Hebrews 10:32

Here, it becomes evident that these Hebrew Christians had been suffering intensely for the sake of Christ's name. Perhaps, this was a reason why some of these professing believers were being tempted to abandon their faith in Christ and return to their former Jewish system of worship. At least, under the Jewish system, the worshippers would not be subjected to the same degree or intensity of persecutions and sufferings for their faith.

However, such a move on their part would amount to the sin of apostasy. This is because it would involve a complete and final renunciation of Christ and his Gospel, together with all the benefits and blessings of Christ's atoning sacrifice. As we saw earlier in this chapter (and in chapter 6), to commit this sin—i.e., to repudiate completely Christ and his Gospel—was to put oneself beyond the pale of God's salvation. (Heb. 2:3; 6:4-8; 12:25)

The writer encourages these suffering believers to recall the days when first they had been enlightened—i.e., when first they had understood and accepted the Gospel message. They had been called

not only to believe on the Lord Jesus, but also to suffer for his sake. (Phil. 1:29-30; Heb. 12:4; 1 Pet. 2:21; 5:10)

Indeed, they had been suffering greatly, even up to the present time. The writer realises just how difficult their struggles had become, and yet he is concerned that they persevere in their faith. There could be no turning back to the system of legal sacrifices and offerings. To turn back or apostatise was to demonstrate that their profession of faith in Christ had not been a real or true profession but merely an outward assertion of belief with no corresponding inward change of heart or mind. Thus, such a person would be still in his sins: still at enmity with God, and still abiding under his righteous and holy wrath.

Hebrews 10:33

The writer acknowledges that these Hebrew Christians had been exposed to much suffering, often publicly. They had been subjected to the most severe reproaches, cruel ridicule and the utmost contempt because they were known as Christ's followers. Satan is completely powerless to vent his malice upon God directly; but the evil one delights to attack the people of God through the attitudes, actions, and even atrocities of ungodly men and women. (Heb. 11:26,36; 13:13)

Again, and like the apostle Paul, it was quite possible that some of these believers had been committed to prison by the civil magistrates because of their belief on the Lord Jesus Christ, and because they had been testifying to his life, death and resurrection. (Acts 16:37; 1 Cor. 4:9; 2 Cor. 12:10; 2 Tim. 2:9)

Yet, while some suffered unjustly in prison, other believers shared with them in their distress, sympathized with them, and visited them in their confinement. As with Paul, those who were imprisoned unjustly had committed no crime and done no wrong. They were suffering in chains because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. (Heb. 10:33; 13:3; 1 Pet. 4:13)

Hebrews 10:34

Not only did these Hebrew Christians show real compassion to those in prison for their faith, but they also rejoiced when their own property had been plundered. Perhaps, while incarcerated for their faith, their property had been confiscated by the civil authorities as part of their punishment. However, it is also possible that ungodly men and women took advantage of these believers, and robbed them of their property either while they were in prison or while they were otherwise absent from their homes.

Nevertheless, at such plundering of their goods, the believers rejoiced. They knew that they possessed a far better inheritance in glory, forever kept secure for them by their heavenly Father. Again, they had been laying up their real and lasting treasures in heaven—not on earth. Such things as they possessed on earth were those things that were essential to life and wellbeing—and even these had been taken from them. (Matt. 6:19-21; 1 Pet. 1:3-4)

Hebrews 10:35

Therefore, says the writer, do not cast away your confidence—your hope or assurance in Christ. (Heb. 3:6,14; 4:14)

If you have truly believed on him, you must persevere in your faith to the end. A great reward has been laid up for you in glory, but it is needful that you continue to persevere, so that—when the race

has been run—you may lay hold of the crown of righteousness. (1 Cor. 9:24; 2 Tim. 4:7-8; Heb. 12:1)

Therefore, do not become discouraged by the trials and tribulations of the moment or of this life. Do not throw away your confidence—the assured confidence that you have in Christ and in the Word and promises of God. Suffering is but for a time. We, however, look ahead to when Christ will say to every one of his faithful people:

“Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.” (Matt. 25:21 ESV)

Hebrews 10:36

The writer encourages his readers to endure the present troubles and to persevere in their faith. For it is those who persevere to the end who will be saved: i.e., who demonstrate that they are the saved of the Lord and have been kept in their faith by the sovereign and all-sufficient grace of God—granted to them by the God of all grace. (Matt. 10:22; 24:13; Luke 8:15; Heb. 6:11,15; Jas. 1:3-4; 5:7-11)

When you have done the will of God: i.e., when you have suffered for the sake of Christ’s name and according to the will of God, God will surely honour and bless you. (Acts 9:15-16; Phil. 1:29-30; 1 Pet. 3:14-17)

You will receive everything that God has promised to his faithful servants: the glorious heavenly reward including the crown of life; the additional rewards bestowed on the true and faithful servants of the Lord Jesus, and the blessed reward of being in the immediate presence of God and of his Son for all the ages of eternity. (Matt. 5:11-12; 1 Cor. 3:13; Col. 3:23-24; Heb. 11:25-26; Jas. 1:12; 1 Pet. 1:8-9; 2 John 1:8; Rev. 2:10)

Hebrews 10:37

(Cf. Isa. 26:20 with Hab. 2:3-4)

It is only a matter of time—a comparatively short time in the calendar of God—when the coming one will appear again. At the appointed time, there will be no further delay. The Lord will come and he will gather his people home. Then, the rewards will be apportioned. Then, the blessings will be bestowed on the faithful servants of Christ. Then, all sorrow, suffering, pain, and grief—together with sin and death itself—will be abolished forever. (Matt. 24:36-44; 1 Thess. 4:15-18; 5:1-5; Jas. 5:7-8; 2 Pet. 3:8-10; Rev. 22:20)

Until that time, however, the believers were to persevere steadfastly in their faith and calling, enduring those afflictions that the Lord saw fit to send their way. Yet, they were not to be weighed down with these earthly trials and tribulations, for God’s grace would be sufficient for them. One day, however, they would receive from God an exceeding weight of glory. (2 Cor. 4:16-18)

Hebrews 10:38

Again—and according to the prophet Habakkuk—God’s righteous or justified one will live by faith. He will not consider only the temporary outward circumstances of his life on this earth. Rather, he will look forward and above to his eternal dwelling, and to a city without foundations built by the Lord God himself. Even although God has called him to serve him on earth for all the days that God has allotted to him, the believer realises that earth is not his final dwelling. He lives here as a pilgrim,

journeying onward and upward to a better land on high. Thus, throughout his life, he lives by faith in the Word of God and in the promises of God. He does not depend on what he can see—for anything that can be seen just now is destined to pass away. However, by faith, he believes on the one who has prepared a place in glory that can never grow old; it can never pass away. (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 11:9-16; Rev. 21:14-27)

The believer in Christ lives by faith—not by works of the law, not by works of supposed righteousness or any other kind of works. However, if he were to shrink back from his profession of faith... If he were to forsake the life of faith and turn back to a life of law-works and to Judaism... If he were to abandon faith in Christ and in his Word and promises, and if he were to return to the ordinances, rites, rituals and ceremonies of the law and of the Jewish priesthood, then that person would have apostatised from the faith. He would have renounced and repudiated faith in Christ and in his sacrifice of atonement to the complete and final loss of his eternal soul.

This is the reason that God says in this verse that he will have no pleasure in him. Indeed, by his apostasy, he has brought upon himself not only the sore displeasure of the Lord, but also the holy and righteous wrath and judgment of God. By his repudiation of God's one and only Son and his only way of salvation through faith in his atoning blood, the apostate has placed himself in a position where it is no longer possible to find salvation through Christ. (Ezek. 18:24,26; Matt. 13:20-21; Heb. 6:1-8; 10:23-31; 12:25)

Hebrews 10:39

The writer remains confident, however, that—in the main—the Hebrew Christians are not of those who shrink back or who are likely to repudiate their faith in Christ, and therefore are destined for destruction. Rather, he is convinced that they are the true and faithful children of God by regeneration and adoption. (Matt. 13:23; 2 Tim. 2:12)

Nevertheless, it has to be acknowledged that—among the professing people of God—will be some people whose hearts are not right with God. This is not because they have sinned, and as yet have failed to seek God's forgiveness. Nor again is it because they are in a backslidden state, and have remained out of fellowship with the Lord and with his people. Upon true repentance and confession to God of either of these categories of sin, the believer can be forgiven and restored to his fellowship.

The people to whom the writer is alluding are those whose hearts are not right with God because they have never experienced God's saving or sanctifying power in their lives. They may have professed faith in Christ, but they do not belong to Christ; and, ultimately, he will disown them. They may speak of the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives; but, in reality, they have never experienced the regenerating or sanctifying work of God's Spirit. Although perhaps appearing very pious, godly or religious, although perhaps attending services regularly, and although perhaps involved in the work or appointed to the offices of the church, they are yet in their sins. These imposters are yet alienated from God and abiding under his wrath.

It is to people such as these that the severe warnings of Hebrews chapter 6:1-8 and chapter 10:23-31 are intended to apply. However, the writer of this epistle remained persuaded that this situation was not true generally of the Hebrew believers.

HEBREWS CHAPTER 11

In this chapter, the writer is about to apply some of the principles that he has just been discussing, especially, in the immediately preceding chapter. At this point, the writer will cite some past examples of those who lived by faith—all of whom were well known to the Hebrews believers with their Jewish ancestry. However, the writer will point out that each of these Jewish believers of past ages not only lived by faith but also suffered because of their faith in God. Yet, they persevered, for they had not set their hearts and minds on the things of this age but on the things of the age to come. Thus, ultimately, they received that promised inheritance that had been laid up for them in glory, and that had been promised to their forefathers.

Faith Summarised***Hebrews 11:1-2*****Hebrews 11:1**

Faith is not something ephemeral; it is not a figment of the imagination, or a flight of fancy on the part of some benighted souls. The faith of the Bible is not founded on theories, hypotheses or the philosophies of men. Rather, biblical faith is founded on solid and irrefutable facts. These facts include the assured knowledge of the will of God, the assured knowledge of the purposes of God, and the assured knowledge of the promises of God. This knowledge is not attained by human reasoning (e.g., by deduction, by induction or by empirical knowledge) but by and through *God's revelation* of these divine and eternal verities in his own inerrant and infallible Word, the Bible.

Our faith is in the living and eternal Word of God and in everything that that Word teaches concerning his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ—the one and only Redeemer of sinful men and women. Thus, our faith is not a theoretical or hypothetical faith, nor is it a philosophy of men. Rather, it is a rock solid assurance that everything that God's Word asserts to be true is true and everything that God's Word states as a fact is in reality a fact (not merely a belief). (2 Tim. 3:16)

This is why the writer says in this verse that *'faith is the assurance of things hoped for...'* It is the absolute certainty that what we have hoped for in Christ, will come to pass: not merely because we believe it, but because God has said it. Moreover, his solemn word that cannot fail or be broken is the basis of our belief. We believe it because of who God is: the Eternal One, the Ever Living One, the One who cannot fail but who must fulfil his Word and his promises. Therefore, we believe what God has said. (Num. 23:19; Jos. 23:14; Isa. 40:8; Heb. 6:17-18; 1 Pet. 1:23-25)

Thus, in his Word, God declares:

Isaiah 55:10-11 (ESV)

(10) "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, (11) so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

Our *'faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.'* Based on the testimony of the written Word of God, we are utterly convinced in our own hearts or minds that all things of which God has spoken will happen. They have been promised to us by the God who has spoken to

us in these last days by (or in) his Son. In him, we believe; and, by him, we are convinced of the truth. We are convicted of things not seen; not only concerning this life, but also—and most especially—concerning the life to come: that inheritance which is laid up for his people in glory.

Hebrews 11:2

By it (i.e., by faith) the people of old received their commendation or approval from God; some of whom the writer will name shortly. All of these believers walked or lived by faith—faith in God and in the promises of God. They lived by faith, utterly convinced that—in due time—the LORD would fulfil these promises.

Not one of these Old Testament believers lived to see the full realisation of God's promises insofar as they related to the coming of his Son (the promised Seed or Messiah (Gen. 3:15)). Nor did they experience the many blessings and benefits of the Gospel of God's Son. Nevertheless, they believed that these things would surely be fulfilled, for God had spoken. Thus, when they left this life, they left behind them an example of faith in God and faithfulness to God. Again, when they left this life they entered into the promised glorious inheritance of the Lord. Because of their faith, God commended them and blessed them with the blessings of heaven above. (Heb. 11:39-40)

These were men and women of faith. However, as we shall see shortly, their lives were distinguished not only by their signal example of faith, but also by the sufferings that they were called upon to endure for the sake of the LORD's name.

Hebrews 11:3

By faith—by believing what God has said concerning the creation of the universe—we understand, or have come to know, that the entire created universe of planets, stars and other heavenly bodies, and everything else throughout the entire creation was brought into existence by the express word (or will) of the LORD. Thus, the creation did not come into being of its own accord. It did not arise from a process of unplanned or spontaneous origins and subsequent evolution, but by the express command of God and according to the express will of God. He alone is the Creator of the universe. (Gen. 1:1; Isa. 40:28; 44:24; 45:12,18)

By the word or will of God, the creation was brought into existence; and, by that word, it is being sustained. God ordained that there should be a creation; he brought about the means of establishing that creation—namely, his own express word of command. In addition, he determined that nothing in that creation should be brought into existence except by and through his eternal Son—the Logos or Word of God. (John 1:1-3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:2-3)

Thus, the entire creation—seen and unseen—was not made out of things visible. It was not made out of physical things. It was not made out of pre-existing matter. Rather, God gave existence to everything in creation—living and non-living. God is the Creator of all. Only those who are of the Godhead are uncreated and eternal: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Faith Exemplified**Hebrews 11:4-40****Hebrews 11:4**

Here, we are told about Abel's faith. Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than did his brother Cain. We know that Cain brought of the very best of the first fruits of the ground as an offering to God, whereas Abel offered to God the very best of the animals from the flock. What was the difference? Why did the LORD accept one and not the other? Why was one a sacrifice of faith, and the other not? (Gen. 4:3-5; see also 1 John 3:12)

Both Abel and Cain would have heard from Adam and Eve what God required concerning offerings and sacrifices (cf. Gen. 3:21). The primary offering that a person needed to bring to God was a sin offering—a blood offering that would typify atonement for sin. (Heb. 9:22; 12:24)

Abel recognised this, because he had faith in God, in his Word, and in what God required. Thus, in faith, Abel offered to God a sacrifice that conformed to God's requirements as being a sacrifice for sin. This sacrifice God was pleased to look upon and to accept. Thus, God commended Abel as righteous: i.e., as one who in faith and obedience to his Word did the right thing.

Cain, however, had offered to God as a sacrifice the first fruits of the ground. There was, of course, a time and place for making such offerings to God, but this was not the occasion. What Cain should have done first, was to offer to God an acceptable sacrifice for his sin. This, however, he failed to do. Thus, God was not pleased with Cain or with his offering. God rejected Cain, together with his offering.

Cain had made his offering based on his own ideas of what was pleasing to God, and not from obedience to God's word or from the express instructions imparted to him by Adam. Thus, Cain's offering was not based on faith, but on works—works of merit or self-righteousness.

Concerning Abel, however, the Scripture says that—although he died—he still speaks. His actions still bear testimony to his absolute faith in God and in his Word, and to the fact that God commended him for his faith and obedience. Thus, even although this incident took place thousands of years ago, Abel is still remembered for his faith in God, and for his trust in and obedience to the Word of God.

Hebrews 11:5

Enoch walked with God because he believed utterly and completely in the promises of God. He lived a life of faith. At the end of his life, the Lord did not permit Enoch to pass through the veil of death. Indeed, the Lord took Enoch into his immediate presence while he was yet alive.

Enoch was taken up so that he should not see or experience death. And he was not found. Enoch had not died; but, suddenly, he had disappeared. The LORD had taken him and people could no longer find him. However, before he was taken from this world, he was commended as having pleased God, and as having been one who walked faithfully with God. (Gen. 5:22,24; cf. 2 Kings 2:11; 1 Cor. 15:51-52)

Hebrews 11:6

Without faith, it is impossible to honour or please God, or to be accepted by him. God does not accept into his presence, nor does he hear, anyone who attempts to approach him without true faith in his or her heart. (Rom. 8:8)

Those who would come to God—whoever would draw near to God—must believe that he exists. This means, of course, that they must believe that he is the one and only true and living God—Yahweh, the God of Israel; now the God of all his redeemed people, whatever their ethnic origin or nationality. They must believe that there is no other God but he, and that Jesus Christ is his one and only Son. (John 5:22-23)

They must believe not only that God exists, but also that he is a rewarder of those who seek him diligently (cf. Gen. 15:1; Matt. 7:7; Luke 13:24). All who call upon his name with a true, sincere and contrite heart—through his own appointed Mediator—will be heard by him and will be answered by him, in accordance with his will. (Heb. 4:16; 10:35; 11:26)

Without this faith, however, it is impossible for anyone to draw near to God, to be accepted by him, or to be heard or answered by him.

Hebrews 11:7

Like Enoch, Noah was said to have walked with God. (Gen. 6:9) In Noah's day, God determined to destroy the world of mankind. At that time, the world had become notoriously wicked. All mankind had sinned wilfully and repeatedly against the Lord, and had refused to repent of their evil deeds. Thus, the world had become filled with corruption, violence and many other forms of wickedness.

Mankind had known the word of God, but they had failed to obey his word. Indeed, they had spurned the word of the Lord deliberately and persistently. They had experienced something of his grace, but they had despised and repudiated the grace of God. They had experienced the outward call of the Spirit of God warning them of coming judgment, but they had rebelled against the Spirit—though he continued long to strive with mankind. (Gen. 6:3) Therefore, God determined that he would put an end to all flesh; i.e., he would destroy the world of mankind and animals by a catastrophic deluge. In that deluge, all mankind and all land based creatures would perish.

God determined, however, that his faithful servant Noah, together with his family, was to be saved from the waters of judgment. Thus, the LORD commanded Noah to construct a multi-deck vessel or ark. This ark was to be large enough to house himself, his family, and two of every kind of animal that the LORD would bring to Noah to be saved by the ark.

