

Hebrews

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Hebrews 1

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in *His* Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. 3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high; 4 having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they. 5 For to which of the angels did He ever say,

"THOU ART MY SON,
TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN THEE"?

And again,

"I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM
AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME"?

6 And when He again brings the first-born into the world, He says,

"AND LET ALL THE ANGELS OF GOD WORSHIP HIM."

7 And of the angels He says,

"WHO MAKES HIS ANGELS WINDS,
AND HIS MINISTERS A FLAME OF FIRE."

8 But of the Son *He* says,

"THY THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER,
AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM.

9 "THOU HAST LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATED LAWLESSNESS;
THEREFORE GOD, THY GOD, HATH ANOINTED THEE
WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE THY COMPANIONS."

10 And,

"THOU, LORD, IN THE BEGINNING DIDST LAY THE FOUNDATION OF
THE EARTH,

AND THE HEAVENS ARE THE WORKS OF THY HANDS;

11 THEY WILL PERISH, BUT THOU REMAINEST;

AND THEY ALL WILL BECOME OLD AS A GARMENT, 1

2 AND AS A MANTLE THOU WILT ROLL THEM UP;

AS A GARMENT THEY WILL ALSO BE CHANGED.

BUT THOU ART THE SAME,

AND THY YEARS WILL NOT COME TO AN END."

13 But to which of the angels has He ever said,

"SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE THINE ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL
FOR THY FEET"?

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

The God who reveals Himself in the Bible is a God who speaks. We are told here in verses 1 and 2 that He has spoken, to whom He has spoken, and how He has spoken. In the past, He spoke to the fathers, the ancestors of the Jews of the time. He

spoke to them “in the prophets.” The word of God came through human spokesmen. He spoke to the prophets and told them what to say. We can see how this worked in this passage from Jeremiah:

Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations." Then I said, "Alas, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, Because I am a youth." But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' Because everywhere I send you, you shall go, And all that I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, For I am with you to deliver you," declares the LORD. Then the LORD stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, To pluck up and to break down, To destroy and to overthrow, To build and to plant." (Jeremiah 1:4-10.)

Peter also explained how this worked in 2 Peter 1:20-21, “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” As God spoke, the prophets spoke, and when they spoke, they spoke the words from God.

In the past, God spoke “in many portions and in many ways.” He doled out His revelation piecemeal. He did not say everything He had to say in one big address to one prophet at one time, but gave it little by little, some here and some there. Some of it came through Moses, some through Joshua, some through Samuel, etc. He used many different means to speak to His prophets. He spoke to Moses in a burning bush. He spoke through dreams and visions, and even once spoke through a donkey! (See Numbers 22:28-30.) God is a God of infinite variety, who does not always do things the same way. Just because He spoke once to Moses using a burning bush does not mean that we should go looking for God wherever shrubs are being burned. God uses many means to speak and to work and to reveal His will.

There is a contrast in verse 2 with verse 1. God spoke in many different ways to many different prophets in the past, but now, in these last days, He has spoken in His Son. The days in which we are living are the “last days,” and in these last days God has given us the pinnacle of His revelation in His Son. Jesus is the fulfillment of many of the promises and prophecies spoken of through the former prophets. He is the culmination of the word of God and is in fact the Word of God Himself. John 1:1 tells us, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John 1:14 says, “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Jesus was and is the Word of God incarnate. What He says the Father says. The truth that comes from His lips is the truth that comes from the Father's lips. Jesus Himself insisted on this many times as recorded in John's gospel. In John 12:44-50 we read:

And Jesus cried out and said, "He who believes in Me does not believe in Me, but in Him who sent Me. And he who beholds Me beholds the One who sent Me. I have come as light into the world, that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness. And if anyone hears My sayings, and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day. For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say, and what to speak. And I know that His commandment is eternal life;

therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me."

The Father told Jesus what to say. Jesus did not speak of Himself, but the Father in Him spoke through Him. Jesus never said anything that was not from the Father. Jesus was not just another good human teacher with some good ideas. He claimed that His words and teachings came directly from God and that God was speaking in Him and through Him. To hear Him is to hear God. To believe in Him is to believe in the One who sent Him. To see Him is to see the One who sent Him. Many today want to believe in God (whom they also want to define as they wish) without believing in Jesus. But Jesus said that if you reject Him and His sayings you are rejecting the God who sent Him. You cannot have God apart from Jesus, because "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19a).

Verse 2 also tells us two things about the Son of God. First, that He has been appointed heir of all things. As God's "first-born" (verse 6) He is entitled to inherit everything. It is an accomplished fact that Jesus has been made heir of everything. In fact, Jesus said that he had already inherited all things from the Father, "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." (Matthew 11:27.) The Father bequeathed everything to His Son, and has already given everything to Him. In saying this, we do not mean in any sense that the Father is going to die or is going to retire and leave the Son with everything. Father and Son are one, and what belongs to the one belongs to the other.

Second, the Son of God is the one through whom God made the world. He is the agent of creation. Colossians 1:16 says, "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created by Him and for Him." John 1:3 says, "All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." The Greek term for "world" in Hebrews 1:2 is *aiónas*, which means "ages." Through Jesus time as well as matter was created. All things belong to Jesus because He is the Son of God, the heir of the Father, and also because He is the creator of all things. Everything owes its existence to Jesus Christ, and He has the right to do as He pleases with all things.

We learn more about Jesus in verse 3. We learn that He is the "radiance of His glory." The word for "radiance" is the Greek term *apaugasma*, "brightness, to shine out."¹ He is saying that the glory of God shines out of Jesus. This is not a new idea, but echoes what is said about Jesus in John 1:4-5, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." Jesus Himself said, "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12b) and, "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 9:5). We have already cited the passage from John 12 above where Jesus says that He has come as light into the world. What does this mean in practical terms? Does it mean that if you saw Jesus on this earth as a man, that He would have had some sort of glow about Him? Does it mean that He had a halo? No, I don't think that this was a physical manifestation of

1 Thayers Greek Lexicon

light, but that this is obviously a metaphor. When you read the gospels you get no indication that Jesus' appearance was radically different from any other man's. There was only one exception to this, and that was when He was transfigured before Peter, James and John as recorded in Matthew 17:1-2, "And six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light." This was the one occasion before His death and resurrection that these three apostles had the privilege of getting a glimpse of His divine glory. Otherwise, as we are told in Isaiah, Jesus "has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him" (Isaiah 53:2b).

How, then, did the glory of God radiate out of Jesus? John says in John 1:14, "we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." He saw the glory of the Father in Jesus in the grace and truth manifested in Jesus. He exhibited the grace of God in His dealings with people. He was always truthful. There was no falsehood in Him. Additionally, in John 2:11, after Jesus had changed water into wine at the wedding in Cana, John commented, "This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him." His glory was seen in the miraculous signs that He performed; in this incident, in His many healings, in walking on the water and stilling the storm and in raising the dead. Just before He raised Lazarus from the dead, Jesus said to Martha, "Did I not say to you, if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" (John 11:40). When Jesus said, "Lazarus, come forth!" and the dead man came out of the tomb, all who were gathered there saw the glory of God. They saw the power and authority of the Father exercised by the Son.