Noah believed God's word concerning the impending judgment on the world, and he began constructing the great wooden vessel or ark that would deliver him and his family from the righteous judgment of God. (Gen. 6:1-22; 7:1-24)

At the time Noah heard from God of this coming judgment on the world, the flood was yet many years distant. However, the LORD was giving Noah and his family sufficient time to build the ark. In addition, he was giving sinful mankind more than sufficient time to repent of their wicked deeds and to seek God's mercy (cf. 1 Chron. 28:9; Isa. 55:6-7)

To this end, Noah proclaimed the message of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment, to the people over the entire period that the ark was under construction. No one, however, believed the message of this preacher of righteousness, or of their need of salvation from sin and judgment by

means of the ark. Indeed, many of the people mocked and despised Noah for apparently engaging in a foolish enterprise of building such a large vessel when there appeared to be no need for it, and no signs of impending judgment. Clearly, they could not discern the signs of the times; for, ultimately, God always brings righteous judgments upon a corrupt, violent and wicked generation.

Righteous and faithful Noah endured scorn and derision because he believed the word of the LORD. Ultimately, however, Noah's faith was justified, and the mockers and scorners met their due end beneath the overwhelming waters of the flood: a judgment that the ungodly world of the time thought would never happen. Therefore, because of their unbelief, they lost their lives under God's temporal judgment—only to face God's eternal judgment: a judgment that would condemn them to the never-ending torments of hell. (1 Pet. 3:20; cf. Matt. 24:38; 2 Pet. 2:5-9)

By demonstrating his practical living faith in the God of Israel, and by believing his word, Noah condemned the world of that day. He condemned the world because he believed God's Word, whereas the impenitent sinners did not. Deeply ensconced in the vile pleasures of their sins, these wicked men and women would not believe—i.e., they refused utterly and wilfully to believe—God's solemn Word, which warned them repeatedly and unmistakably of coming judgment on their iniquitous lifestyles.

Noah, however, did believe, and he became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. By the grace of God, Noah—together with his household—experienced the salvation of the LORD and deliverance from God's judgment on an impenitent and ungodly world.

Hebrews 11:8

It might be said that Abraham (then known as *Abram*) acted foolishly when he set out from Haran (and earlier from Ur in Chaldea/Mesopotamia) and from his father's house and everything that was near and dear to him to go to a land of which he had no knowledge. However, Abraham did not walk by sight: i.e, he did not believe only that which could be seen with the eyes or demonstrated in physical or material terms. Rather, Abraham walked or lived by faith in Him who is invisible. Consequently, this was not a blind faith; nor was it irrational. On the contrary, it was an absolutely assured faith in the true and living God, and in his Word. (Gen. 11:31; 12:1-4,7; 17:5)

Abraham was not acting on impulse. Rather, he was responding in obedience to the express command of God. Abraham had been told explicitly to leave his father's house and to go to a place that God would show him. When he received this command from God, however, Abraham possessed no prior knowledge of this land's location. Nevertheless, the patriarch of Israel believed that God would show him the way ahead, and that—in trusting and obeying God—the Lord would reveal to him where he was to go.

Abraham *obeyed* the word of the LORD because he *believed* the word of the LORD. He trusted God implicitly. God had chosen him and called him out of Haran, and Abraham was determined to walk in the way of the Lord his God. Thus, by faith, Abraham left his father's house (in Haran) and the land of his forefathers (Ur of Chaldea) and began his journey to the land of promise and ultimately of blessing.

Hebrews 11:9

By faith Abraham went to live in the land of promise; ultimately, the land of Canaan. This was to become the possession of God's chosen people, Israel. (Gen. 13:15-17; 15:7)

Yet, to Abraham and his descendants, Canaan was a foreign land: Not, however, because of foreigners in the land, because God had judged the Canaanites for their wickedness—including their vile practise of child sacrifice—and he would dispossess and expel them from the land. (Deut. 9:5) No, Abraham and his descendants saw Canaan as a foreign land because it was not their final destination. It was their temporary abode on earth. Their final destination, however, was the promised inheritance in heaven. (Gen. 23:4; Acts 7:4-5; Heb. 6:15)

Hebrews 11:10

This confirms the explanation given in verse 9. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had not set their hearts on their earthly inheritance but on their heavenly inheritance. They did not set their hearts on the things of this world. Rather, they were looking forward to that city above, whose designer and builder was God. (Heb. 11:13-18; 13:14; cf. 1 Pet. 1:4-5)

There, in heaven, they had set their hearts or minds. They looked forward to the eternal dwelling in that city of God that would never pass away: For this city had real and enduring foundations because it had been established by God the Almighty. (Heb. 12:22)

Hebrews 11:11

Sarah exemplified her faith in God by the manner in which she took God at his word. However, when God had first promised Abraham and Sarah a child in their old age, Sarah had laughed within herself at the very idea. Again, when God had not fulfilled his promise immediately, Sarah began to doubt the word of the LORD. Indeed, and almost in despair of having a child herself, Sarah encouraged her husband Abraham to father a child by means of her slave, Hagar. Subsequently, Hagar gave birth to Ishmael—but Ishmael was not the son that God had promised to Abraham and Sarah. God had said that Sarah herself would bear a son; and this solemn promise was yet to be fulfilled. (Gen. 16:1-4,15-16; 17:17-19)

Nevertheless, following the birth of Ishmael, another fourteen years were to elapse before Sarah conceived. By this time, Abraham was about 100 years old, and Sarah about 90 years. Yet, at this very advanced stage of their lives, the LORD appeared again to Abraham and Sarah, renewing his promise to them of a child—this time, within a year.

At this point, Sarah was completely overcome with amazement and disbelief, and laughed scornfully at the very suggestion of her conceiving a child at such an advanced age. She had disbelieved the word of the LORD spoken by his angel. She had thought that God was not the God of the impossible; that God could not override natural circumstances or events—completely forgetting that God was the God of creation, providence, nature and natural events. Little did Sarah realise that God really was the Almighty, and that to him nothing would be impossible. (Gen. 18:11-15)

Ultimately, however, Sarah did learn to trust the word of the LORD—even although the promised child had been long delayed. At the time announced by the LORD—and in complete fulfilment of his word—a son was born to Abraham and Sarah, whom they named Isaac (meaning, *'laughter'*). Isaac was the child whom God had promised.

It was under these intensely difficult circumstances, and because of her later confidence in God, that God commended Sarah for her faith. After she had overcome her initial amazement and doubt, Sarah had considered him faithful who had made the promise to her.

Hebrews 11:12

Abraham and Sarah were well advanced in years. In respect of procreation, Abraham's body was considered as good as dead, and Sarah had far exceeded her natural childbearing years. (Rom. 4:19) Yet, from Abraham and his wife proceeded a great and numerous nation. So great were the offspring of Abraham and Sarah that they could not be counted. Therefore, they were likened to the stars of heaven or the grains of sand on the seashore for multitude.

God had brought Isaac into the world through Abraham and Sarah, because through this couple's offspring the LORD would fulfil his promise of making of Abraham a great nation. From eternity, the LORD had determined that this chosen nation or people would fulfil his purposes for the world. By means of Abraham's descendants, God would fulfil the promise that he made in Genesis to bring forth a Seed to bruise the serpent's head. (Gen. 3:15; cf. 49:10; Num. 24:17) Thus, through the Seed or Messiah of God, all nations of the earth would be blessed—in accordance with God's express promise to Abraham. (Gen. 12:2-3; 15:2-5; 22:17)

Hebrews 11:13

These all died in faith. Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob and all the descendants of the promised line, died in faith. They had received and believed the promise that God had made to Abraham concerning the nation and concerning the promised Seed who would be born of one of their descendants. Nevertheless, throughout the succeeding centuries, all of these believers died in faith: i.e., they died believing the promise, but none of them actually witnessed the fulfilment of that promise. (Heb. 11:39) Only those living immediately before and during the birth of the Lord Jesus saw God's word concerning the Seed or Messiah of Israel being fulfilled according to the centuries-old promise made to Abraham; and earlier to our first parents, Adam and Eve. (Gen. 3:15)

Yet, the Scripture says that these ancient believers greeted the promise from afar. They believed implicitly in the word of the LORD, and they saw his word as being fulfilled at a great distance in time. (John 8:56) Furthermore, these believers did not consider that the promises and blessings of God pertained to this life or to this age only. Rather, they considered that their life here on earth was but for a temporary period. Therefore, they considered that they were pilgrims and strangers in this world; they considered themselves as exiles in this world, inhabiting a land that God had given them, but which was their temporary place of abode only (cf. Gen. 23:4; 47:9; 1 Pet. 2:11). They considered that this land was not their own, so they lived as it were 'in tents' (as they did literally for many years) until the day that their 'tent' or temporary abode on earth would pass away. Then, they believed with full assurance of faith that they would proceed to the promised inheritance above, and to their permanent and eternal city—the city of God in heaven. (Heb. 11:10,16; cf. 12:22; see also 2 Cor. 5:1-7)

All of these believers among the Israelites died believing that the promises of God would be fulfilled—not only in this life, but also in the life to come. Thus, they walked by faith and in faith they died. They were convinced that God would continue to fulfil his promises in the lives of their descendants throughout their generations, and until the word of the LORD had been fulfilled to the uttermost.

Hebrews 11:14

Those who live and speak of this earth as though it were not their permanent home, make it plain that they are seeking a better land; and those who declare that their home is in heaven, make it plain that they are pilgrims and strangers on this earth. (Heb. 13:14; cf. Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 4:18; Phil. 1:23)

Nevertheless, and although looking forward to their heavenly home, they still continue to live on this earth to honour and please their heavenly father and to be a blessing to men and women with whom they come in contact. They have been called to believe on Christ and to serve him faithfully for as long as God gives them time on this earth. (Matt. 24:45-47) Therefore, they are to prove faithful to the one who called them, serving Christ in that capacity for which he equips them or to which he appoints them.

Hebrews 11:15-16

If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return.

Concerning these believers of the Old Testament, the writer of Hebrews makes it plain that if they had been thinking—or if their heart had been set—on that land from which they had come (Haran, or Ur in Chaldea), they would have had many opportunities to return there. (Gen. 11:31; see also Gen. 12:10; 24:6-8)

However, their hearts were set not on the things of this world, or of those things that the world holds dear, but on the things of the world or age to come, where their treasures had been laid up in the presence of God. Thus, they counted it a joy and a privilege to press on in their upward journey, knowing that one day it would lead them into the presence of their loving, caring Father in heaven.

Clearly, then, they desired a better country. Their aim was to please their Lord and Master while they remained on this earth, believing firmly that—one day—he would receive them into his eternal presence. Therefore, he had prepared for them a permanent dwelling: a city in heaven unlike the temporary dwelling of their earthly tents or tabernacles. (Heb. 12:22; 13:14; see also Matt. 25:34; Phil. 3:20)

It should be evident from these examples of faith that the writer is referring only to those in Israel whose lives honoured and pleased the LORD. Many in Israel remained persistently unfaithful to God and sought only the advantages of this life, with no thought of blessing or reward in heaven. Such people as these were never likely to inherit God's promises or God's blessings, either in this life or in the life to come. However, all those who—like Abraham—believed and obeyed God implicitly (although not without their individual faults and failings) would and did benefit from God's blessings, both on earth and in heaven.

Hebrews 11:17-19

The writer comes now to verse 17 of chapter eleven. In this verse, we have another example of Abraham's unwavering faith. On this occasion, God had commanded the patriarch to take his son—his only son, Isaac, whom he loved—and to offer him up as a sacrifice. This indeed proved to be a most severe test of Abraham's faith and trust in God's promise, because God had said to Abraham that through his son, Isaac, he would be blessed. Again, it was through Isaac that the promised Seed was to come into the world. How then could this take place if God were to take from Abraham the son whom he had promised? (Gen. 17:19; 21:12; 22:1-12)

Yet, Abraham continued to believe the LORD. The patriarch could not understand why God required him to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice. However, he believed that, somehow, God would restore his son to him—even from death (v.19).

Such was the faith of Abraham when he took his journey to the mountains of Moriah, when he ascended the mount, and when he bound his son hand and foot and laid him upon the altar. Even as he lifted the knife to slay his son in obedience to the command of the LORD, Abraham continued to trust in God. Only the intervention of the angel of God stayed Abraham's hand. He would indeed have slain his beloved son; such was his implicit trust and confidence in the Lord his God.

God, however, had been testing the reality and extent of Abraham's faith. The LORD and Giver of life did not intend to allow Abraham to take the life of his son. Indeed, the Lord had provided a substitute for Isaac: a ram, caught by its horns in a thicket, was to be offered up instead of Isaac. Even so, this is a clear example of the extent and degree of Abraham's faith in God. Although, emotionally and psychologically, Abraham must have suffered intense anguish and grief over the potential loss of his beloved son—especially at his own hands, and in accordance with God's express command—Abraham nevertheless persevered in his faith. Such outstanding faith and obedience showed the reality of Abraham's confidence in God and the extent of his walk with God. (Rom. 4:17-21; cf. Jas. 2:21) Thus, too, in effect, Abraham did receive his son back from the dead. Although not actually sacrificed, Isaac was as good as slain—and would have been slain had not the angel of the Lord intervened.

Hebrews 11:20

Verse 20 says that Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau: Isaac being the promised son to Abraham and Sarah, and the one through whom the promised Messiah would come. When close to death, Isaac summoned his eldest son Esau to receive his blessing. We know, of course, that—at the instigation of his mother—Jacob came in place of Esau, pretending to be Esau. In his disguise, Jacob was not recognised by his father. Isaac's eyesight was failing, and presumably his hearing as well, because—initially—he was unable to distinguish Jacob's voice clearly. Thus, Jacob deceived Isaac and benefited from the blessing intended for his older brother Esau—the firstborn. (Gen. 27:1-40)

However, in spite of his deception, it was upon Jacob that the LORD's choice had fallen for the fulfilment of his purposes—even although Jacob was not the firstborn son. On this occasion, Isaac's intentions were overruled by the providence of God. God's purposes and promises for his people and for the coming Messiah would be fulfilled through the descendants of Jacob (or Israel), not those of Esau.

Nevertheless, Isaac demonstrated his faith in God when he blessed his two sons with their respective blessings. These were solemn blessings, founded on the word and promises of God. Therefore, when Isaac blessed his sons, he was expressing his complete confidence in God and in his word and his wholehearted belief that the LORD would fulfil through his sons and their children every promise that he had made.

Although Esau was the firstborn son and became the father of many nations, it was not through any of those nations that the Christ was to come. Rather, it was through one people and one nation alone: that of Israel. Jacob (otherwise known as Israel) was to be the father of that nation; therefore, God's supreme blessing had to fall on Jacob rather than Esau. This demonstrates God's sovereign choice. (Rom. 9:7-13)

This, however, is not to suggest that the deception on the part of Jacob or his mother was justified. Their deception of their aged father Isaac was sinful and inexcusable. The LORD did not need their intervention to ensure that the supreme blessing was bestowed on Jacob.

Hebrews 11:21

From the foregoing examples, we see quite plainly that these men were convinced of the faithfulness and promises of God. They lived their lives on this earth with complete confidence and trust in the Lord their God, and in the unfailing nature of his word.

Again, they believed that they were on this earth only for a short time. Ultimately, they would inherit the blessings that God had laid up for them in heaven. At the same time, they believed that—through their descendants—God would continue to bless the nation. They believed that—from their nation—God would bring forth the promised Seed or Messiah of Israel. They understood also, that through this Messiah, God would bless the entire world—as he had declared to Abraham.

Therefore, when he lay dying, Jacob blessed each of the sons of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh). Bowing in worship over the head of his staff, Jacob committed his people and himself to the Lord his God. With all his heart, Jacob believed that God would continue to fulfil his promises for his descendants throughout their generations. (Gen. 47:27-31 LXX; 48:8-22)

Hebrews 11:22

We must remember, of course, that after Abraham and his family had entered Canaan, a severe famine had come upon the entire land. Some years before this occurred Joseph had been sold as a slave to Egypt. Over the years, however, Joseph had risen to the position of second in command to the ruling Pharaoh. As such, he was responsible for the administration of food supplies throughout the land of Egypt. All this was unknown to Abraham and his family, who considered that Joseph had been lost forever and that they would never see him again. We know, however, that eventually Abraham and his family moved down into the land of Egypt to escape the worst effects of the famine in Canaan. There, in Egypt, they discovered that Joseph was alive and well; and, with great joy, they were reconciled to him. Abraham and his family settled in Egypt, and, while he lived, Joseph took care of them during their sojourn in the land. (Gen. 41:54; 42:1 - 46:7)

However, in course of time, another Pharaoh arose in Egypt who refused to recognise the people of Israel or the God of Israel. This Pharaoh subjected the people of Israel to cruel bondage and slavery, and reduced the children of Abraham to complete misery. Thus, the Hebrew people had to suffer intense cruelty for the sake of their faith in the true and living God. (Acts 7:9ff)

Toward the end of his life, Joseph was convinced that God would deliver his people from Egypt and would bring them back to the Promised Land. Therefore, Joseph gave instructions concerning his bones. He had no wish for his remains to be left in Egypt. Rather, he desired that the people of God carry his bones with them when they left Egypt and bring them into the land that God had given them, where he could then be laid to rest in peace (ultimately, in Shechem). (Gen. 50:24-26; Ex. 13:19; Jos. 24:32; Acts 7:16)

Hebrews 11:23

The new Pharaoh of Egypt had passed a law whereby any male child born of the Hebrews was to be slain by the midwives. When the Hebrew midwives refused to obey this command, the Pharaoh ordered his people to drown in the River Nile any male babies that they found among the Hebrews. (Ex. 1:16-22) Thus, when Moses was born, his parents hid him from the Egyptian people for three months.

The passage says that the parents saw that the child was 'beautiful'. From this, we deduce that Moses' parents were convinced that their child was not only fine looking in himself, but also that he was special or unique in the eyes of the LORD. (Acts 7:20-22) Indeed, God had ordained that Moses was to become the deliverer of his people from Egypt. Thus, God had determined that Moses would be preserved from the hand of the Pharaoh, and from his wicked plans to annihilate all the male Hebrew infants. Again, God had ordained that—in course of time—Moses would be the man to whom he would give his Law to transmit to the people.

Thus, by the grace and providence of God, Moses was preserved at his birth from the hands of the Pharaoh. Again, by the grace and providence of God, Moses was discovered and rescued by a daughter of the Pharaoh when the infant's parents had laid him in a basket in the river. Thereafter, young Moses was brought up by the Pharaoh's daughter and in the Pharaoh's royal household. As he grew, Moses learned everything relevant to the household and court of the Pharaoh. This experience stood Moses in good stead when, ultimately, the Lord God of Israel was to call him to be the deliverer, leader, teacher, administrator and guide of the enslaved Hebrew people.