Jesus is also "the exact representation of His nature." The Greek term is *charakter*, from which we get our word "character." A.T. Robertson comments on this phrase:

[*Carakthr*] is an old word from [*carasso*], to cut, to scratch, to mark. It first was the agent (note ending [=thr]) or tool that did the marking, then the mark or impress made, the exact reproduction, a meaning clearly expressed by [*caragma*] (Ac 17:29; Re 13:16f.). Menander had already used (Moffatt) [*carakthr*] in the sense of our "character." The word occurs in the inscriptions for "person" as well as for "exact reproduction" of a person. The word [*upostasis*] for the being or essence of God "is a philosophical rather than a religious term" (Moffatt). Etymologically it is the sediment or foundation under a building (for instance). In 11:1 [*ypostasis*] is like the "title-deed" idea found in the papyri. Athanasius rightly used Heb 1:1-4 in his controversy with Arius. Paul in Php 2:5-11 pictures the real and eternal deity of Christ free from the philosophical language here employed. But even Paul's simpler phrase [*morp^h teou*] (the form of God) has difficulties of its own. The use of [*Logos*] in Joh 1:1-18 is parallel to Heb 1:1-4.²

Jesus represents exactly the nature and character of God, His being and essence.

2 Robertson, A.T., Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament

He is a picture of the essence of God. This is why the trinitarian creeds say that the Son is one essence with the Father. They share the same basic foundational nature as God. This is a clear declaration of the deity of Jesus.

The next thing in verse 3 turns from who Jesus is to what He does. He “upholds all things by the word of His power.” The word means that He bears or carries all things. It is a present active participle, which means that He is continually upholding all things at all times. This is one of the functions of the Son of God, to continually carry all things. How does He do this? He does it “by the word of His power.” By His powerful word He upholds everything. He speaks and it is done. This is how He created all things and this is how He sustains everything. God does what He does by speaking. He speaks and what He commands happens. We see this in Genesis 1 when God speaks and says “Let there be...” and the things He commands come into being. We see it also when Jesus speaks and stills the storm in Mark 4:39. If Jesus were not right now upholding all things by the word of His power, all things would cease to exist.

Finally, verse 3 also tells us that the priestly mission of Jesus on earth was to make “purification of sins.” Once He had accomplished this, He sat down at the right hand of God. Hebrews will tell us much about the priestly function of Jesus and also about how He is not only our great High Priest, but also our great King. Here we have both pictured in this one verse in what He has done. He has provided for the cleansing of our sins by His sacrifice of Himself, and He has seated Himself in the place of authority as King. When He sat down at the right hand of the Father after His ascension, He fulfilled Psalm 110:1, “The Lord says to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.’” This verse is quoted six times in the New Testament, twice in Hebrews. We will discuss it some more when we get to verse 13.

In the first 3 verses of Hebrews we have learned quite a bit about Jesus. We have learned that He is the Son of God, that He is the One through Whom the Father has spoken in these last days, that He has inherited all things, that He created the world, that He radiates the glory of the Father, that He depicts the essence of God exactly, that He sustains everything by His powerful word, that He has made purification for our sins, and that He has taken His seat in glory beside the Father as King. This forms a strong foundation for the author's argument in the book that Jesus is greater than all others and His covenant is a superior covenant.

This brings us to the first major assertion of the book, that Jesus is better than the angels. He is better because He has “inherited a more excellent name than they.” He is the “Son” of God, not just a messenger of God. The point is proved in a string of Biblical quotes in verses 5-14.

Explaining the “better name” of the Son, he quotes Psalm 2:7 and asks, “For to which of the angels did He ever say, 'Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee'?” God never said this to any of the angels, but in the great Messianic Psalm, Psalm 2, He says this to His Son. The second quote in verse 5 comes from 2 Samuel 7:14a, “I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me.” The quote comes from a passage where the prophet Nathan is telling David about the promise of God for his descendants. The Lord said to David:

“When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom.

He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took *it* away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever." (2 Samuel 7:12-16.)

The immediate fulfillment of this promise was in Solomon, which is why in the context it says, "when he commits iniquity, I will correct him...". But the passage has application to Jesus, the unique Son of God as well, who fully and finally fulfilled the promise. The eternal kingdom belongs to Jesus, the Son of God. Again, God never said this to any of the angels. Jesus holds a unique position as the only begotten Son of God.

When the Father brought His "first-born" into the world, He commanded that the angels of God should worship Him. A.T. Robertson points out that the quote in verse 6 comes from the Septuagint (the Greek) version of Deuteronomy 32:43, but is not in the Hebrew. The Septuagint says, "Rejoice, ye heavens, with him, and let all the angels of God worship him; rejoice ye Gentiles, with his people, and let all the sons of God strengthen themselves in him; for he will avenge the blood of his sons, and he will render vengeance, and recompense justice to his enemies, and will reward them that hate him; and the Lord shall purge the land of his people." The same basic idea is found in Psalm 97:7, "Let all those be ashamed who serve graven images, Who boast themselves of idols; Worship Him, all you gods." If Jesus were merely an angel, the others would not have been commanded to worship Him. The angels who announced His coming in Luke 2 honored Him as the "Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

The title of "first-born" gives Jesus the preeminence as well. Paul makes the same point about Jesus in Colossians 1:15, "And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation." He then goes on to say that He is the first-born from the dead in Colossians 1:18, "He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything." Jesus is not an only child, however, as Paul says in Romans 8:29, "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren." To say that He is the "first-born" is to say that He has first place. He is the first and primary Son of God, and is greater than all others in the family.

God says something else about the angels. He calls them "winds" and "a flame of fire." The quote comes from Psalm 104:4. The word for "wind" and "spirit" is the same word. The angels are spirit beings. They are messengers and ministers of God. They do His bidding and carry out His purposes.

By contrast, verses 8 and 9 tell us that the Father says of the Son, "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy companions." This comes from Psalm 45:5-7. The angels are ministers, but the Son is a ruler. He holds a throne that is eternal. He reigns alongside the Father forever. His reign is a righteous reign. He rules in righteousness because He loves righteousness and hates lawlessness. He

does not decide or do what is wrong. He does what is right as He rules. He will not make a mistake. He will not do what is unjust. He will condemn the guilty and acquit the innocent. He cannot be bribed or corrupted in any way. He hates lawlessness, which means He hates sin, since "sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). This is something we must realize about Jesus, that He is not soft on sin. He loves righteousness and hates sin. Yes, He is compassionate and gracious and forgiving, but sin and lawlessness grieve Him. He will judge sinners who refuse to repent. The wicked will be condemned by Jesus. He made this clear in His own teaching. For example, in His parable of the dragnet in Matthew 13:47-50 He pointed out that under His rule in His kingdom the wicked would be removed from among the righteous and cast into a "furnace of fire." It was His consistent teaching that He makes a distinction between the righteous and the wicked and that the wicked cannot continue to live among the righteous in His kingdom.

Because Jesus loves righteousness and hates lawlessness, God has anointed Him with the "oil of gladness" and has exalted Him above all others. The Father was glad to do this because He is pleased with the Son. The Father said this of the Son at His baptism, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (Matthew 3:17). The Son is the one who always pleases the Father.

The next quote about the Son in the author's string in verses 10-12 comes from Psalm 102:25-27:

Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Thy hands; They will perish, but Thou remainest; and they all will become old as a garment, and as a mantle Thou wilt roll them up; as a garment they will also be changed; But Thou art the same, and Thy years will not come to an end.

Again this points to the Son as the creator of all things. Verse 10 clearly echoes Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This is another clear declaration of the deity of the Son of God. Verses 11 and 12 draw a contrast between the creation and the Creator. The heavens and earth will perish, but He will remain. The creation will become old like a garment, will be rolled up and changed, but He is the same forever and will never pass away. He transcends the creation. One day the heavens and earth will be rolled up and put away and there will be a new heaven and new earth, but Jesus will still be the same. All creation is temporal, but He is eternal.

The author's last rhetorical question in this chapter is in verse 13, "But to which of the angels has He ever said, 'Sit at My right hand, until I make thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.?' " The implication is that He never said this to any of the angels, only to the Son. Only the Son has been invited to sit at the right hand of the Father and rule with Him. Only the Son has been promised that His enemies will be made His footstool. The Son rules now alongside the Father, and one day His enemies will be subjected to Him.