The Scripture tells us that Moses' parents were not afraid of the king's edict; i.e., because of their faith in God, they were unafraid of the Pharaoh's royal decree commanding the destruction by drowning of every male Hebrew child. On the contrary, Moses' parents feared God. In reverence and awe, they shielded the baby Moses and continued to care for their child for three months. Then, as it became impossible to conceal him any longer, they placed the child in a basket at the edge of the River Nile, while his sister continued to watch over him from a distance. Then, according to the providence of God, the infant Moses was discovered by the Pharaoh's daughter and adopted by her as her own son. Knowing that she had rescued a Hebrew child, the Pharaoh's daughter sought a nurse for him from among his people. By the providence of God, this nurse was to be Moses' natural mother. (Ex. 2:1-10)

Hebrews 11:24

In this verse, we are told that—when he had grown up—Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Moses knew that the Pharaoh's daughter was not his true mother; nor did he belong to the Egyptian race or nation. Moses knew that he belonged to the enslaved people of God. From those people he had come—and to that people he must return.

This, of course, implied no dishonour or disrespect on the Pharaoh's daughter who had brought Moses up as her own child. God would honour this woman for taking care of Moses and for providing for him throughout his childhood and youth. Nevertheless, the Pharaoh's daughter had rescued and adopted Moses only in accordance with the providence, plans, and purposes of God to spare the child for future service. Now, the time had come for the LORD to prepare Moses more fully and directly for this immense task. Therefore, the Lord God began to make Moses aware of his origins and of his identity with the people of God. Thus, too, God began to prepare his servant Moses to leave the privileges, rank, and honours of the Egyptian royal court to suffer with the people of Israel. (Ex. 2:10; Acts 7:21-24)

Hebrews 11:25

Moses had been brought up in all the comforts, privileges, and enjoyments of the household of Pharaoh. He had no need to concern himself unduly with any matters concerning his life or his health. Everything that wealth could afford was provided, and every need was attended to, in that prestigious royal household.

Away from the shelter and seclusion of the magnificent royal palaces, however—in the fields and in the countryside of Egypt—cruel taskmasters were subjecting Hebrew slaves to unrelenting and arduous labour.

As he grew from childhood to young manhood, Moses must have become more fully aware of the harsh sufferings of the Hebrew people. As we have seen, Moses enjoyed great privileges and comforts in the Egyptian court. Yet, rather than continue with his present enjoyments in the Pharaoh's household, Moses chose to be identified with, and maltreated with, the people of God.

All of the earthly pleasures that Moses had enjoyed up to this point were transient. Ultimately, they would pass away. Furthermore, none of these earthly advantageous or pleasures could ever have satisfied the deepest needs of the soul. Thus, instead of seeking earthly advantage or gain, Moses chose to endure a life of disadvantage and suffering along with his own people—the people of God. (Cf. 2 Cor. 4:18)

Hebrews 11:26

This verse tells us that Moses considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt. The word translated '*reproach*' is a word that means 'reviling', 'disgrace' or 'insult'. Here, we are told quite plainly that—for Moses (and other OT believers)—suffering shame and disgrace for the name and for the sake of the LORD their God, to all intents and purposes, was suffering for the name and for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Phil. 1:29-30; cf. 1 Tim. 4:10; 1 Pet. 3:14,17; see also Heb. 12:2)

These Hebrew slaves were suffering for their faith. Ultimately, their faith would be in their Messiah—the promised Anointed One of God, and the true deliverer of Israel.

It is virtually certain that, during his early years in the Pharaoh's royal household, Moses would have been taught by his nurse (his natural Hebrew mother) of the true God—the God of Israel. Thus, because of his faith in the word and promises of the true and living God of Israel, Moses considered reproach for the sake of Christ as wealth greater by far than all the vast treasures of Egypt.

One day, all these vast earthly treasures would pass away. One day, all people would be separated from their earthly wealth and treasures. However, the people of God would inherit a treasure and wealth greater by far than any of this earth; for their treasure and inheritance was their God, and he had laid up for them in heaven a treasure, an inheritance, beyond all comparison. (Col. 3:24; Heb. 9:15; 1 Pet. 1:4)

Thus, Moses was fully prepared to set aside all the treasures of the Egypt; for he was looking beyond the treasures of this world to the inheritance and reward that God had promised to all his faithful people. Throughout the ages of eternity, this inheritance and reward would never fade, diminish or pass away.

Hebrews 11:27

By faith, Moses left Egypt. However, he did not leave Egypt of his own volition or of his own accord. He believed that God had set him apart for his service and for his people. However, to be called to God's service, and to be associated with God's people, Moses needed to dissociate himself from the Pharaohs' court and identify himself with the enslaved people of God.

Although Moses did not consider himself capable for such a task, God had ordained that Moses would be the one who would lead the Hebrew people out of the land of Egypt and bring them to the borders of the Promised Land. (Ex. 3:15; 4:1,10-12)

Thus, by faith, Moses identified himself with God's people. By faith, Moses left Egypt. He was not disheartened or discouraged by the thought of the Pharaoh's anger against him. Rather, Moses was encouraged, strengthened, and emboldened by seeing—with the eye of faith—him who is invisible. (Rom. 1:20; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16; cf. Heb. 11:1)

Moses believed completely in the sovereign Lord God of all creation. He believed that the God of the Hebrew people would overrule and prevent the Pharaoh from harming his people any further. (Ex. 14:10-13)

Hebrews 11:28

Again, as we see in this verse, it was by faith that Moses sprinkled the blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn might not touch the firstborn of the Hebrews. God had sent various plagues already on the land of Egypt and upon the Pharaoh's household. The Pharaoh, however, had failed to respond to any of God's warning judgments. Indeed, in his stubbornness, the ruler of Egypt had hardened his heart against God, and had increased the demands on God's enslaved people.

Moses had witnessed all of these judgments on the people and land of Egypt. Thus, he was utterly convinced that God would indeed slay the firstborn in every household of the land from the firstborn of the Pharaoh on the throne to the firstborn of the slaves in the fields. Only those who believed the LORD, and who sprinkled the blood on the doorposts and lintels of their homes would be spared the judgment of the destroying angel: For, when he saw the blood, he would *pass over* them.

Thus, in faith, Moses instructed the Hebrews to take the blood of the Passover lamb and to sprinkle it on the doorposts and lintels of their homes. Moses believed completely that, when the angel saw the blood, he would pass over them. Thus, the firstborn of every Hebrew household was spared. (Ex. 12:3-14, 21-30)

Hebrews 11:29

Moses had led the people of Israel out of Egypt, and was heading toward the wilderness. Barring their way, however, were the waters of the Red Sea. As if this were not bad enough, the Egyptian army was now in hot pursuit of the Israelites. Soon, the Egyptians would overtake the Israelite people, unless Moses and the people could find a way of escape across the Red Sea. By faith, however, Moses believed that God would provide a way of escape for them.

Then, the Lord commanded Moses to raise his staff over the waters of the Red Sea. When, in faith and obedience, Moses responded to God's command, a strong wind separated the upstream and downstream flows, creating an extensive breach across the river. Thus, the people of Israel were able to cross between the waters on the wide seabed. The Lord God kept the waters apart until the entire nation of Israel had passed over to the safety of the Sinai Peninsula.

Soon, however, the pursuing Egyptian army arrived at the banks of the Red Sea. Seeing that the waters had parted, the Egyptian soldiers thought that they could still overtake the Hebrew people and bring them back as slaves to Egypt. However, these Egyptians believed neither in the God of Israel, nor in the almighty power of Israel's God. As the Egyptian horsemen and charioteers made their way across on the seabed, their horses' hooves and chariot wheels became embroiled in the muddy soil. At this point, God commanded the waters to return to their normal flow. Thus, Israel's pursuers found themselves engulfed beneath the waters of the Red Sea. Therefore, God judged Egypt, and delivered his people Israel from the hands of their enemies. (Ex. 14:5-31)

Hebrews 11:30

The people marched around the city of Jericho, to show their faith in the word of God and their belief in the power of God to overcome their enemies. The LORD had told the people that—when they had completed seven circuits of the city—the strongly fortified perimeter walls protecting Jericho would collapse. Then, the people of Israel would be able to capture the city.

Israel believed that this would actually happen. Thus, in faith—and according to the word of the Lord—they marched around the city of Jericho these seven times. Then, and in accordance with the word of the Lord, on the seventh circuit of the city, the supposedly impregnable walls of Jericho collapsed in ruins. (Jos. 6:1-20)

Hebrews 11:31

Here is another example of true faith in God. Two spies had been sent by Israel to assess the strength of the people of Canaan. When they entered the city, they had been taken and sheltered by Rahab, a prostitute of that city. Rahab took the spies and hid them from the citizens, because she believed that God had given Israel that land.

Thus, Rahab exemplified true faith in the God of Israel, although she herself was a Canaanite. Therefore, on account of her faith in God—the true and living God—Rahab did not perish with the other Canaanites when God destroyed that land because of their unbridled wickedness.

It was because of their evil practises, such as child sacrifice and the Canaanite's resolute determination to continue unabated in these and other iniquitous crimes, that God determined to take the land from them and to give that land to the Israelites. Rahab, however, was to be spared (and, no doubt, certain other God-fearing Canaanites, such as Abimilech, king of Gerar (Gen. 10:19; 20:1-2)). By her faith, Rahab earned God's commendation. Moreover, by God's grace, she was delivered from God's righteous judgment on all the ungodly members of the Canaanite nation.

Rahab had demonstrated the reality and extent of her faith in the true and living God by the fact that she had welcomed the spies, taken them, and hidden them from the wrath of the citizens. Rahab knew that these two spies had come from the Hebrew people, and that they had come to spy out the land. She knew too that these same Israelite people were about to dispossess the land of Canaan. Thus, Rahab committed her faith and her trust to the God of Israel, and proved the validity of her faith by what she did to protect and deliver the LORD's servants. (Jos. 6:17,22-25; Jas. 2:25)

Hebrews 11:32-34

These were just a few examples of the many people in Israel who possessed true faith in God. These faithful believers were to be found not just among the patriarchs or ancient people of Israel, but also among those who lived in later generations of Israel's history; people like Samson (Judg. 13:1 – 16:21), Jephthah (Judg. 11:1 – 12:7), David (1 Sam. 16:1,13), Daniel, and other prophets—and continuing right up to New Testament times.

All of these people exemplified true faith in God; and through faith, they conquered kingdoms (2 Sam. 8:1-14)—not by force of arms alone—but by the strength of the Lord their God. (Ps. 44:2-6) Through faith, they administered justice under the Lord their God. Through faith, they stopped the mouths of lions (as did Daniel—Dan. 6:20-23), believing that God would preserve them. Through faith, they quenched the fires of affliction, and they escaped the edge of the sword—all through their trust in the living God.

God honoured their faith, delivered his servants, and used them to honour and glorify his holy name.

Hebrews 11:35

Even in the Old Testament, women received their dead back to life. (1 Kings 17:17,22-24; 2 Kings 4:27-37)

Many of these OT believers had to endure intense sufferings and severe persecution for their faith. Some of them were cruelly tortured. Rather than deny their faith in God, they refused to submit under torture and to accept release. (Cf. 2 Macc. 7:1) They refused to yield to their tormentors because they knew that—should they forfeit their lives—they would be raised again to a better life. (Job. 19:25-27; Dan. 12:2; cf. Heb. 10:34)

Here, it is evident that these Old Testament believers held confidently to their faith in a blessed life after death. This assurance of life eternal in the presence of God is not peculiar to New Testament believers. God's people of all generations have always believed in the resurrection to life; albeit, the Old Testament believers lacked the fuller understanding of that eternal blessedness which God has revealed to his people in these latter days.

Hebrews 11:36

Here it says that others suffered mocking and flogging, chains, and imprisonment. However, they were not called upon to endure these trials and afflictions because they had committed offences deserving punishment, nor had they committed any other kind of wrongdoing. Rather, and as with the Lord Jesus himself, they had been accused falsely, and condemned and sentenced unjustly. They had been whipped, shackled and imprisoned for their faith in the true and living God of Israel. (2 Kings 2:23; 2 Chron. 30:10; 36:16; Jer. 20:2,7; 37:15)

Hebrews 11:37

In this verse, we learn that some of God's people were stoned—meaning that they were stoned to death. Again, however, this was not because of a lawful sentence of execution that had been passed upon them justly, but rather unjustly, and because of their faith in the living God. Others had their bodies dismembered by being sawn in two while still alive—as may have happened to Isaiah, according to Jewish tradition (*Yevamoth* fol. 49,2). Others again were slain by the sword.

Often, these sorely persecuted and afflicted believers went about clothed only in skins of sheep and goats. This, perhaps, was especially true of the prophets of God. (2 Kings 1:8; cf. Matt. 3:4; Rev. 11:3)

These men were faithful to God, and they were faithful in instructing the people in the Word of God, calling upon the people to repent of their sinful ways and to return to the LORD with all their hearts.

However, the prophets themselves were often abused, insulted, and misunderstood by an ungodly and rebellious people. These faithful prophets of God were rejected and despised because they brought the truth from God. The people had no desire to hear or to obey the truth of God. (2 Chron. 24:20-22; 1 Kings 18:4; 19:10)

Hebrews 11:38

Wandering about in the arid deserts and rugged mountains, and seeking a hiding place and refuge in the caves of the earth, it is recorded here that these afflicted and persecuted servants of God were those of whom the world was not worthy. These prophets and other servants of the LORD were in this world. They cared for and loved this world, and because of their deep spiritual concern for this world, they were bringing God's Word of Truth to the world.

The world, however, refused to listen to them. The people of the world had no wish to hear the words of God. Therefore, they despised and rejected God's Word and God's messengers, the prophets. Consequently, these prophets found themselves compelled to wander about in the deserts and mountains. These remote places were their only refuge on earth from the rejection and hostility of the people. However, the very people who despised, rejected and even killed God's messengers were the people of Israel—the nation that claimed to be the chosen people of God. (1 Kings 17:3; 18:4,13; 19:9; Matt. 23:37; cf. 1 Thess. 2:15)

Together with a number of other faithful believers and servants of the LORD, the prophets remained true to God and to the people whom they loved. They knew that—whatever might befall them in this life—they had an abiding and an unending refuge in God in heaven. To him, they belonged; and to him they must continue to remain faithful. Nevertheless, these dedicated servants of God had to endure the anger and rage of a people who had no desire to hear or to respond to the voice of God, or to obey his commands.

How these faithful believers suffered! How they endured! How they persevered—because of their faith in the true and living God!

Hebrews 11:39

Unlike the main body of the Israelite nation, this faithful remnant of Old Testament believers remained steadfastly faithful and obedient to God. They trusted him implicitly. They showed outstanding confidence in his Word, and they received God's commendation for their faith. Yet—throughout the centuries—none of these believers ever received what had been promised to them through Abraham and the other patriarchs. (Heb. 11:2)

They did indeed receive the blessings of God. They did indeed receive the promises of God concerning the preservation of a remnant within the nation. In addition, they did indeed receive many promises that were of an earthly and temporal nature, such as blessings on their families and on their fields. However, the vast majority of these dear saints of God did not live to see the fulfillment of the promise concerning the Seed of the woman and the coming of the Messiah. (Luke 10:24)

Again, most of them did not live to experience the full blessings of the Gospel. They themselves had been justified by God's grace; they themselves were the children of God; but there were many blessings which they personally did not experience—blessings that were bestowed upon God's children only with the outpouring and fullness of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Nevertheless, when these Old Testament saints died, they passed into the Lord's presence. There—in the presence of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—they received their eternal inheritance. (Cf. Matt. 8:11; Luke 16:22; 1 Pet. 1:10-12)

Hebrews 11:40

The time for the fulfilment of these promises relating to the Messiah and the Gospel had not yet arrived. The fullness of the blessedness that God had intended for Israel through their Messiah and through the Gospel would not be fulfilled until Christ came and the Gospel was proclaimed to all nations. Then, when the Gentiles were gathered into the church of God, both the true believers in Israel and the true Gentile believers would be gathered together into one flock: One church of God—Jewish and Gentile believers together; recipients together of the promised blessings and inheritance of God. (John 10:16; Eph. 2:14-19; Gal. 3:21-29)

Then, they would be made perfect; perfect in the sense that they would experience the fullness of all the blessings that God had promised to Israel, beginning from the very first promise of the Gospel contained in Genesis and speaking of the Seed of the woman that would bruise the serpent's head. Then, Christ—the promised Seed—would be victorious. By his death, resurrection and exaltation, the Lord Jesus would triumph forever over the evil one, and over all his evil works. (Col. 2:15)

Because of Christ's work on the cross, his subsequent resurrection and exaltation to glory, and the proclamation of his Gospel around the world, all who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved. (Rom. 3:26; 10:12-13; Heb. 5:9) Then, all these believers—Jew and Gentile together—experience the manifold blessings that God had promised, through his Son. Moreover, when received into glory, all believers in Christ—of whatever race, nationality or colour—rejoice together in the presence of the Lord their God.

HEBREWS CHAPTER 12

In the previous chapter, the writer listed some of the many OT saints who had demonstrated their complete confidence and utter faith in the LORD. They did this by the way they lived, by their willingness to take God at his word and to believe in him wholeheartedly. None of these believers was perfect or faultless; but in spite of their many shortcomings, they held steadfastly to their faith in God. They believed uncompromisingly in the promises that God had made to them concerning the nation of Israel, concerning his promised blessings on that nation, and most especially concerning the promised Seed. They believed also the promises that God had made to them concerning the life to come, their promised eternal inheritance in glory, and in the presence of Abraham.

The Heavenly Spectators***Hebrews 12:1-3*****Hebrews 12:1**

These saints enumerated by the writer of Hebrews in chapter 11 constituted the cloud of witnesses, who were now surrounding these Hebrew Christians. This vast crowd of 'onlookers' (so to speak), might be thought of as observing or looking carefully at the Hebrew believers' faith and perseverance. However, the heavenly witnesses were not scrutinising or criticising any aspects of the Hebrew Christians' faith. Rather, they were considered as a vast audience of believers who had finished the race, and now—from their home in glory—were encouraging the Hebrews to continue steadfastly in their faith.

Again, concerning this same vast company of heavenly witnesses, the Hebrew Christians had seen, heard, and understood something of their lives and examples from the Old Testament Scriptures. Furthermore, they knew that even at this day, these OT believers were alive and rejoicing in the presence of the Lord their God.