As we mentioned above, the verse from Psalm 110:1 is quoted 6 times in the New Testament. Jesus Himself quoted this verse in Matthew 22:41-46:

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, "What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?" They said to Him, "*The son* of David." He said to them,

"Then how does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying, 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT THINE ENEMIES BENEATH THY FEET"'? "If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his son?" And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question.

Jesus stumped the Pharisees with this question. If the Christ is the son of David, how then can He also be the Lord of David? If He is David's son, then why does David call Him "Lord"? Jesus was pointing to both the deity and the humanity of the Christ in this passage. The Christ is fully God, but also fully man. He is both the descendant of David and the pre-existent creator of David! This is similar to Mary's situation. Jesus was both the son of Mary and the Lord of Mary. In fact, Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, made reference to this when Mary came to visit her. She asked, "And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43.) Jesus is not only fully God, but He is also fully one of us. There is no sense in which He is not fully human. He was not some sort of phantom or spirit who only appeared to be human. He identified with us completely.

So what about the angels then? Who are they? What do they do? What is their function? The author says, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?" The angels are spirit beings, not corporeal, though they can appear in human form. They are ministers and servants to those who will inherit salvation. God sends them out to do what He needs done.

Hebrews 2

For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away *from it*. 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, 4 God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

5 For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking. 6 But one has testified somewhere, saying, "WHAT IS MAN, THAT THOU REMEMBEREST HIM? OR THE SON OF MAN, THAT THOU ART CONCERNED ABOUT HIM? 7 "THOU HAST MADE HIM FOR A LITTLE WHILE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS; THOU HAST CROWNED HIM WITH GLORY AND HONOR, AND HAST APPOINTED HIM OVER THE WORKS OF THY HANDS; 8 THOU HAST PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET." For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him. 9 But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, *namely*, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. 10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. 11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one *Father*; for which reason He is

not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying, "I WILL PROCLAIM THY NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING THY PRAISE." 13 And again, "I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM." And again, "BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME." 14 Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; 15 and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. 16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. 17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

Since in these last days God has spoken in His Son, whom the author has shown is greater than the angels, he points out that we must "pay much closer attention to what we have heard." Since it is the Son through whom He spoke, what has been said is worthy of closer attention. Since He is greater than the angels, the revelation that came through Him is greater than that which came through the angels, and is worthy of much closer attention. It is necessary that we pay close attention to what He has said. One could venture to say, then, that it is proper for us to pay closer attention to the New Testament than to the Old Testament. We must not neglect the Old Testament, of course, because it lays the foundation for the New. But the revelation through the Son carries more weight and importance than the revelation that came through angels.

There is also a warning in verse 1. There is a danger of drifting away from what we have heard from the Son. The word is used by Xenophon of a river flowing by.³ We may drift past the truth revealed by the Son and end up in dangerous waters. Jesus warned us to "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it." (Matthew 7:13-14.) It is easy to drift past the narrow gate offered by Jesus as we go along with everyone else in our culture. We must be diligent not to allow that to happen.

He continues to explain this in verses 2 and 3a. He asks, "For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" God spoke through the angels in the past, and that word spoken was "unalterable." The word means that it was steadfast, sure, fixed. It was like a concrete foundation that could not be moved or changed. As such, the word spoken through angels was reliable. You can build your life on it; you can trust it. It will not change or pass away. Jesus said of the scriptures, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:17-

³ Robertson, AT, Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament.

19.) The word that came through angels has not been abolished by Jesus, but fulfilled by Him. If you annul one of the least of the commandments, your position in the kingdom of heaven will be diminished.

Not only is the word spoken through the angels unalterable, but every transgression and disobedience of that word receives “a just recompense.” The word of the Old Testament is steadfast and sure and when we violate it, when we refuse to listen and to obey, we face a fair repayment. We will get what we deserve for refusing to obey God’s word. God’s judgment is just and fair. He does not punish the innocent nor does He acquit the guilty. He does not make mistakes in this regard. The penalties for our disobedience are completely fair and deserved. God will not cast anyone into the lake of fire who does not deserve to go there.

We should note that **every** transgression and **every** disobedience calls for a just repayment. Justice demands that every single crime be punished. People today seem to think that God should overlook violations of His law in ways that we would never tolerate in a human judge. If a judge routinely let convicted criminals go free with no penalty whatsoever, people would be outraged, and the judge would soon be removed. Yet this is what we expect of God. We expect Him to overlook our violations of His perfect law. We expect Him to let us get away with things like adultery, lying, disrespect toward our parents, coveting, idolatry, dishonoring Him, etc. We think that His love means that He should forget His justice. God is just and cannot and will not overlook our violations of His law. Exodus 34:7b says that “He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.”

The question is posed in verse 3a, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” This is the “then” portion of the conditional question. If the word that came through angels was reliable and those who ignored it were invariably punished, then how will we escape that “just recompense” if we neglect the message that came through the Son? The Greek term translated “neglect” is *ameleo*, which is a compound of *a*, a negative particle (“no, not”) and *melo*, “care” or to “care about.” If we do not care about the message that came through the Son, then we face an inescapable judgment. This is a dire warning! God expects us to listen to what He has said in His Son, and if we turn from it and ignore it, judgment and condemnation is certain!

What we neglect when we neglect the word God spoke through His Son is “a great salvation.” The message that came through the Son is good news! It is news of God’s salvation in Christ. It is the message that we have been saved from the wrath of God through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and that we can be forgiven our sins and reconciled to God through Him. It is the message that saves us if we believe it (1 Corinthians 15:1,2). If we neglect it, though, there is no other escape from wrath and condemnation.

Why is it, then, that people neglect the salvation that God offers in Christ? John explains in John 3:16-21:

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to

the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

People neglect God's salvation because they prefer the darkness to the light and don't want their evil deeds exposed. They hate the light in Christ because it exposes them. They are judged already. You don't have to do anything to be judged; just keep going along with the world. Just keep refusing to listen to what God has to say, and you are already judged. If you would like to escape judgment, then don't neglect God's great salvation offered in Christ. Turn from your sin and selfishness and trust in Christ, and you will escape God's wrath.

The message of God's "great salvation" was first spoken through the Lord. Jesus was the first to speak of this great salvation. The message was then confirmed by those who heard it from Him, and so it came to the author of Hebrews. The apostles had the role of passing on what they had heard from the Lord and making it firm. John said, "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life-- and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us-- what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:1-3) John proclaimed what he had seen and heard, and it was all about the eternal life that was manifested to he and the other apostles.

As the apostles confirmed the word of the Lord, the message of His salvation, God Himself bore witness along with them. Through signs, wonders, miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit He confirmed their message. He did this in the past when he confirmed the word of Moses to Pharaoh. He said, "But I will harden Pharaoh's heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt." (Exodus 7:3.) And so God used the staff of Moses and the ten plagues on Egypt as signs and wonders to pressure Pharaoh to release the Israelites. He performed signs and wonders for Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon to deliver Daniel from the lions and to show that Daniel was His man. Nebuchadnezzar said, "He delivers and rescues and performs signs and wonders In heaven and on earth, Who has *also* delivered Daniel from the power of the lions." (Daniel 6:27.) The gospel of John is a book of "signs" that are recorded so that we might believe in Jesus and have life in His name (John 20:30-31). Peter said that Jesus was "attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst" (Acts 2:22). These signs and wonders are done by the will of God. They are not conjured up on demand, but God does them when He is pleased to do so. Acts 14:3 tells us this about the ministry of Paul and Barnabas in Iconium, "Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands." If signs and wonders are to be done, they must be "granted" by God. Again we are told that this is the way that God testified along with the apostles. The signs and wonders and miracles are not ends in themselves, but are means God uses to confirm "the word of His grace" which must be believed by those who hear.