Like every other believer, these Hebrew Christians were engaged in a race: a race that they would have to run, to persevere in, and to endure: fighting against every obstacle, hardship and difficulty in order to reach the end of their course. Witnessing this race, was this great cloud of heavenly believers who had lived, persevered, and endured in previous centuries.

Therefore, in verse 1, the writer says that the Hebrew Christians were to lay aside every weight, every hindrance, everything that might distract them from the Christian pathway; everything that might deter them from pursuing the Christian road unhindered; everything that might become a hindrance to making progress in the things of Christ. These Hebrew believers were to lay aside every weight or burden; everything that held them back from making progress in the way that God intended. Again, they were to lay aside every sin or sins that were hindering their advancement in the Christian pathway or the Christian race. Therefore, these believers were to run with resolute determination, perseverance or endurance the race that was set before them. (Matt. 10:38; Luke 9:59-62; 18:22-25; Rom. 13:11-14; 1 Cor. 9:24-27; Gal. 5:7; Phil. 2:16; 3:10-14; 2 Tim. 4:7; Heb. 10:36)

These instructions were especially relevant to the Hebrew believers because of their propensity to doubt, hesitate, or question whether they should continue in the Christian pathway, or whether indeed, they should turn back again to the Jewish faith. The writer of Hebrews is encouraging them to persevere in the way of the Lord Jesus in running the race: for, now, there could be no turning back

to their former religion or to their former mode of worship. With the coming of Christ, this form of worship had been superseded, and its rituals, ceremonies and ordinances abrogated. (Heb. 3:12)

Hebrews 12:2

As the believers ran this race, they were to look constantly onward and upward toward the prize of their high calling. By fixing their hearts or minds ahead and above—on the Lord Jesus Christ himself—they would not be tempted to look around them or be distracted by the many hindrances of the way. (John 6:40; Phil. 3:14,20; Col. 3:1-4; 2 Tim. 4:8)

The writer reminds these believers that the Lord Jesus is the Founder of their faith. He was the Author or initiator of their faith. By his Holy Spirit, these Hebrew Christians had been brought under conviction of sin and led to repentance and faith in the Son of God. (Acts 5:31; Heb. 2:10)

Furthermore, the Lord Jesus is the perfecter of their faith. He is the one who, by his Holy Spirit, strengthens these believers in their faith. He is the one who guards them in their faith and prevents them from falling away fatally or apostatising from the faith. Again, the Lord Jesus is the one who will bring their faith to completion at the end of this earthly race, and who will receive each of these dear believers unto himself and into the presence of his Father in heaven. (Heb. 10:14)

Yet, again, the glorified Lord Jesus also acts as their supreme example of perseverance and suffering. Instead of being disheartened and discouraged by the sorrows, griefs and sufferings of the way, or of the contempt and hostility shown by the world, the Lord Jesus despised the shame. For the joy set before him in his Father's presence, the sinless Son of God endured all forms of shame, suffering, hostility, pain, and sorrow—for he looked above to the reward. (Luke 24:26; Phil. 2:8-11; Heb. 2:7-9; cf. Acts 5:41; Heb. 11:26)

There, on that glorious heavenly throne, the Lord Jesus sits highly exalted over everything in all creation. There, he sits at his Father's own right hand—the place of absolute equality and sovereign authority—ruling over everything in heaven and on earth. (Ps. 110:1; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 1 Pet. 3:22)

Hebrews 12:3

Because of the intense persecutions connected with their faith, the Hebrew Christian had been tempted to doubt and despair, to grow weary and become fainthearted in their race in the Christian pathway. Because of this severe persecution, they had been tempted to turn back in the race, to turn away from the Christian faith and to return once more to the Jewish faith, where they believed they would not be subjected to such severe persecutions. However, the writer is pointing out that to turn back is to apostatise. This is the sin of wilful unbelief; one of the sins that they must confess, renounce and lay aside in order to persevere in the way to which God had called them. (Heb. 6:11-12; 10:23-39)

To this end, the writer takes the example of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. The Lord Jesus endured the outright and unmitigated hostility of sinners against himself. The holy spotless Lamb of God committed no sin and thought no sin; yet, sinners were openly and vilely hostile toward him. They treated him with contempt because of who he was, and because of the message that he brought from God, calling for people to repent of their sins and believe the Gospel.

If sinners demonstrated such hostility toward the Holy One of God, how much more will they demonstrate their hostility toward the people of God? (Matt. 10:25) Therefore, using the Lord Jesus as an example, the writer is saying to these Hebrew believers, 'look to Jesus', or 'consider Jesus'—that you

may not grow weary. (Heb. 3:1; cf. 1 Sam. 12:24) As he persevered for us, so we must persevere for him. As he endured for us, so we must endure for him. We must not grow weary or faint hearted, but must continue to run the race that is set before us in order to win the prize. (Mark 13:13; 2 Thess. 1:4-5; Jas. 5:10-11; 1 Cor. 9:24; Heb. 12:1-2)

Whom God Loves, He Disciplines

Hebrews 12:4-14

Hebrews 12:4

The Lord Jesus, of course, in his endurance or perseverance, and faithfulness to God, suffered to the utmost. The Lord was enduring everything, including the wrath of God on account of sinners. He had to suffer to the point of shedding his blood on the cross for our redemption.

Here, the writer is pointing out to these Hebrew believers that—although they had been suffering, although they had been enduring, although they had been sorely tempted—they had not yet been called upon to suffer to the extent of shedding their blood. They had not yet been called upon to lay down their lives for the sake of their faith. Yet, this was exactly what some of the faithful believers of the old covenant had been called upon to do for their faithfulness to the LORD. (Heb. 11:35-37)

Thus, even if some of these Hebrew believers had been called upon to lay down their lives for the sake of the Gospel, this would have been part of their calling to faith in the Son of God. But they ought to consider themselves blessed that they were suffering for the sake of Christ, and blessed that God had spared them as yet from such extreme sufferings. (Matt. 24:9; 1 Pet. 4:16-19; Rev. 12:11)

Hebrews 12:5

The suffering that these Hebrew Christians were being called upon to endure was not just for suffering's sake. Rather, their suffering was designed for a purpose. Their experience of suffering was intended to discipline them; i.e., to chastise them, to train them, to correct them, and to lead them in the way of holiness. God was not afflicting his people or allowing his people to be afflicted for no good reason. The Scripture is addressing them as sons: i.e., God's own children. Moreover, the Scripture says *"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him."* (cf. Prov. 3:11-12; see also Eph. 6:4)

So long as we are suffering for righteousness' sake, and not for some sin that we have committed, then we are being disciplined, trained, or corrected by the Lord, or we are being chastised by him. However, it is because the Lord loves us that we are being exposed to such suffering. Therefore, we must not grow weary when he reproves or admonishes us, or when he warns or corrects us. Rather, we should respond to his corrections in love, trust and obedience. (Job 5:17-18; Ps. 94:12; 118:18; 1 Cor. 11:32; 2 Cor. 4:8-9; 12:9-10; Jas. 1:12; Rev. 3:19)

Hebrews 12:6

The fact that we receive discipline, correction, or training is evidence that we belong to the Lord, and that the Lord loves us. It is evidence that he has received us as his own, for he chastises everyone whom he receives through Christ Jesus. (Deut. 8:5; Ps. 32:1-5; 89:30-34; Isa. 48:10; cf. 2 Sam. 7:14-14)

The Lord God, however, does not chastise outsiders (unbelievers) in the same way that he chastises and corrects his own children. Rather, the Lord punishes outsiders. He judges outsiders with afflictions and distresses of body and mind (or body and soul) because of their impenitent and sinful way of life. God does not chastise, correct, train or discipline the ungodly in the same way that he lovingly disciplines his own children. (Ps. 7:11)

Hebrews 12:7

It is for discipline, training, correction, admonition that God is dealing with his people as he is doing. These Hebrew Christians had many previous examples—and especially the examples of their forefathers—recorded in the Old Testament. God had disciplined all of these Old Testament saints; but he had disciplined them in love, for their greater good. Therefore, they endured, as seeing (believing and trusting) him who is invisible. (Heb. 11:27) God was treating them as his own sons. They were the Lord's: they were his people, his redeemed children. He was making them holy. Through suffering, he was sanctifying, strengthening, and perfecting them in their faith. (Acts 14:22)

What son is there whom the father does not discipline? Only one who is not loved: only one for whom the father does not care, one for whom the father shows no concern. He has no interest in whether his son progresses in the way of righteousness or unrighteousness, or in the way of godliness or ungodliness. He has no real love for his son. The fact that we are disciplined is the proof that God has an intense and real love for us. (Prov. 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15,17; cf. 1 Sam. 3:13)

Hebrews 12:8

The clear fact is that, if someone professes to be a believer, but that person never receives discipline, never receives correction—in which all other believers share—then this person is not a true-born (spiritually regenerated) child of God.

Thus, such individuals are reckoned as (spiritually) illegitimate, with no rightful place among God's true people. Regardless of their claims asserting faith in Christ, such individuals have no spiritual life within them. They may profess that they belong to God, they may profess that they have received Christ, but if they have never received the Lord's disciplining hand upon their lives then they are not the children of God.

Thus, the writer says to these Hebrew believers, the fact that they *do* receive discipline is evidence that they *are* the children of God, and that the Lord will bring them through every difficulty, every sorrow, every trial and every suffering. (Ps. 119:67,71,75)

Hebrews 12:9

Human parents who love their children discipline their children for their own good. They correct them, admonish them, and direct them in the ways of righteousness. Moreover, if earthly fathers and mothers should so discipline their children for their good, how much more should their Father in heaven? Should not he, who is a true Father, discipline those whom he loves? In addition, should not we, who are his children, subject ourselves to his loving discipline? (Cf. Mal. 1:6; Jas. 4:7,10; 1 Pet. 5:6)

God is our Father in heaven. He is the Father of our whole being—body and soul. He is the Father of all spirits: of all living things (Job 12:10)—and especially of his own redeemed children.

Hebrews 12:10

Human parents discipline their children for the first years of their lives, as seems good to them. Despite the parents' best endeavours, it is not always the right way; it is not always the best way, and it is not always the way that is most profitable for their children. Nevertheless, at the time, this way seemed best to the parents. And, for all their shortcomings and failings, their children respected them for it.

So, too, the Lord disciplines us for our good. However, the Lord does not discipline his children as *seems* best to him, but as he *knows* is best for us. He makes no mistakes. He makes no errors of judgment. He does not bring us by any way of pain, sorrow or grief but that he knows that this is the right way for us, and for the fulfilment of his purposes in our lives. (Heb. 12:5-6)

All this is that we might share his holiness: not the holiness intrinsic to God himself or to his Son, but the perfect—but finite—holiness that is appropriate for the redeemed people of God: i.e., sanctification resulting ultimately in glorification. (Eph. 5:26,27)

Hebrews 12:11

At the time, all discipline, all correction, all admonishment does seem painful. We would rather not be disciplined, corrected or admonished. Yet, such training in godliness is necessary, however much psychological or even physical pain, it causes us at the time. Later, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. By being disciplined, we are being trained in the way of righteousness; we are being brought up to walk in the ways of the Lord. When, by the Spirit's enabling grace and power, we learn to trust and obey God's Word implicitly and wholeheartedly, we will reap the blessed fruit of true spiritual peace and righteousness in our lives. (Isa. 32:17; Rom. 5:3-5; 14:17; Gal. 5:22)

There is, of course, no peace for the wicked—for those who practise unrighteousness. (Isa. 48:22; 57:21) But there is the peaceful and abundant fruit of righteousness to all those who know the Lord, and who walk in his ways; to all those who have been trained and disciplined by his loving hand, and who have learned to persevere, to endure, and to suffer for the sake of his name.

Hebrews 12:12

Some of these believers were beginning to lose heart, to doubt, and to consider whether it was worthwhile continuing in the Christian pathway, or whether indeed they ought to return to their old Jewish way of life. Therefore, the writer says to these Hebrew Christians, "Lift up your weak and drooping hands. Strengthen your weakened knees."

The words used here allude to limp or useless hands and paralysed lower limbs. By using such language, the writer is suggesting some degree of spiritual infirmity due to neglect of regular spiritual exercise. In saying, "*Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees*", he is exhorting these Hebrew believers to continue putting their faith into practice, and to persevere. He is challenging and encouraging them to keep on running the Christian race, to keep on enduring. (Job 4:3-4; Isa. 35:3-4; cf. Nah. 2:10; 1 Thess. 5:14; see also Heb. 12:3)

Once a runner has begun the race, and is intent on winning the prize, he cannot slow down; he cannot pause; he cannot stop or stand still, and—most of all—he cannot turn back. The prize awaiting the runner lies ahead—at the end of the course. There is no other way to achieve victory or to win the prize. Similarly, the completion of our salvation lies ahead, where also the prize of victory (or reward for faithfulness) and the inheritance await us. There is no other way to reach the crown of life.

There is no other way to experience glorification or glory but by running the Christian race, pressing ahead determinedly; and persevering in the faith to the end. (2 Cor. 9:24; Phil. 3:13-14; Heb. 12:1-2)

Thus, the writer emphasises to these believers the futility of turning back to the Jewish religion, and the fatal and irreversible error and sin involved in turning away from Christ, who is the only way of salvation and life.

Hebrews 12:13

The verse says make straight paths for your feet. Normally, an athletic racing track of the kind envisaged here was laid out over a level surface. This ensured that no irregularities in the ground existed with the potential to cause injury to any of the competitors, such as dislocated joints due to uneven, rutted, or haphazardly raised surfaces.

Thus, these believers were to ensure that the path they were following was not littered with unnecessary obstructions or hindrances in their lives that could cause spiritual injury. They were to make straight or level paths for their feet—running unfettered and unhindered in the Christian race, avoiding all obstacles and pitfalls of their own making, and recognising that there was no other way to go to reach the goal. (Prov. 4:26-27; cf. Luke 3:5; 1 Tim. 1:6; 5:15; 2 Tim. 4:4; Heb. 12:1)

The writer is telling these Hebrew believers to keep on exercising their minds, to keep on exercising their hearts, and to keep on moving forward in their thoughts—training and sustaining their hearts and minds habitually and diligently with the Word of God.

Each person running in the race must not slow down, must not stand still, and must not look back. Only then can the runner prevent any tendency toward spiritual weakness or atrophy: a condition that is likely to arise through persistent lack of use or lack of exercise. If it is not to waste away spiritually, the mind that God has given us must be used or exercised regularly, and it must be sustained consistently by the teaching, study and application of his Word to our lives. (Isa. 35:3)

Hebrews 12:14

Just as we strive in running the race, so also we must strive for peace with everyone. We should do all in our power to be at peace with everyone. This, of course, includes everyone within the church. However, it includes also those outside the church, so that our lives may give a good testimony to those outside. (Ps. 34:14; Prov. 16:7; Matt. 5:9; Mark 9:50; Rom. 12:18; 14:19; Eph. 4:1-3; 1 Pet. 3:11)

...and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord:

This is that holiness that begins with the Holy Spirit at regeneration and continues with the ongoing sanctifying power of the indwelling Holy Spirit in our lives. Without this work of regeneration and sanctification, leading ultimately to glorification, no one will ever see God. Unless they have been sanctified, no one will ever be accepted into God's presence. Unless they have been made holy by the Spirit of God, no one can enter—no one would be fit to enter—the most holy presence of God in heaven. (Rom. 6:22; 2 Cor. 6:17; 7:1; 1 Thess. 4:7; Heb. 12:10; 1 Pet. 1:15-16)

By the grace of God, by faith and trust in, and by obedience to the teachings of God's Word, we must continue to strive for that holiness in our hearts and lives without which we cannot see the Lord or enjoy in heaven his glorious and loving presence forever. (Matt. 5:8; Eph. 5:5; Rev. 21:24-27; 22:3-4)

God's Majestic Holiness

Hebrews 12:15-24

Hebrews 12:15

See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God. Take heed that there is no one among you Hebrew believers whose profession of faith is not genuine. Be careful that no one among you has failed to experience the grace of God in regeneration. Examine yourself to ensure that the Holy Spirit really is within you. (Rom. 8:9; 2 Cor. 13:5; Heb. 3:12; 4:1; 10:23-35; see also Gal. 5:4)

Again, see to it that no "*root of bitterness*" springs up and causes trouble: the reference is to a passage in the Old Testament, where it is written:

Deuteronomy 29:18-20 (ESV)

(18) Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the LORD our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, (19) one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying,

'I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.'

This will lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike. (20) The LORD will not be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the LORD and his jealousy will smoke against that man, and the curses written in this book will settle upon him, and the LORD will blot out his name from under heaven. (See also Deut. 32:32; Matt. 7:16-18)

There must be no root (i.e., no source or cause of offence) out of which bitterness can arise, and which can spring up to cause trouble among believers. Such trouble can arise from an individual's unfaithfulness to God, from setting the things of the world above the things of God (idolatry), or from admitting into, tolerating, or condoning erroneous or false teaching within the church. All these things tend to corrupt or defile the fellowship of believers. (Jos. 6:18; 22:17-20; Acts 15:24; 20:30; 1 Cor. 5:6; 15:33; Col. 3:5; 2 Pet. 2:1-2,18)

Again, disputes, wrangling or strife among the people of God may become the means by which many people become spiritually defiled or corrupted. (cf. 1 Cor. 3:3; Gal. 5:19-20; Phil. 2:3; 1 Tim. 6:4; Jas. 3:14-16)

We must avoid studiously everything that defiles us in body or soul, or which can cause defilement (desecration) of the Lord's name or place of worship. Similarly, we must avoid assiduously any words, actions or attitudes that might bring about the spiritual stumbling or downfall of any of the Lord's people—whether it is by a harsh, unkind, unforgiving or otherwise bitter spirit, or by any other means. (2 Tim. 2:16-17)

Hebrews 12:16-17

Here, the writer is making it plain to these Hebrew believers, as he is to believers everywhere, that there can be no place in the lives of Christians for sexual immorality of any kind. All forms of impurity, indecency, or immorality must be excluded from the life and practices of the believer. For the people

of the Lord are a holy people. They have been called to honour the Lord in their lives, and to honour legitimate sexual relations alone. However, in the eyes of the Lord, legitimate sexual relations can be engaged in only within the bond and covenant of marriage—marriage between one man and one woman.