When it comes to signs, wonders and miracles, we must be careful, however.

There are counterfeit signs and wonders. Jesus warned about this in Mark 13:21-22, "And then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ'; or, 'Behold, He is there'; do not believe him; for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order, if possible, to lead the elect astray." The magicians in Egypt were able to duplicate some of the signs that Moses gave. Jesus also said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'" (Matthew 7:21-23.) Not all signs, wonders and miracles come from God and are legitimate divine works. Satan can counterfeit some of these things in order to deceive. This is why we must not simply believe every miracle worker who comes along. If their message is not in harmony with the word of God, then we must reject their message, no matter how powerful their works may be.

Incidentally, this passage tells us that the author of Hebrews could not have been the apostle Paul or any of the other apostles. Paul insisted that he heard the gospel directly from the Lord Himself. In Galatians 1:11-12 he writes, "For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ." The author of Hebrews says that he heard the message through those who heard it from the Lord.

Another reason that Jesus is superior to the angels is that the "world to come" has been subjected to Him and not to the angels. The new order that is coming has been put under the authority of the Son of God. The author quotes Psalm 8:4-6, "What is man, that Thou rememberest him? Or the son of man, that Thou art concerned about him? Thou has made him for a little while lower than the angels; Thou has crowned him with glory and honor, and hast appointed him over the works of Thy hands; Thou has put all things in subjection under his feet." The psalm is a reflection on both the lowliness and the exaltation of mankind, but the author here applies it to Jesus. Jesus is the pinnacle of mankind and the one to whom everything is made subject.

Though all things have been subjected to Jesus, we do not as yet see all things subjected to Him (verse 8). This is the paradox of the age in which we live. Everything has already been made subject to Jesus, but we do not see it in practice in this life. His kingdom has come, but not yet in fullness. Lost humanity and fallen angels are still in rebellion against Him. Jesus has been crowned King, but His enemies have not yet been made His footstool. This is why Jesus taught us to pray, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). The implication is that God's will is not carried out on earth like it is in heaven, but one day it will be a reality. When His kingdom comes in fullness, His will will be done on earth as it is in heaven. He will rule on earth as He rules in heaven. The Lord tells us why He has not yet exercised His full reign on the earth in 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." It is His patience that restrains His judgment. He has not yet come to reign because there are still more people who need to come to repentance and faith in Jesus.

We do not yet see all things subjected to Jesus, but we do see Him as the one who was made lower than the angels for a little while. This points to the humility of Christ, which Paul talked about as well in Philippians 2:5-11:

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus emptied Himself, took the form of a bond-servant, was made in the likeness of men, and even humbled Himself to the point of death on a cross. While living His life on earth as a man, Jesus was protected by angels (Matthew 2:13) and helped by angels (Matthew 4:11, Luke 22:43). Because He humbled Himself in obedience to the point of death, He was exalted to the highest place. He was crowned with glory and honor because He humbled Himself to the point of death.

Jesus “tasted” death for everyone by the grace of God. The word “taste” should be understood in the sense of “experience.” Jesus did not merely take a little sample of death, but He experienced the entire thing. It was a “cup” of judgment that He drank (Matthew 20:22; 26:39). He did not take a little sip. The supreme expression of God's grace toward us is seen in the death of His Son. Does God favor mankind? Does He care about us? Does He love us? The cross proves that the answer is a resounding “yes”! There is no doubt about it. God has demonstrated His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). He did this on behalf of everyone. The death of Jesus is sufficient to cover the sins of every man, woman, boy and girl.

Verse 10 tells us that it was “fitting,” it was proper and appropriate, for God to perfect His Son through sufferings. This is not implying that Jesus was not perfect and needed to be improved, or that He was sinful. In 4:15 he tells us that Jesus was without sin. The word “perfect” can also mean “complete” or “finished.” What it means is that Jesus had to be made complete in His human experience. His life as a man had to be completed and He had to experience the things we experience. The Son had never had to obey as a human before. He had never had to suffer as a human before, and so His sufferings brought Him to completion as a man.