Any sexual relations that are outside of the marriage bond and covenant must have no place in the life of God's redeemed and holy people. Therefore, all premarital, extramarital or adulterous relationships, and all casual sexual relationships outside of marriage are prohibited to the Christian. (Mark 7:21; Acts 15:20,29; 1 Cor. 5:1-6,9-11; 6:15-20; 10:8; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:3-5; 1 Thess. 4:3-7)

Similarly, all same-sex 'marriage' relationships or sexual partnerships between two males or two females are expressly forbidden by God's Word, and condemned as an abomination in his sight. (Gen. 13:13; 18:20-21; 19:1-28; Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:24-28; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10; 2 Pet. 2:6-8; Jude 1:7)

As we shall see shortly, only the marriage bed of a husband and his wife remains undefiled in the sight of the Lord. Sexual relations between a husband and his wife are the only kind that God has ordained. This, too, is the only kind of sexual union among mankind that God commends, honours and blesses. (Heb. 13:4)

The writer had said that no one was to be sexually immoral or unholy like Esau. Probably, this alludes to Esau's utter disregard for God's command regarding marriage. Not only had Esau taken many wives, but also he had taken them with a view to dishonouring and distressing his parents and fulfilling his irreligious and profane proclivities. (Gen. 26:34-35; 36:1-3) It was the same kind of irreligious and ungodly attitude that caused Esau to despise his birthright. (Gen. 25:31-34; 27:36)

Esau's birthright was the rights belonging to the firstborn son or the right of primogeniture. This included the right and privilege to become a patriarch of the nation and an ancestor of the promised Seed, and to inherit all the other rights and privileges of the firstborn son. Nevertheless, Esau was prepared to forego all these rights and privileges in order to satisfy his inordinate lusts—in this case, gluttony. For the sake of a meal, he sacrificed the immense privileges of the firstborn. Then, when he regretted his fatal error, he endeavoured with tears of remorse to recover these lost rights and privileges. (Gen. 27:31-41)

Those, however, who despise and profane God-granted rights and privileges, will find that there is no place for repentance, even though sought with many tears. So it was with Esau. He had profaned the LORD's name and despised his gracious gifts. Therefore, for his ungodliness and folly, Esau experienced utter rejection, and was wholly unable to recover his loss. By his own foolhardy actions, he found himself disinherited; and not all the remorse and tears in the world could restore to him his lost inheritance. For his tears were not tears of true godly repentance, but of worldly sorrow, regret and self-pity. (2 Cor. 7:10)

Hebrews 12:18-19

These verses look back to the time when Moses was about to receive the Ten Commandments (or Ten Words) of God on Mount Sinai, together with all his other laws and ordinances for the people of Israel. The Lord God instructed Moses not to permit the people to approach anywhere near the mount until they had heard the sound of a long blast on the ram's horn trumpet. Then, they could come outside the camp to take their places around the perimeter, near the lower approaches to the holy mount.

On the day that Moses was to ascend Mount Sinai, thunder, lightning and a blazing fire surrounded the mount, and a thick smoke-filled cloud enveloped the entire mountainside. These overwhelming phenomena spoke of the awesome and unapproachable majesty of Almighty God, and of his absolutely righteous, pure, holy and just character or attributes.

Elsewhere, Moses describes this scene in these words:

Deuteronomy 33:2 (ESV)

(2) He said, "The LORD came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us; he shone forth from Mount Paran; he came from the ten thousands of holy ones, with flaming fire at his right hand.

(These words portray something of the majestic and holy presence of the LORD as he descended to Mount Sinai, accompanied by myriads of his holy ones (glorious angels).)

While the people of Israel were waiting inside the camp, they heard the long trumpet blast sounding very loud and instilling great fear and foreboding among everyone in the camp. The Lord God had descended upon the mountain in fire, with the smoke ascending upward as though from a blazing furnace. At the presence of the LORD, the whole mountain shook exceedingly. At this point, the people knew that they could leave the camp and approach the lower parts of the mountain—although they did so with much fear and trepidation.

By this time, Moses had ascended the mountain. Nevertheless, the Lord told him to go back down and warn the people not to attempt to come any closer to the sacred mountain, lest they die. Thus, Moses instructed the people, warning them of the very great danger of attempting to approach the holy presence of Almighty God.

However, says the writer to these Hebrew Christians, "*...you have not come to what may be touched...*" (v.18) You have not come to Mount Sinai; to the awesome majesty, righteousness, holiness and purity of God, as he met with Moses to give to him the law of commandments and ordinances for the people. This was a tangible mountain—a mountain that could be touched. Yet, at the same time, the LORD God forbade any of the people from approaching too close to this holy mountain. Their sin separated them from the most holy and immediate presence of the Most High God. Indeed, so great was the people's fear of God's presence and God's voice that they pleaded with Moses that no further messages be spoken to them (v.19).

Hebrews 12:20-21

The Israelites could not endure the order given by God through Moses to remain at a prescribed distance from the holy mountain. The thunderous sounds reverberating around the mountainside intimated something of the majestic power and awesome glory of God. This, however, proved too much for these people. (Yet, somehow, their reverent awe and fear was to be short-lived—as subsequent events were to prove.)

Moses himself confessed that he trembled in fear at the sight (v.21). The reference here was not to the sight of God, whom no one can see and live. Rather, it was to the sight of the atmospheric disturbances accompanying the presence of God on the mountain and to that part of God's glory that the LORD permitted Moses to see.

By contrast, however, the Hebrew believers of the writer's day had not come to a tangible mountain that instilled fear and foreboding into the hearts and minds of the people—a mountain where even a beast was to be put to death if it approached too close to the sacred presence of God (v.20).

Hebrews 12:22

Now, the writer explains the difference between the situation involving the professing people of God in Moses' day and that of the Hebrew believers in the present day. Unlike the people of Israel, the people of God of the writer's day had not come to a physical mountain but to a spiritual mount. They did not stand before God at Mount Sinai, but at Mount Zion. They did not meet the Lord under his law, but under his grace. They had not come to an earthly sanctuary, but to the heavenly sanctuary. They were not forbidden from approaching the holy mount of God, but rather were encouraged to come boldly into the presence of the Most High God in heaven.

What had made the difference? Who had made this possible for the people of God? The way into the most holy place in heaven had been opened up by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. He who was both the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and the High Priest who offered up that sacrifice to God, had rent the heavenly veil and opened up the way into the immediate and most holy presence of God.

- As Mediator and Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus had fulfilled every law ever promulgated at **Mount Sinai**,
- He had borne the penalty for every breach of that law, and endured the wrath of God vicariously for sinners, on **Mount Calvary**,
- He had been raised, exalted and glorified by his Father, to intercede for all his people from **Mount Zion**—the heavenly Jerusalem, sanctuary and throne of God.

It was to this city of the living God that these Hebrew Christians (and all other Christians) had now come. Now, they were citizens of a heavenly kingdom, not of an earthly kingdom. Now, they were joint-heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ himself—the one who is King of kings and Lord of lords. Now, instead of standing at a great distance from God and from the presence of his innumerable holy and glorious angels, they were united through the Son with the Father, and joined with the holy angels in the true spiritual worship of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In this verse, the angels are described as being arranged in 'festal gathering': i.e., they surround the throne of God celebrating, glorifying and praising his name. This is in contrast to the gathering of angels that accompanied the LORD God to Mount Sinai. On that occasion, the angels witnessed the giving of the law and the holy, righteous and just character of God—although never removed from his love, mercy and compassion. Now, however, the angels in heaven praise the Lord continually for his works of grace and mercy toward the children of men, and they rejoice over sinners repenting and being redeemed to God. Now, the redeemed children of God join with these holy angels in their worship, praise and glory of the Lord God and of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus, unlike Mount Sinai (which spoke of the law, sin and death), Mount Zion (the heavenly city of God, which speaks of grace, forgiveness and life eternal) is a place of great rejoicing. It is a place where God's redeemed children can approach their Father's most holy presence. They do so with reverence and awe, yet also with gratitude and love and with boldness and confidence, through the atoning blood of the one who loved them and who gave himself for them.

Hebrews 12:23

...and to the assembly of the firstborn...

In this context, the word 'assembly' is ἐκκλησία, *ekklēsia* (congregation, gathering, or community). This is a reference to the church universal: i.e., to all the true people of God. Probably, the reference is to all believers of previous ages and generations who looked forward to the coming of Christ, and who were considered to be an integral part of the true church (or 'assembly' or 'congregation' of God). Such were Abraham and Sarah, and such were all true believers in the covenant promises. Now, of course, these Old Testament believers were in the presence of God.

These believers are referred to as 'the firstborn'—probably, in allusion to the firstborn of Israel. The firstborn enjoyed many rights and privileges, including priority rights of inheritance. The term 'firstborn' also speaks of one holding pre-eminence, priority or superiority in rank or station, etc.—although not necessarily the firstborn of the family. King David was referred to as God's 'firstborn'—although he was not the firstborn of Jesse's sons. The reference was not to his family position, but to the rank or status to which the LORD had appointed him as king. Therefore, also, the Son of God is referred to as the 'firstborn'. This reference, however, does not imply that the Son of God had a beginning in time. Rather, it refers to priority of rank or station, and to his absolute pre-eminence and superiority over all other things in all creation.

When believers are termed 'firstborn', the reference is to the fact that God has granted them privileged rank or status in his kingdom and household, and has made them heirs of his inheritance and joint heirs with his Son. The assembly of the firstborn in this verse, however, most likely refers to the Old Testament saints, and perhaps some early New Testament believers, who were now with their Lord in heaven.

The verse continues by saying:

...and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven....

This is just another way of saying that their names had been written in the Lamb's book of life, or that they were counted among those whom God had predestined and elected to eternal life from before the beginning of the world. The enrolment was considered to be in the form of writing tablets (fulfilling the same role as a register in book form), where, from eternity, every name of every one of God's elect people had been inscribed or engraved in the Lamb's book of life. (Rev. 21:27)

..and to God, the judge of all....

'But you have come..' says the writer '...to God, the judge of all...' (vv.22-23)

Here, the writer is reminding these Hebrew believers that they have come into the presence of God Most High—the Judge of all... Israel trembled in fear before Mount Sinai when the Judge of all men descended to meet with his servant, Moses. The Hebrew believers, however, had no such cause to fear. Granted, they should worship God acceptably, with reverence and awe. Nevertheless, they were being encouraged to approach the throne of the Most High God—not as though he were their Judge—but as though he was their loving, caring, heavenly Father. This of course had been made possible for the people of God only through the blood of the everlasting covenant. Yet, by that blood, they could now enter within the veil to petition their Father in heaven and to praise and glorify his magnificent and holy name.

...and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect...

Some commentators believe that this phrase refers to those whom God considers perfect on earth: i.e., justified believers, clothed with the perfect righteousness of Christ. While this is true forensically, yet it also remains true that believers on earth remain imperfect in practice.

Considering that the entire surrounding context is speaking of heaven, it is the opinion of this commentator that this phrase should be understood of believers in heaven. The *'spirits of the righteous made perfect'*, therefore, would be those whom God has redeemed on earth, and whom subsequently he has called home to glory. There, in the presence of God and of the holy angels, these redeemed saints of the Lord have been made perfect forever.

By their prayers, therefore, these Hebrew Christians could come now into the very presence of God Most High: to the same glorious heavenly realms where the spirits of the redeemed are now enjoying eternal rest and peace with God.

Hebrews 12:24

And to Jesus...

The people of God on earth were never to approach the holy angels, nor were they to hope in them as their mediators or intercessors. Nor, again, were they to approach the most holy presence of God the Father directly. Rather, their way of approach to God the Father must always be through the one Mediator that the Father himself had provided—the Lord Jesus Christ. It is utterly impossible to approach God in heaven by any other means, or by means of any other person. Jesus Christ alone provides the way into the Father's presence; and all who would come to God must come to God by his Son.

Therefore, says the writer, you have come to Jesus.... The risen, exalted and glorified Lord Jesus is the Author and Finisher of our faith; he is the Beginning and the End; the Alpha and the Omega. These titles pertain also to God the Father; therefore, anyone approaching the Son is also approaching the Father (by means of the Son). (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; Rev. 1:8,11; 2:8; 21:6; 22:13)

There can be no other way of approach to God, because God the Father will hear only those who recognise their need of an atoning sacrifice for their sin, and who accept that Jesus Christ is the only atoning sacrifice for them, and therefore that he is the only Mediator between God and man. Salvation is found in no one else. (John 6:44; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5) Therefore, these Hebrew believers ought never to think about returning to their former Jewish faith—for, now that Christ had come, there could be no salvation for them through their old religion. Indeed, to return to their old religion in the light of better knowledge was to despise God's grace and to show contempt for his Son. This would have been the sin of apostasy.

Far from returning to their old form of worship, they were to remember that:

[Jesus is] *the mediator of a new covenant...*

No longer were these believers living under the Old Covenant. Rather, now they were living under the New Covenant. This new covenant was superior by far to the old. It was enacted on better promises, and it provided a sacrifice for sin that was infinitely superior to those provided under the Mosaic arrangement. By this one perfect sacrifice for sins forever, the Lord Jesus—the Lamb of God—had paid sin's penalty in full and had abrogated and superseded the ritual and ceremonial laws of the old covenant.

Thus, a new covenant had been established—and this new covenant endures forever. Again, the temporary priesthood of the old covenant had been abolished and replaced by a permanent priesthood: that of Christ, after the order of Melchizedek.

The old covenant stipulated that no one could approach God except by means of a priest ordained of God, bearing sacrifices for sin. Similarly, the new covenant stipulates that no one can approach God except by means of the Priest ordained of God—this Great High Priest having made a once-for-all sacrifice for sin on behalf of all his elect people. Thus, the exalted and glorified Lord Jesus—and he alone—is the Mediator (or Great High Priest) of our profession.

...and to the sprinkled blood...

The sprinkled blood is that which makes atonement for a person's sin. The blood cleanses or purifies a person so that he can come near to God. The reference is to the blood shed by the Lord Jesus when, in obedience to his Father's will, he laid down his life to make atonement for the sins of all his people. By that blood, sin and guilt is expiated and forgiven; the conscience of the redeemed believer is cleansed and sanctified to God and the believer experiences true peace with God in the knowledge that his former sins will never again be counted against him. The contrite believer, of course, receives God's gift of grace and mercy toward him through his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and renders to God his heartfelt adoration, praise and worship for the One who loved him and died for him on Calvary's cross.

...and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

These Hebrew believers would recall the circumstances surrounding Abel's death. Some time after his acceptable sacrifice to God, Abel had been accosted and murdered by his brother Cain. Abel's shed blood cried out for vengeance. He had been put to death without just cause as an 'innocent' victim. Therefore, in justice, his murderer had to be punished for the shedding of innocent blood.

Christ, too, was put to death unjustly, at the hands of evil men. However, his shed blood—speaking of his pure and perfect life given up—speaks far more eloquently than the blood of Abel. Again, the Lord Jesus made an acceptable sacrifice to God—but the Lord's sacrifice of his own unblemished life was immeasurably greater than that of Abel. The shedding of Abel's blood alienated the offender (Cain) from God and banished him from God's presence. By contrast, the blood of Christ brings peace and reconciliation with God, whereby estranged offenders (sinners) can be forgiven and brought near to God. Thus, on all accounts, *the sprinkled blood* [of the Lord Jesus] *...speaks a better word than the blood of Abel*—and it was through this sin-atonement blood that these believers could now approach the throne of God in heaven.

Our God is a Consuming Fire

Hebrews 12:25-29

Hebrews 12:25

Unlike the people of Israel, whom God commanded to stand below Mount Sinai, these Hebrew believers were being exhorted to draw near to God—into his glorious presence in heaven, through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Nevertheless, they were to approach God with reverence and awe. They had been granted immense privileges insofar as they could approach God through the mediation of his Son, and did not require an *earthly* mediator like Moses or one of the Aaronic priests to represent them before God.

Yet, with this immense privilege came great responsibility to hear and to heed the Word of God. God had spoken in the past by Moses. Now, however—in these last days—he had spoken by (or in) his Son. It was a fearful thing to despise the voice of God speaking through his servant Moses, and it brought upon the despiser of God’s Word the penalty of death. How much more severe would be the punishment for anyone who despised or refused to hear the voice of God speaking now, through or in his Son? This would be the sin of wilful rebellion and unbelief; it would be to spurn the Word of God and repudiate his grace. It would be to trample the blood of Christ underfoot and treat with contempt the redeeming and sanctifying blood. It would be to contemn the Spirit of grace, of holiness and of sanctification.

There is no forgiveness for this sin. Those who—in the light of better knowledge—so treat the blood of Christ, indicate by their actions that they have hardened their hearts fatally and finally against the grace of God. This is the sin of apostasy, or a wilful and final turning away from the things of God after these things had been clearly made known to them.

Thus, in view of the very great danger of despising God’s Word or neglecting to obey God’s Word, the writer implores these believers to exercise extreme care and diligence in hearing and obeying God’s Word as it had been imparted to them by the apostles, or recorded in the Holy Scriptures. Those whom God warned on earth (Israel, under the ministry of Moses) did not escape when they despised the Word of God. Neither will those escape today who despise God’s Word, warning them now from heaven itself. Thus, these believers were being exhorted in the strongest possible terms not only to hear the word of the Lord, but also to believe and obey it. Because of their repeated and wilful unbelief, the entire adult population of Israel (excepting Joshua and Caleb) perished in the wilderness. Likewise, those professing faith in Christ today may also face severe punishment should they ever sin against the Lord repeatedly and wilfully. To this end, God punished some of the Corinthian believers with (physical) death for wilfully and repeatedly, and in the light of better knowledge, sinning against the body and blood of Christ at the Lord’s Supper. (1 Cor. 11:27-30)

How important it is for those who have experienced God’s love, grace and mercy to prove faithful to the One who called them in his grace by hearing his Word and obeying everything that God’s Word says. Those who know and belong to God are those who obey their Father’s will.

Hebrews 12:26

Referring to the voice of God thundering from Sinai, the writer says that this voice shook the earth. The voice of the LORD God Almighty was attended by smoke, thundering and lightning around the sacred mount. These phenomena indicated something of the awesome power, presence and glorious majesty of God.

In Scripture, phrases such as ‘a shaking of the earth’, etc. are sometimes used figuratively to represent great or cataclysmic changes to the world, to society, or to the social and religious structures of the world. Thus, significant changes to things on earth are often portrayed figuratively, and frequently literally also, by cosmic disturbances in the heavens and the earth. Therefore, when the smoke, thunder and lightning accompanied the presence of the LORD on Mount Sinai, this portrayed not only the power, glory and majesty of the Lord God himself, but also the changes that would be effected on earth and among his people by the introduction formally of his law of commandments and ordinances. These laws became the religious and legal framework for the entire Israelite society. For many centuries later, these same laws were adopted by, or adapted into, much of civilised society.

Now, however, God has assured us that he will shake not only the earth but also the heavens: i.e., the entire created universe will be affected by the changes brought about under the terms of the new covenant.

The thought is derived from the prophet Haggai, where it is written:

Haggai 2:6-7 (ESV)

(6) For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. (7) And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts.

The reference is to the temple of the LORD. Under the terms of the new covenant, there is no longer an earthly Jewish priesthood or temple. Christ alone is our Great High Priest, and the temple is the sanctuary or dwelling place of God in heaven. However, God is promising that he will so disturb the nations, by bringing about significant changes, that he will yet gather his treasured people from among all nations and from every area of society. No one who calls upon the Lord Jesus for salvation will be turned away or excluded. All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. And, one day, these redeemed of the Lord will stand before him in glory, filling his heavenly sanctuary with their presence and offering up praise, worship and adoration to God their Father and to the Lamb.

Hebrews 12:27-28

The writer encourages these believers to be truly grateful to God for receiving an eternal kingdom: a kingdom that cannot be shaken, that is immovable in the heavens. Unlike the kingdoms of this earth, which all decay and perish in time, the kingdom of our God and of our Christ is not of this creation. It is of heaven itself, and therefore not part of the earthly creation that will pass away. God's kingdom is eternal in the heavens; and God's redeemed people will remain in his blessed presence in the new heavens and the new earth for all the ages of eternity.

In view of these momentous truths and of the wonderful assurances of love, grace and mercy in the presence of our Father in heaven and of his Son, the writer exhorts these believers to show their gratitude to God by offering to him acceptable sacrifices of worship, praise and adoration. However, they were to worship God with due reverence and awe for his holy and majestic Person. So ought each one of us to fall down in wonder, praise and adoration before the Lord God Almighty, offering to him through his Son the sincere and humble praise and worship of our hearts: For he is a great God and a gracious God, who has done wonderful things for his people.

Hebrews 12:29

...For our God is a consuming fire.

In part, the reference here is to the LORD's descent to Mount Sinai to meet with Moses. However, the fact is true of any attempt to approach the most high and holy God.

God is the Almighty One. He is the Most Holy One among his people. It is a great mistake in our modern day to believe that we can approach the Most High God in a casual, flippant or irreverent manner. God is most holy, and those who approach him—through his Son—must approach him with due reverence for his holy and majestic Person and with awe in their hearts for his glory and for his righteous and holy character.

When the Bible says that '*our God is a consuming fire*', it is referring principally to certain aspects of God's character or attributes: i.e., to his infinite holiness, righteousness, justice etc. So holy is our Father in heaven that nothing unclean or impure can ever enter his presence. For, like a consuming fire, God's majestic, holy and righteous character would destroy forever anything or anyone that approached him with unclean hands or an impure heart. This is one reason why we must approach God the Father in prayer through our Mediator—the Lord Jesus Christ, who intercedes with the Father on our behalf. Again, we need to remember always that—although God is our Father in heaven who loves each one of his children—yet his children must always show respect for (or reverence and awe toward) their heavenly Father. Those who are contrite in heart and humble in spirit the Lord our God delights to hear, and to answer in accordance with his will.

HEBREWS CHAPTER 13

At this point, the writer begins the conclusion of his letter, urging the believers to show deep love and concern for each other, encouraging them to persevere in their faith and calling, and exhorting them to prayer and faithfulness in their calling.

Practise Your Faith**Hebrews 13:1-7****Hebrews 13:1**

The writer begins by declaring, *let brotherly love continue...*

The word here for love (φιλαδελφία, *philadelphia*) refers to that pure love or caring concern that should exist between a brother and sister. In the context of brothers and sisters in Christ, it refers to that care and concern or compassion that each believer should show for one another as those who are bonded to each other through their union with Christ and acceptance into the family of God.

The writer speaks of letting brotherly love continue. Clearly, these Hebrew believers had been demonstrating such love for one another, and had been caring for and supporting one another in the trials and distresses through which they had been passing. However, now they are being exhorted to continue demonstrating this love to each other, without becoming disheartened or discouraged by severe trials of their faith.

Perhaps, too, the writer is thinking of those in the fellowship who were being tempted to turn back to their former Jewish faith. However, if the other believers continued to support them by their love and concern, then perhaps these waverers would be encouraged to press on in their faith, in spite of the undoubted persecutions that they had been called upon to endure for the sake of Christ's name. (Phil. 1:29; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 2:21; 5:10)

Hebrews 13:2

One of the most important ways of demonstrating Christian love practically was by showing hospitality to others. However, this hospitality was not to be extended merely to their known friends and fellow-believers, but also to those fellow-believers whom they did not know. For the sake of the Lord Jesus, they were to accept and welcome those strangers as though they were one of their own families, showing the same love, kindness and consideration to them as they would to their own. (Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9)

Indeed, these Hebrew believers were being encouraged to show hospitality more generally to strangers. The reference to entertaining angels unawares is to Abraham on the plains of Mamre (Gen. 18:1-33)—where the patriarch interceded for Sodom; and later, to Lot when he encountered the men of God who had come to Sodom: one of the cities doomed to destruction. Initially, unaware of their identity as the angels of the LORD, both Abraham and Lot welcomed them into their dwelling. (Gen. 19:1-26) In fact, of course, by so doing, they had been entertaining the Lord himself.

We must also remember the teaching of the Lord Jesus, that insofar as we have done it unto one of the least of these, his brothers, we have done it unto him. (Matt. 25:35-40)

Hebrews 13:3

The writer now exhorts the believers to remember those who had been imprisoned, and who were suffering the loss of their freedom and association with family and friends. Principally, of course, the writer would be thinking of those who had been persecuted and imprisoned because of their faith in Christ—as was the apostle Paul. (Eph. 4:1; Col. 4:18; 2 Tim. 1:16)

These dear saints had been deprived of their liberty, not because of any crime committed but because of the 'offence' of the Cross. They had been incarcerated unjustly because of their testimony for the Lord Jesus and the Gospel. (Heb. 10:34)

Thus, the Hebrew Christians were to remember their fellow-believers in prison—not, however, in the sense of bringing them to mind, merely. Rather, they were to pray for them actively and constantly. Where possible, they were to support them practically and minister to their needs. They were to petition the Lord on their behalf, that his will would be accomplished and his name glorified through these imprisoned and persecuted saints of God. This would encourage these believers to bear witness to the truth while in prison, as did Peter; and as did Paul and Silas, resulting in the conversion of the prison guard. (Acts 16:29-34)

The writer then mentions those who were being mistreated, whether within prison walls or not. Wherever the Lord's people were being persecuted for the sake of Christ's name, the Hebrew believers were being exhorted to sympathise with them, to uphold them in prayer, and—where possible and appropriate—to share with them in the fellowship of suffering for Christ. (Rom. 12:15; 1 Cor. 12:26)

We should observe, however, that the writer might not be thinking exclusively of believers in chains or of persecuted believers alone. He may have been thinking also of all those who had been deprived of their liberty and separated from their families for one reason or another; and especially of mothers and children separated from their fathers. Indeed, we are exhorted to pray for all men (i.e., all people in society—not only for God's redeemed people), and for all those in authority over us. (1 Tim. 2:1-3)

Hebrews 13:4

Now, the writer reminds these believers of the sanctity of marriage. Sexual immorality was rife in these days, just as it is today. However, among the redeemed children of God, there must be no immorality; no defiling of the believers' bodies, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:18-20)

Thus, the writer begins by exhorting these believers to hold marriage in the highest possible esteem; for marriage is honourable before God, and should be so among men. In the case of the believer, marriage is especially sanctified by the Spirit of God. To this end, the marriage bond could not be severed by either improper or adulterous union with another person, or by wilful neglect of the God-ordained marital union. (Matt. 19:5-9) By honouring the union between a husband and his wife, the marriage bed remained pure or undefiled. Indeed, in these circumstances, the conjugal union received the full blessing and approval of God. (Cf. Gen. 2:23-25 with Gen. 1:27-28)

However, all forms of immorality were forbidden to the people of God—including adulterous relationships, casual sexual relationships, and every other form of sexual impurity or immorality. The marriage bed, therefore, can be honoured only when it is shared with a husband and his lawful wife. Every other intimate or sexual relationship with another person brings shame and dishonour upon both partners. This applies also to those who share such relations before being committed to each

other in the bonds and sanctity of the marriage relationship. Any couple who have engaged in pre-marital relations must seek God's forgiveness and the forgiveness of each other, and refrain from sexual relations until they have been united to one another as husband and wife. (1 Thess. 4:3-8)

Again, shame and dishonour is brought upon the sexual union by all those who engage in homosexual relationships, whether recognised as 'civil partnerships' or 'married couples' in civil law or not. Sexual intimacy or union between two males or two females is wholly unnatural, and it is expressly condemned and forbidden in God's Word. Anyone, therefore, who believes that God will honour or bless such a union, is greatly deluded and grossly deceived. On the contrary, anyone who engages in a same-sex union remains under God's wrath and judgment—unless and until they repent of their sin and renounce it utterly, as did some former practising homosexual people who were accepted into the church at Corinth. (1 Cor. 6:9-11; see also Rom. 1:18,24-28; cf. Lev. 18:22; 1 Tim. 1:9-11; Jude 1:7)

However, it is utterly impossible for a genuinely born-again Christian to participate in a homosexual relationship with another person. If he does, he demonstrates unmistakably that he has no regard for the teaching of God's Word (therefore despising both God and his Word), or that he does not belong to Christ and therefore does not have the Spirit of Christ within him. Those, however, who refuse to repent of their immorality, face the inevitable judgment of God, both in the present by way of temporal judgments and in the future by way of final judgment. (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Jude 1:6-8)

Yet, God is merciful to all those who confess their sin to him, forsake it utterly, and seek to live thereafter to his honour and glory. No homosexual will ever be excluded from God's kingdom because of his sexual orientation, but only because of his unconfessed and unforgiven sin and sinful practises. For this reason, all kinds of people who formerly were deeply immoral in their lives (such as adulterers, prostitutes, practising homosexuals, etc.) can still experience the love and mercy of God. Whenever they turn to the Lord in godly repentance and genuine faith, seeking his mercy and forgiveness, they will most certainly find his mercy and forgiveness: For the Lord will never turn away anyone who comes to him in true repentance and genuine faith. He will save them, and he will save them to the uttermost. (1 Cor. 6:11; cf. Rom. 6:17-19; Eph. 4:17-22; Col. 3:5-7)

Hebrews 13:5

The writer now reminds the Hebrews of the danger of insidious forms of idolatry—in this case, the love of money. We must note, however, what the writer is saying here. He is not declaring that money itself is sinful, or that wealth or possessions are sinful. Indeed, some of God's most faithful saints were wealthy individuals: e.g., Abraham, whom the LORD blessed with great wealth and possessions. Rather, the Hebrew believers are being warned against *setting their hearts* on money, or on their wealth or possessions. For, as soon as a person sets his heart on anything above the Lord his God, then he becomes guilty of worshipping false gods, or idols. Moreover, those who think more of money than they do of God, or who spend more time or effort in pursuing their material possessions than they do in pursuing righteousness and holiness of life, have departed from the true and faithful worship of God to serve the gods of mammon and unrighteousness. (1 Tim. 6:10; see also Luke 16:13-14; 1 Tim. 6:6-8; Jude 1:11)

But what leads to this situation? Very often, it begins with the heartfelt desire for more of this world's goods—more than what God considers wise and appropriate for that particular person or family. And once a person seeks more and more of money or material goods, he develops an attitude of selfish ambition, greed and covetousness.

How, then, does a believer who has displaced the Lord in his life with some idol then remedy this situation? He does it firstly by acknowledging his sin to the Lord, and asking the Lord for his forgiveness. He does it by being content—or fully satisfied and grateful to God—with his present condition (although this does not prevent him from seeking to improve on that condition, so long as he does so in line with God's will and purposes).

Again, the believer remedies a sinful situation by putting God first in his life and in the life of his family. Once he does these things, he will he find again the blessing of the Lord on his house and the full provision of the Lord for all his needs—without having to resort to the arm of flesh (i.e., human effort apart from God) in order to meet his needs. For, in his Word, the Lord has said very plainly, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Deut. 31:6; 1 Chron. 28:20)

Indeed, God will never leave or forsake his people if they remain true and faithful to him, trusting him to provide for their every need, although not necessarily for their every desire—especially, if these desires do not accord with the will and purposes of God for that person.

Hebrews 13:6

With such an assurance from the Lord God himself, the believer can remain convinced that his every genuine need will be met from the bountiful hand of a loving and caring heavenly Father. This does not guarantee riches or great material wealth to any of the Lord's people; but neither does it preclude such abundance. More important, however, is the promise of providing his people with their daily bread, as far as physical needs are concerned, and of providing great riches in heaven for every believer who sets his heart or mind on things above and who stores his treasures there. (Matt. 6:8, 11, 19-21, 31-34)

Therefore, with the Lord as our Helper, we have no need to fear the future, or worry about how we will manage from day to day in times of shortage. The Lord will provide. He knows every detail of our lives and circumstances. Nothing that happens in our lives can take him unawares or by surprise, for everything that happens in the lives of his redeemed children has been known to him from eternity. Moreover, since he loves and cares for each of those whom his Son has redeemed by his precious blood, he will most certainly meet their needs at his appointed time and in his appointed manner. (Ps. 37:25)

Furthermore, with the Lord as our helper, the believer ought never to exhibit an undue or misplaced fear of man or of human agency. God is in control: not men, and not human agency. God can overrule the intentions and purposes of men, or can turn these intentions and purposes so that they bring blessing to the Lord's people. Thus, we ought not to fear man. Rather, we should fear God, and worship him with reverence and awe; and yet with love and adoration for the one who is our Father in heaven, and who loved us so much that he gave his only Son to die for us. (Ps. 27:1; 118:6)

Hebrews 13:7

Now, the writer reminds these believers to remember their leaders (or spiritual guides). The word 'remember' is in the imperative mood (or in the form of a command), and is a direct instruction to 'remember with diligence' or to 'keep in mind continually'.

The believers were to remember their leaders especially, because they had taught the Hebrew Christians the Word of God. These leaders had instructed the dispersed believers in the faith. The believers, therefore, were indebted to their spiritual leaders for the great blessings that their teaching had

brought to them, and for the help that these leaders had given to the dispersed Hebrew believers in growing in their faith and in holiness of life.

The writer does not name any of these leaders specifically, but they would be well known to the Hebrew believers. Therefore, they are being encouraged to pray for these leaders, and to help them in any way possible in making known the truths of God's Word.

However, the Hebrew Christians are being exhorted not only to remember their leaders' *teaching*, but also to remember their leaders' *example*, and to emulate their manner of life insofar as these leaders exemplified the Lord Jesus. They were to imitate (or 'mimic') their leaders' life of faith, trust and obedience to God.

Thus, we are reminded to pray for our spiritual leaders. This includes all those who have influenced us in some way and aided us in our apprehension of the truth, but it refers specifically to those who are our leaders in church (e.g., pastors and teachers, elders, or other similar leaders, etc.), or as instructors or lecturers in a theological college or Bible School. Those who teach God's Word ought to be supported prayerfully and practically by those who benefit from their instructors' teaching. (Cf. Luke 10:7; 1 Cor. 9:4-15; Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17-18)

In passing, we should observe that the KJV and a few other versions translate this verse as follows: '*Remember them which have the rule over you...*' (KJV). While it may be essential to remember those in authority over us—a concept that is expressed very clearly elsewhere—this particular verse does not appear to be making this assertion; or, at least, not directly. Most versions therefore translate: '*Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God...*' (ESV) (or similar). While leaders are mentioned, the emphasis in this place is not on the leaders' authority, position or office *per se*, but on their teaching of the Word of God and of the power and authority of God's Word. In the case of the apostles of the Lord Jesus, however, their teaching and authority as inspired and infallible teachers of God's Word were inseparable concepts. (1 Thess. 2:13)

The Eternally Unchanging Word

Hebrews 13:8-9

Hebrews 13:8

The previous verse spoke of the power and authority of God's infallible and living Word, and of how that Word had been delivered to them by the leaders or guides of the church. This verse speaks of the Living Word himself—the source of God's eternal Word to his people and church.

Thus, the writer declares: *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.* (ESV)

The Lord Jesus is the unchanging Son of God *from* all eternity and he will remain the unchanging Son of God *to* all eternity. He is the Alpha and the Omega; the First and the Last; the Beginning and the End. (Heb. 1:12; cf. Isa. 41:4; 44:6 with Rev. 1:8,17)

The Lord Jesus is the same yesterday (from the eternal ages past), today (at this present moment in time), and forever (to the eternal ages yet to come). In the same way, the Word of God that was spoken to these believers is eternal and unchanging. It is the Word of the living sovereign and eternal God, and God cannot be mistaken in his pronouncements, nor can he fail to fulfil every word that he has uttered. (Cf. John 1:1)

Furthermore, the Word of God is expressed in and by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. He is the Word of God from the beginning—i.e., from eternity. This Word (Logos) alone has been with the Father from eternity; and this Word is God. The Lord Jesus alone knows and proclaims the Word of God to his people. Therefore, since Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever, so also the spoken and written Word of God is the same yesterday and today and forever: That is, it remains unchanging, powerful through the Holy Spirit to achieve its intended purposes, wholly inerrant, and completely reliable and trustworthy. (Isa. 40:8; 55:10-11; 2 Tim. 3:15-17)

Hebrews 13:9

In view of the fact that these believers had received the unchanging and eternal Word of God, they were not to be deceived by those people who would attempt to distort that Word and lead them astray to erroneous or false doctrines. Just as the Lord Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever, so also the content, power and authority of the written Word must remain the same for all eternity.

Changes could be made to the content or teaching of the Word of God only if the Lord God himself or Jesus Christ his Son expressly made such changes. Such was the case when the laws of ceremonies and ordinances—i.e., rules, regulations and rituals—pertaining to Old Testament offerings and sacrifices were fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, and subsequently abrogated. Without such express divine teaching and sanction, however, God's Word cannot be changed or altered in the least degree by any man, by any body of men, or by any other power or authority under heaven. (Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18; cf. Isa. 40:8; Jer. 23:28-32)

In God's written Word (the Bible), the Lord has revealed all doctrines necessary to the knowledge of the truth and to godliness and holiness of life. Nothing further is, or ever will be, required. As delivered to these believers, this Word was final. It was perfect and unchanging as it stood and as it had been proclaimed by the Lord, and then by those who had heard him. Therefore, these believers were not to give credence to any other teaching or doctrine, which purported to be the word of God, but which had not been delivered by God, by the Lord Jesus, or by any of the genuine apostles of the Lord Jesus.

The writer was thinking particularly of those false teachers who insisted on obedience to Jewish dietary laws and traditions, or who distorted the Word of God in other similar ways with specific reference to the Mosaic Law, or to the now fulfilled and abolished laws and ordinances of Jewish rituals, rules and ceremonies. To return to these abrogated laws was to return to Judaism, and to lay upon the believer the heavy yoke of legalism—the very yoke of bondage from which Christ had delivered that person. (Matt. 11:28-30; see also Acts 15:10; Gal. 5:1)

Therefore, the writer states that the soul is not strengthened by food (permitted and forbidden meats and drinks), but by grace. It is by grace that the believer is saved. It is by grace that he stands. It is by grace that he makes progress in his faith. It is by grace that he overcomes temptation and sin. It is by grace that he will persevere in holiness of life until the end, and it is by grace that he will stand at last in the presence of God and of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. All this is by the sovereign and unmerited grace of God—not by works of personal merit, nor by observance of dietary or any other rules or ceremonial laws. (Acts 20:32; Eph. 2:5,8; 2 Tim. 1:9)

The New Covenant Altar

Hebrews 13:10-16

Hebrews 13:10

The writer of Hebrews now reminds his readers of the great distinction between their position under the terms of the new covenant and those who were yet living under the old covenant.

We have an altar...

Here, the phrase, 'we have an altar...' takes the form of an ellipsis¹² where the reference is not to the altar *per se*, but to that which was laid upon the altar: i.e., the offering or sacrifice.

Under the old covenant, such sacrifices were indeed offered upon the altar by the priests. By contrast, however, under the new covenant, one sacrifice for sin forever has been offered upon the altar: i.e, the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, and the shedding of his blood as an atonement for sin at Calvary. Thus, these Hebrew believers, who were living under the terms of the new covenant, were greatly favoured in that they participated in the benefits and blessings of that once-for-all atoning sacrifice.

Herein lay the difference between the altar and sacrifices of the old covenant and that of the new. The priests of the old covenant offered up the same repetitive sacrifices to God to make atonement for sin. From some of these sacrifices, the priests were permitted to share in, or appropriate to themselves, a part of the offering, which they could eat. (Lev. 2:3; 1 Cor. 9:13) However, no priest of the old covenant was ever permitted to share or participate in the altar or the sacrifice of the new covenant. At this altar, they could not 'eat' of the offering: i.e., they could not feed spiritually on the body or blood of Christ, nor could they participate in the blessings and benefits of his redemption.

From a purely human perspective, the old covenant priests were not qualified to 'serve' at this altar. They belonged to the priestly tribe of Levi, whereas the Priest of the new covenant had to arise from the royal tribe of Judah (the Sceptre of Shiloh and the Lion of Judah (Gen. 49:10; Rev. 5:5)). Furthermore, the Levitical priests were sinful men, who could not offer to God a perfect sacrifice. By contrast, the Priest of the new covenant was a sinless Man, who was fully able and willing to offer to God his own life as a perfect or unblemished sacrifice of atonement.

Thus, those who serve at and participate in the old covenant altar cannot serve at or participate in the new covenant altar. Those who share in and eat of the old covenant sacrifices, cannot share in and 'eat' (spiritually) of the new covenant Sacrifice. They are completely distinct, and those who would benefit from the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus upon the altar can do so only through faith in him. Then, indeed, they participate in the new covenant altar by 'eating and drinking'¹³ (spiritually), or by

¹² *ellipsis* (in grammar): a word or phrase not expressed in the sentence, but understood from the context; an incomplete, contracted or condensed sentence where omitted expressions need to be supplied to provide the correct meaning of the sentence.

¹³ The metaphor or figure of speech relating to 'eating' and 'drinking' of the blessings and benefits of Christ's atoning sacrifice derive from expressions used in the Old Testament—expressions which would be very familiar to Jews and Jewish Christians. In the Old Testament, these expressions were used metaphorically in different contexts, and the Jews should have understood their spiritual and moral meanings: For example, to 'eat the bread of wickedness' was to participate in iniquitous practices (Prov. 4:17), and to 'eat the bread of sorrow' was to experience sorrow or grief. (Ps. 127:2) Thus, when the Lord Jesus spoke of 'eating' or 'drinking' of the blessings and benefits of salvation, Jewish people ought to have recognised that this was a metaphor or figure of speech for participating spiritually, and by faith, in God's salvation. This is especially true when we remember that, concerning repentance and salvation, God spoke to his people Israel in these very terms: For example, the

appropriating to themselves through faith, all the blessings and benefits of the Lord Jesus' priceless atonement.

Thus, the writer says:

Hebrews 13:10 (ESV)

(10) We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat.

As we have shown above, 'to eat' is a metaphor for sharing in all the blessings and benefits of the sacrifice of atonement. It derives from old covenant usage, where the priests were permitted to eat a part of the sacrifices that they had offered on the altar. However, no one other than those whom God had called, inclusive of their immediate households, could share in the blessings of the altar. Similarly, under the new covenant, only those whom God has called have a right to share in the blessings and benefits of Christ's atoning sacrifice.

It is true, of course, that—on hearing the Gospel—many of these old covenant priests did profess faith in Christ. However, by accepting the sacrifice of Christ as their atonement for sin, these Jewish priests had renounced forever their office and participation in the old covenant sacrifices. (Acts 6:7)

For the majority of Jewish people, however, they could not share in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus unless they too were called to repentance and faith in him, and unless they too accepted the Lord's sinless offering as their complete and final sacrifice for sin.

Hebrews 13:11

This relates to the sacrifice of a bullock or goat on the Day of Atonement. These beasts were slain on that Day; their blood was shed on the altar, and sprinkled on the horns of the altar of incense. Then, within the holy of holies, the high priest would sprinkle the shed blood on and before the mercy seat covering the ark of the covenant. Thus, atonement would be made for the high priest himself and for the sins of the people of Israel. Thereby, the people were reconciled to God. (This, of course, typified the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus and the shedding of his blood to make atonement for sin and to reconcile redeemed sinners to God.) (Exo. 13:10; Lev. 16:3-34; 23:26-32)

Once the atoning sacrifice had been offered and the blood sprinkled within the most holy place, the bodies of these sacrifices (bulls or goats) were then taken outside the camp of Israel. There, the ceremonially unclean carcasses were burned.

Figuratively, this spoke of the offensiveness to God of that which was unclean. The blood of these bulls or goats had just been used to make atonement for sin. They had acted as a sin offering, as a substitute for sin, and consequently as a sin-bearer for the sins and iniquities of the people of Israel. Therefore, the Lord considered these carcasses both ceremonially unclean and utterly contaminated (figuratively) by the sins of the people. For this reason, the bodies had to be burned outside the camp. They had to be separated entirely from the most holy presence of God among his people, and represented by the holy of holies inside the camp and within the tent or tabernacle (and, later, the temple).

OT speaks of drawing water (to drink) from the wells of salvation (referring to regeneration through faith—and as exemplified by the Lord Jesus when speaking to the woman at the well. John 4:10-14; see also John 6:32-59; 7:37-39; cf. Isa. 12:3; 55:1-3; Jer. 2:13; Rev. 7:17; 22:1)

Hebrews 13:12

These Old Testament sacrifices of atonement typified or foreshadowed the sufferings and once-for-all sacrifice of atonement that would be offered by the Lord Jesus. Thus, in fulfilment of these types, the Lord Jesus—the spotless, sinless Lamb of God—suffered the shame and humiliation of the cross for the sins of others. Like the animal sacrifices, the Lord Jesus suffered ‘outside the camp’: i.e., at Calvary, outside the walls of Jerusalem, and away from the location of the earthly sanctuary or temple. (Cf. Lev. 16:27) There, at the place called ‘the place of the skull’, the Lord Jesus endured complete separation from his Father. (Mark 15:22-24; Luke 23:33; John 19:17-18) The holy Son of God experienced the agony of utter abandonment by his Father as he bore the sins of men and women and as he endured in his own Person the righteous, holy and burning wrath of God for sinful people. (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34)

Thus, like the animal sacrifices, his innocent, pure and perfect blood was shed to make atonement for sin. Unlike the animal sacrifices, however, the Lord’s precious blood was not then taken into the most holy place on earth (the holy of holies within the temple), but rather the merits and efficacy of his redeeming blood was applied to the holiest place of all—the sanctuary in heaven. Again, like the animal sacrifices, the Lord Jesus was accounted ‘unclean’ (legally or forensically—although not actually or personally so). This was because he was acting as the sinner’s substitute, bearing their sins (or the legal liability and blame for their sins), and suffering vicariously the punishment of his Father for other people’s sins in order to redeem and reconcile those sinful men and women to God. Thus, like the animal sacrifices, the Lord Jesus was considered ceremonially unclean (although never morally or actually so) while he was acting as an atoning sacrifice, and shedding his blood, for the sins of the people. (Isa. 53:4-9; Rom. 4:25; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24)

However, by that shed blood, now sprinkled on and before the mercy seat in heaven, sinners have been redeemed and reconciled to God. For, by the Lord’s sufferings, death, resurrection and ascension to glory, they have been justified once-for-all and accepted as the children of God. As such, and by that atoning blood, the redeemed children of God are granted access to their Father in heaven, the exalted and glorified Lord Jesus Christ being the Mediator and Great High Priest who intercedes for them and represents them before the Father’s throne. (Heb. 4:14-16)

Hebrews 13:13

Now, the writer encourages these beleaguered Christians to hold fast to their faith. He has pointed out to them the significance of the Lord Jesus being sacrificed ‘outside the camp’—or beyond the walls of the city, and away from the holy temple. Now, the writer declares that these believers should emulate their Lord and Master, insofar as they too must be prepared to suffer for their faith—‘outside the camp’. Outside the camp implied separation from the city and from its ungodly society. It implied separation from the earthly temple and from its redundant mode of worship and sacrifices.

Yet, this was exactly the situation in which the Lord’s people now found themselves. No longer did they belong to this world, nor were they permanent citizens there. Rather, the Lord had separated them unto himself. He had made them citizens of a higher and heavenly realm. Now, while they remained on earth, they were to live as strangers and pilgrims in this world, ever looking forward to their true home and city above.

However, while they lived in this world, these believers would be called upon to suffer for the sake of Christ’s name, and for his cause. The sinless Lord Jesus suffered outside the camp for sinners. Similarly, redeemed sinners must suffer outside the camp for him. They must expect the world to act hostilely against them, as they did with the Lord Jesus. They must expect the world to expel them from

their society, as they did with the Lord Jesus. They must expect the world to despise and reject them, as they did with the Lord Jesus. Yet, as Jesus taught in the Beatitudes, those who were persecuted for righteousness' sake were blessed—or greatly privileged and highly favoured—of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:10-12)

Thus, the writer exhorts these Hebrew Christians not only to 'go to him outside the camp'—i.e., to take their place in identifying with Christ—but also to be fully prepared to endure scorn, derision, and other forms of persecution for the sake of his name.

We must remember, of course, that those who act scornfully or who otherwise despise and reject the people of God are doing so out of unregenerate souls, spiritually blinded minds and an abject fear of God. Despite all their claims to the contrary, they know that God exists and that he will judge their evil deeds. For God has put the knowledge of his existence into the hearts or minds of all mankind, from the most enlightened to the most unenlightened person on earth. Furthermore, God has revealed something of his almighty power and glory in his creation. Therefore, mankind are without excuse when they claim (futilely) that he does not exist, or when they deny his almighty power and glory. (Rom. 1:18-32)

However, because, in reality, they know that God exists, they know that he will judge them according to their evil deeds and will condemn the finally impenitent to hell. Therefore, in their spiritual blindness, or in anger, bitterness, resentment and fear of the coming judgment, they do all in their power to attack and malign the redeemed people of God.

Nevertheless, the redeemed people of God must ever remember that such may have been some of their own number, before their calling and conversion to Christ. The wrath of man cannot forestall or overcome the purposes of God. Those whom God elects to save—even from among the vilest or most depraved of mankind—will be saved. However, their salvation by the grace and power of God will result in the complete transformation of their former attitudes and behaviour and a wholehearted commitment to the one whom formerly they had denounced and derided. Thus, the persecuted believers were ever to bear in mind that their sufferings for the sake of Christ, and their humble but courageous stand for Christ, might lead ultimately to the salvation of their persecutors. (See the examples of the condemned criminal on the cross (Luke 23:39-43) and the fanatical Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus (Paul), in Acts 8:3; 9:1ff; 1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13)

Hebrews 13:14

Here, the writer reminds these believers of the transient nature of their lives in this world. God has placed them in this world to fulfil his purposes and to honour and glorify his name. Nevertheless, although they must prove faithful to the Lord and to his service while they remain here, this world is not their permanent home. Therefore, they are to live here as sojourners or strangers and pilgrims, knowing that the Lord has prepared for them a far better and permanent home in his heavenly dwellings. (2 Cor. 5:1-8; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 11:12-16; 12:22; 2 Pet. 3:13)

Thus, although they are citizens of this world they are citizens also of the world to come. In this world, they are temporary citizens. In the world to come, they will be permanent citizens. In this world, they are to assume all the duties and responsibilities of citizenship. In the world to come, and as a reward for faithful service on earth, they will assume appropriate duties and responsibilities in the heavenly kingdom. They will share with Christ in ruling over the new heavens and the new earth, or the new creation. (2 Tim. 2:12; 2 Pet. 3:11-13; Rev. 21:1-7; see also Matt. 19:28-29)

Therefore, in view of the great blessings awaiting them in the heavenly city, these believers were being exhorted to treat this world and its associations as something that would pass away forever. At the same time, they were to consider that their heavenly dwelling and its associations would never pass away throughout the eternal ages. Thus, while ministering to the needs of a lost world, and while living their lives to the glory of God, they were nevertheless to concentrate their minds on the city of God above. (Heb. 11:10) For those only whose minds are fixed on eternal verities can be of true use and value to this lost and perishing world. (Col. 3:1-3)

Hebrews 13:15

Having explained to the Hebrew Christians the significance of the new covenant altar and sacrifice, the writer now speaks of the Son who made that sacrifice, and of the Father who gave him for a lost and sinful world. (John 3:16-18)

Those who have experienced the salvation of the Lord and who share in all the blessings and benefits of Christ's redeeming sacrifice must praise and glorify God for all his great love, mercy and grace toward them. Thus, the writer exhorts these believers to make their offering to God upon the altar (of their hearts or minds)—an offering or sacrifice of worship, praise and adoration to God their Father in heaven.

Those sacrifices of praise and worship that acknowledged the name of the Lord, and that were offered to the Father through the merits of Christ and his redeeming work, were acceptable and well pleasing to God. They were the fruit of the believers' lips: they expressed the deep love and gratitude of their hearts or minds for all that the Lord Jesus had done for them, and was continuing to do for them by his intercession and mediation at the right hand of God.

Thus, says the writer, offer these sacrifices of praise to God continually.

Hebrews 13:16

Here, the believers are being reminded of their duties to one another and to others in the sight of God. Believers are not saved *by* good works, but they are saved *unto* good works: i.e, they are saved by the grace of God so that they may live a life well pleasing to him, both by godly conduct and by being of use or service to others in their need. Thus, here, the writer exhorts these believers to remember their calling and the implications of that call. They were not to neglect to do good. (Matt. 25:35-40; Luke 6:35-36; Acts 9:36; Gal. 6:10; 2 Thess. 3:13)

One can commit sins by omission as well as sins of commission. Neglect, or failure to do the good we ought to do, is sin in God's sight. Thus, as they were able—as it lay within their power—these believers were to show their love for God by showing love, in a practical manner, to each other and to strangers in need.

Let us remember the Good Samaritan. Here, a despised Samaritan comes to the aid of a Jewish man who had been set upon by robbers. Other Jewish people had passed him by—including religious leaders. However, this Samaritan stopped to help the wounded Jewish man, bound up his wounds, and made provision for his care. (Luke 10:30-37)

So, likewise, those who belong to the Lord Jesus must care for one another, and share with those in need—whether they be other believers or total strangers and adherents of other faiths or cultures, as was the Jewish man in relation to the Samaritan. (Heb. 13:2)

These are the kind of sacrifices that are pleasing to God—sacrifices of heartfelt praise and worship; sacrifices of ourselves and of our goods in order to help or share with others in their need. Together with a godly life, exhibiting an ever-increasing fruit of the Spirit, good works glorify the name of the Lord. For, when done in the name of Christ, they show something of the gracious work of Christ within the believer's life and of that person's love for the Father and the Son.

However, anyone claiming to belong to Christ, while void of genuine concern for, and good works toward others, demonstrates that his faith is not genuine. For, without works, faith is dead: i.e., it is a non-existent, a false or a pretended faith. (Jas. 2:14-26; 4:17)

Yet again, although a person performs ever so many good, upright and charitable deeds—if these good works are performed from a unregenerate and unsanctified heart and life—then they are of no avail in the sight of God. That person is still in his sins. (Isa. 64:6)

Pray for Spiritual Leaders

Hebrews 13:17-19

Hebrews 13:17

Now, the writer exhorts these Hebrew believers to obey their spiritual leaders. These leaders had been teaching God's Word to the Hebrews faithfully and consistently. They had been endeavouring to strengthen the believers in their faith, especially in view of the persecutions to which they were being subjected. Therefore, these spiritual leaders were to be obeyed: i.e., their teaching was to be followed, since it was the Word of God expounded or explained.

To resist these leaders while they were expounding and applying God's Word faithfully was to resist the Word of God, and therefore God himself. Therefore, it was necessary to submit to the authority of these leaders. However, it was not to the leaders or to the words of men that the believers were to submit. Rather, it was to the authority and claims of the Word of God. It was this holy, innerant and unchanging Word of God that these leaders were presenting to the church. (2 Thess. 2:13)

These spiritual leaders had been called of God to minister to his church. Therefore, they were responsible and accountable to God for every word that they spoke to the people and for every instruction that they provided them from the Word of God. They realised that God held them accountable for the welfare of the believers' souls. Should they fail to feed God's flock faithfully on the Word of life, or should they compromise or vary the teaching of God's Word in any way, then the Lord would hold them accountable for leading his people astray. This, of course, would mark these leaders as false teachers, and therefore not the appointed servants of God. (Acts 20:28-31) However, the Hebrew believers were abundantly blessed insofar as their spiritual leaders were true and faithful teachers of God's Word. These faithful men sought to present that Word in all its living power to the hearts and lives of God's redeemed people.

Therefore, by submitting to these godly men (or, rather, to the teaching of these godly men), the Hebrew believers were honouring the Lord and bringing great joy and gladness to the hearts of their spiritual leaders. This, in itself, brought blessing on the believers: for, in being obedient to their leaders, they were being obedient to the Word of the Lord. By submitting to their leaders, they were submitting to the teaching of God's Word. By accepting correction or chastisement at the hands of their leaders, they were accepting the loving discipline of their Father in heaven. (1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:7)

Hebrews 13:18

Those who teach God's Word faithfully are especially vulnerable to attack. Such attacks may arise from the evil one himself, and from those people who would misrepresent the words or character of their teachers. Such are those who would maliciously, and without foundation, malign the character or reputation of certain spiritual leaders in order to discredit them. The reason for such evil actions may be that these people resent hearing the truth of God's Word from the lips of these faithful and godly men, or by their application of God's truth to the lives of the people (which application ag-grieves certain carnal or ungodly individuals) or by the godly example of these spiritual leaders' lives.

In addition to this, the spiritual leaders were often assailed or buffeted by the world for their testi-mony to Christ. As we know, some of the apostles suffered intense persecution at the hands of the world. They endured not only physical and psychological abuse of their persons, but also bodily dep-ri-vations, such as hunger, thirst, and the lack of many other necessities of life—all for the sake of the Gospel and for their faithfulness to God and to his Word.

Therefore, the writer exhorts the Hebrew believers to pray for their spiritual guides or leaders. He encourages them to remember these leaders daily and hourly before the Lord, that they might be upheld by his almighty hands and delivered from all evil.

Thus, too, we ought to pray for our spiritual leaders. We should pray that they would remain ever faithful to the Lord and to his Word. We ought to pray that God will grant them daily strength and grace to stand by his truth and to feed his flock only and always on the innerant and unchanging Word of God. We ought to pray, too, that God will keep his servants and deliver them in times of temptation, difficulty, perplexity, trials, and sorrows. Again, we should pray that the Lord would grant to them an understanding heart and a receptive mind as they study and meditate upon God's holy Word, seeking to know how best to teach and apply that Word to the hearts and lives of God's re-deemed people. (Rom. 15:30; Eph. 16:18-20; Col. 4:3)

Thus, knowing that they were being upheld by the prayers of the saints, these spiritual leaders could continue teaching and applying the Word of God with a clear conscience, both in the sight of God and in the sight of men. They knew that—although the world, carnal Christians and false professors of the faith would malign and despise them and their teaching—yet, they were being faithful to God. They were presenting God's Word truthfully to his church. Thus, they were acting honourably toward God and men, in spite of some people's attitude or behaviour toward the truth of God's Word and toward the true and faithful servants of that Word.

Hebrews 13:19

Now, the writer exhorts the believers to pray with all earnestness for one leader in particular, as we note from the change from the plural ('we') of verse 18 to the singular ('I') of this verse.

The writer of this letter had been detained or delayed somewhere by circumstances outside his con-trol. Possibly, he had been imprisoned for the cause of Christ and for the preaching of the Word—as was the case with the apostle Paul. Thus, he beseeches the Hebrew believers to pray very especially that he may be restored to them as soon as possible and as soon as God ordained. Granted, the be-lievers were benefiting spiritually from this leader's letter to them and from his previous teaching while yet with them. Nevertheless, he is anxious to be among them again, so that he may continue to teach them the Word of the Lord in person, and guide God's flock faithfully in accordance with his commission as a servant of the Lord and a shepherd of his flock.

Therefore, also, the Lord's people today should pray for their pastors and other spiritual leaders when they are absent from them, or prevented by unforeseen circumstances from attending upon their duties in person. We ought to pray that the Lord will continue to bless their ministry where they are, and that they will yet be a blessing to the local church to which God has called them, both by their previous teaching and by their restoration—in God's will—to that church.

Benediction

Hebrews 13:20-21

Hebrews 13:20

Now may the God of peace...

God alone is the source or author of peace. Predominately, this refers to peace between God and his redeemed people achieved through the blood of the cross, effecting reconciliation and peace for those who formerly were at enmity with God and he with them. God, however, has established peace between himself and his people. (Rom. 5:1; Col. 1:20)

Again, because of the forgiveness of their sins, God has created the sense of deep, lasting and permanent peace within the hearts of all his redeemed and holy people. This is the peace that the world can neither give nor take away. It is the peace of God, and God's peace transcends and overcomes all other kinds or degrees of peace. This deep peace, pervading the hearts or minds of believers, can never diminish or pass away, so long as they continue to walk with the Lord in faith and obedience. (Phil. 4:7; Col. 3:15)

...who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus...

Peace could be established between sinners and God and in the hearts of his redeemed people only if the Sacrifice that made peace through the blood of the cross were to be raised again from death. Thus, it was essential that the Lord Jesus not only lay down his life as a sacrifice for sin, but also that he take it up again. Only by his resurrection, ascension and exaltation could peace be established and applied. Therefore, on the third day, and according to the Scriptures, the Lord rose again from the tomb. (Acts 13:29-30; Rom. 4:25)

The implication of this verse is that the Father raised his Son from the dead. However, this presents no difficulties. Jesus was in the Father, and the Father was in his Son. Whatever the Father willed or purposed, the Son also was said to will or purpose—for the Son could do (i.e., would do) nothing apart from, or independently of, his Father. Therefore, when the Lord Jesus declared that he would arise from death on the third day, we can understand with equal propriety that he arose again with his own power or at his own will and command, or that the Father raised his Son by his own power or by his own will and command. The will and purposes of Father, Son and Holy Spirit are inseparable. Whatever one member of the Trinity is said to will, purpose or accomplish the other members of the Trinity also will, purpose or accomplish. They are one God in three divine Persons: not only one in essence or being, but also one in will or purpose. (John 10:30; 14:6-11; 17:11,21; 1 John 5:7)

...the great shepherd of the sheep...

The Lord Jesus had described himself as the Good Shepherd—the One who would lay down his life for his sheep. This indeed he did; and because of this sacrifice of the Shepherd for his sheep, the Lord has gathered into one fold all those sheep for whom he died. The sheep, of course, are the people of God. Regardless of their nationality, colour, creed, position or standing in society, the Good

Shepherd searches for the lost sheep among sinful mankind and brings them back to the safety of his fold—the fold of the redeemed people and church of God. (John 10:11-16; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4)

Those whom the Lord has sought and brought back to the fold become his sheep for all eternity. Therefore, and since his exaltation to glory, he who is the Good Shepherd is also the Great Shepherd of the sheep. From his exalted throne on high, he continues to watch over every member of his flock. He feeds them and leads them to green pastures. He guards them and carries the lambs (babes in Christ) in his arms. (Ps. 23:1-6; 80:1; Isa. 40:11) They are his redeemed flock. He purchased them with his own life-blood. Therefore, he will protect them with his almighty and sovereign power. Thus, the Lord Jesus was able to declare unequivocally:

John 10:27-30 (ESV)

(27) "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

(28) I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. (29) My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

(30) "I and the Father are one."

...by the blood of the eternal covenant...

There could be no peace with God without the blood of the atoning sacrifice. There could be no redeemed people or church of God without the blood of the atoning sacrifice. For without the shedding of blood, there is no remission (of sins). (Heb. 9:22) Therefore, it was imperative that blood be shed for the sins of the people if they were to be forgiven and reconciled to God; or if the lost sheep were to be found and brought into the fold (God's church and kingdom).

Thus—acting as both the High Priest who offered the sacrifice and the atoning sacrifice itself—the Lord Jesus presented his pure and perfect life upon the altar and shed his righteous blood that men and women might be redeemed. This once-for-all sacrifice of atonement for the sins of his people is what constitutes the blood of the eternal covenant. Unlike the old covenant sacrifices, which were temporary and typical, the new covenant sacrifice is permanent (or perpetual) and anti-typical. It fulfilled to the utmost everything that the old covenant sacrifices and offerings foreshadowed and pre-figured. Thus, the sacrifice of the sinless spotless Lamb of God established not only a new covenant between God and his redeemed people but also an everlasting covenant: a covenant of grace and peace through the atoning blood of the Lord Jesus. This atoning sacrifice need never be repeated, for its efficacy or merits can never diminish or pass away. It remains effectual forever. While time remains, this once-for-all sacrifice will be the only means through which sinners can be redeemed and reconciled to God.

Hebrews 13:21

Thus far, in this magnificent benediction, the writer has elucidated something of the blessings that God has bestowed upon his people because of the merits of Christ's blood and subsequent exaltation to glory. Now, in verse 21, he prays that God may apply the benefits and blessings of that redemption to the hearts and lives of his people.

...equip you with everything good that you may do his will...

The Lord who called a people to himself from among all nations on earth has done so for a reason. This reason is that they may live to the Lord's honour and glory; or—as the Westminster Catechism declares—'*Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him for ever*'. (WCF, Larger Catechism Q/A 1)

Therefore, when the Lord Jesus calls anyone to himself, he imparts to that person not only the gift of the Holy Spirit to seal and sanctify him and to produce the fruit of the Spirit, but also a specific spiritual gift (or gifts) with which to honour God and to be of service to his church and to society. However, the believer must recognise that God is the one who provides them with these gifts. He is the one who equips (or furnishes or supplies) his people with everything necessary to do his will. (1 Cor. 12:4; 14:12)

God's will is accomplished by being faithful and obedient to the teaching of his Word. It is accomplished by bringing forth in ever-increasing measure the fruit of the Spirit, and thereby being transformed daily ever more into the likeness of Christ. (Gal. 5:22-23) God's will is accomplished also by utilising or applying all the gifts, talents or abilities that he has bestowed upon his people—whether in the form of natural or acquired abilities, or in the form of spiritual gifts. All of these—whether natural, acquired or spiritual—come to us either as a gift of God's providence or of his grace. Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity, all of these gifts, talents or abilities are to be used to do God's will, and to glorify God's name.

...working in us that which is pleasing in his sight...

This phrase confirms what has been said above. God has equipped his people to produce good fruit, and to use their gifts or abilities to do his will. As we obey God in this respect, he works within us to produce the good that he has purposed to do for us, and which is well pleasing to him. He does this by his Holy Spirit, who sanctifies us and creates within us the desire to serve God honourably and faithfully, as we are able and according to our several abilities. Thus, by bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit and by using our spiritual gifts for the benefit of the church, we are doing that which is pleasing to God. This, indeed, is one of the purposes for which he has called his people and set them apart for himself: that, by their good works, they may serve and honour the name of the Lord, and be a blessing to the church, to society more generally, and to a world of lost mankind through their living witness for Christ. (Eph. 2:10; 2 Tim. 3:17; Titus 3:8; 1 Pet. 2:12)

...through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Of course, none of these things would be possible without the life and work of the eternal Son of God—our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Everything that we endeavour to do for God, or accomplish in his name, can be done only in and through the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Although multitudes of people around the world attempt to please God or to win his favour by means of their own forms of religion (but without faith in Christ), they cannot succeed. God will not accept the good deeds or charitable acts of anyone who does not belong to his Son. To the most high and holy God, these good deeds are considered as 'filthy rags'—because they have been offered from a sin-contaminated and unforgiven life; a life that is still at enmity with God through 'wicked works'. (Isa. 64:6; cf. Col. 1:21)

Thus, those who endeavour to do the will of God can do so only through faith in his Son. Without faith in Christ, it is impossible to please God. Therefore, everything that the believer accomplishes for God in his life, he owes to the love of Christ for him and to the merits of his life, work, sacrificial and atoning death, resurrection and present mediation and intercession in heaven for the believer.

For this reason, the writer declares—to *whom* [Jesus Christ] *be glory for ever and ever*. That is, to his Person, ought to be ascribed by his redeemed people everlasting praise, honour and glory. Such glory is due to him throughout the ages of eternity, for he has loved us with an everlasting love and has washed us from our sins by his blood. (Rev. 1:5)

All glory, therefore, belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He has reconciled sinful men and women to God. He has redeemed them to the Father by his own righteous life and by his own perfect and sinless sacrifice of atonement on the cross of Calvary. Now, the exalted Lord Jesus intercedes for them in heaven. One day, the Lord Jesus will return in his glory, together with his holy angels, to gather his people home. Ultimately, and with his redeemed and glorified people, he will rule over the new creation, in which righteousness dwells. (2 Pet. 3:13)

Therefore, the writer can say of the Lord Jesus ... *'to whom be glory—everlasting praise, honour, worship and adoration—for ever and ever...*

...Amen.

So let it be. This is the same word so often used by the Lord Jesus when about to declare or announce a solemn truth: Amen, Amen (or, Verily, verily, or Truly, truly), I say unto you...

The word is designed to arrest the attention of the hearers, and to fix their minds on the importance and seriousness of the words that are about to follow. When used, as here, at the end of a sentence, it carries the meaning of complete agreement with or affirmation of the foregoing words (as here).

Everything, therefore, that the writer has just expressed in this benediction is deemed to be utterly true, worthy of the utmost attention, and to be received as the word of the Lord, in common with all other Holy Scripture.

Final Remarks

Hebrews 13:22-25

Hebrews 13:22

Now, before closing his letter, the writer makes one final appeal to his readers. He exhorts these believers most earnestly to give the utmost attention to everything that he has just said in the letter. However, by making this appeal, the writer expects the Hebrew Christians not only to read the letter, or to listen to it being read, but also to believe its promises and assurances and to obey its teaching.

As much as any other part of Holy Scripture, this letter is the inspired and infallible Word of God. Therefore, what the writer is saying to the believers is what God is saying to them. Furthermore, to neglect or disregard the contents of the inspired Word of God would be to neglect or disregard the Lord God himself, Jesus Christ his Son, and the Holy Spirit of God. This, however, would come very close to treating the Word of God with contempt, to rejecting the Son of God, and to despising the Spirit of grace and glory. The believer cannot select which parts of God's Word he will accept and which he will reject. He must accept the entire body of Holy Scripture as the inspired, infallible, and unchanging Word of God if he is to prove faithful to God and to his Word.

Nevertheless, although these things are true, the writer does not explicitly command his hearers or readers to heed and obey God's Word. Rather, he appeals to them with love, warmth and compassion, beseeching them as brothers in Christ to heed and obey the contents of the letter: for by so doing, they are heeding and obeying the words and will of Christ their Redeemer.

In this verse, the word translated 'briefly' (KJV, 'in few words'; Gk., βραχύς) is a word that can mean 'short' or 'brief' (in time or duration). Perhaps the writer's meaning was not so much that he had written a brief or short letter, but rather that he had written a letter that would engage their attention for only a brief or short period of time (comparatively, and in relation to other matters) while they read it or heard it being read aloud.

Hebrews 13:23

The reference here to Timothy might imply that the apostle Paul was the author of this letter. Paul and Timothy were very closely associated in the Lord's work, and it seems unlikely that Timothy would have close associations with another servant of the Lord at the same time. Furthermore, here the writer refers to Timothy as 'brother'. Paul used this term frequently in relation to Timothy when they were working together.

Again, the writer states that Timothy might pay them a visit. However, Timothy is most likely to have visited those churches, fellowships, or groups of believers where the apostle Paul had ministered or to which Paul had sent him.

When the writer says that Timothy had been released, this may imply that he had been released from pressing duties and responsibilities concerning certain other churches, and was now at liberty to visit the Hebrews. However, another interpretation is that Timothy had been released from imprisonment (for the sake of the Gospel), and was now free to travel abroad. Commentators are divided about the correct interpretation of Timothy's 'release' (ESV), or 'being set at liberty' (KJV).

Hebrews 13:24

The writer exhorts the Hebrew Christians to extend greetings to each of their spiritual leaders; i.e., to all those who shared some part in pastoring and guiding the Hebrew fellowship (cf. v.7). In addition, the writer exhorts the recipient of this letter to extend greetings to all the Hebrew believers (saints), and to all the people of God more generally whom this letter might reach.

Next, the writer sends greetings to the Hebrew believers from those Christians who resided in Italy. This would seem to imply that the writer himself was in Italy at this time. We know that the apostle Paul was being held in custody in Italy during this period. Therefore, this again seems to lend support to the theory that Paul was indeed the author of this letter. This is especially true since Timothy has just been mentioned—Paul's close companion in the Lord's work. Nevertheless, the evidence in Paul's favour is both insufficient and inconclusive.

Hebrews 13:25

Finally, the writer extends his parting blessing on the Hebrew believers. However, it is no ordinary or conventional blessing, but one that invokes the grace of God upon every one of his redeemed people. Thus, the writer is beseeching the Lord to impart to these persecuted believers his divine favour and to keep them secure by almighty power, and in his everlasting love and mercy.

All the Hebrew believers are included in this blessing, including the waverers or doubters among them. However, it is assumed that, by God's grace and by the assurances and encouragements of this letter, they will stand, and that they will persevere in their faith unto the end.

Conclusion

Thus, we reach the end of this most important and valuable letter to the Hebrew Christians. In it, the writer has demonstrated the superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, over angels, Moses, the Levitical priesthood, the temple sacrifices and service, and over every other aspect of the Jewish religion.

However, the writer has demonstrated also that the Lord Jesus Christ did not come to abolish these Old Testament institutions. Rather, he came to fulfil them by being himself both the Great High Priest and the atoning Sacrifice, by fulfilling everything that the Old Testament ordinances and sacrifices had typified and foreshadowed, and by fulfilling everything that had been written concerning him in the Law and the Prophets. Only when all these things had been fulfilled completely, and the Lord Jesus had ascended to the right hand of his Father in glory, did he abrogate or rescind the ceremonial law, or the laws of ordinances and sacrifices laid down by God in the Old Testament Scriptures.

However, we should observe that the Lord Jesus did not abrogate or rescind the moral law or the Ten Commandments. Rather, in the Gospels, he corrected the mistaken interpretation and misapplications of the scribes and Pharisees concerning the moral law or law of commandments. There, the Lord makes it very plain that this Law can be broken not only by deed, but also by thought, disposition of the mind, inclination of the heart, or by a word or gesture. (Matt. Ch. 5-7)