God's intention in perfecting His Son was to bring “many sons to glory.” The perfecting of the Son in His human experience was part of God's process of bringing people to glory. Jesus prayed in John 17:24, “Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me; for Thou didst love Me before the foundation of the world.” The glory of the presence of Christ is ahead for those who are children of God through faith in Him. If we are children of God and destined for glory, it is because He has brought us to that point. It is not our achievement, but His. He brings us to Himself in Christ. There is a big difference between being brought to a place and going to that place on your own. There are some places you cannot go unless someone with the proper authority brings you along with them. You cannot go into a bank vault unless

the proper authorities bring you in. You cannot go visit the president in the oval office unless the proper people bring you in. You cannot enter God's family and kingdom unless Jesus brings you in.

Jesus is the "author" of the salvation of those sons who are brought to glory. He is the one who took the lead in procuring our salvation. We owe our salvation, not to ourselves and our own efforts or goodness, but to Jesus and His suffering and death for us.

Since God is the Father of the "many sons" that He is bringing to glory, and the Father of Jesus His unique Son, Jesus and the "many sons" are brothers (verse 11). Jesus is the sanctifier and we are the sanctified, and Jesus is not ashamed to call us "brethren." Jesus tasted death for us and so became the author of our salvation. The Father's purpose is to bring us to glory, and He does that through the saving and sanctifying work of the Son. As we believe in Jesus, we are saved and become children of God and brethren of Jesus. Jesus says, "I will proclaim Thy name to My brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will sing Thy praise" (Psalm 22:22). Jesus has proclaimed the name of the Father to us. He has sung His praise in the assembly of His brothers. The Son brings glory to the Father and points us to Him.

In verse 13 he quotes Isaiah 8:17-18, "And I will wait for the LORD who is hiding His face from the house of Jacob; I will even look eagerly for Him. Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are for signs and wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion." As Jesus walked the earth He trusted completely in the Father and never wavered from that trust. The children God gave Him are to follow the same pattern. Those He calls brethren are those whom the Father gave Him. The gospel of John emphasizes that those who come to Jesus and believe in Him are given to Him by the Father. In John 6:37-40 Jesus says, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day." If the Father has given you to the Son, you will come to Him, you will believe in Him, and you will be raised up on the last day. In His prayer in John 17, Jesus mentions three times that His disciples were those whom the Father had given Him. We do not come to Jesus because we decided to do so. We come to Jesus because the Father gave us to Him. We become His brethren by the gracious gift of God.

The children God gave to Jesus "share in flesh and blood" (verse 14). Because of this the Son of God also partook of flesh and blood. He became what we are in order to accomplish three things (note the use of the phrase "that He might..."). First, He partook of flesh and blood in order to render the devil powerless through death. The devil had "the power of death." He was the one who was responsible for leading men and women into sin and death at the beginning, and he is still involved in getting us to love sin and to remain bound in death. Satan's purpose is to make sure we remain captives of sin and death. But Jesus rendered him powerless. Jesus broke down the prison walls and made it possible for us to escape the captivity of sin and death. He did this through His death. That is the second thing Jesus accomplished through becoming

a man and dying; He delivered those who were slaves of Satan due to their fear of death. Fear is the thing that most often holds a slave to his slavery. If there were no threat of harm for trying to escape, there would be nothing to hold most slaves in their slavery. Jesus has removed that threat. Death no longer has any sting (1 Corinthians 15:54-57). It has been “swallowed up in victory.”

The third thing that Jesus accomplished in becoming a man was that He became a “merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” One must be a priest in order to offer a propitiatory sacrifice for sins, and Jesus became both the priest and the sacrifice. The meaning in verse 17 is actually that Jesus was **obligated** to be made like His brethren in order to become High Priest and make atonement for their sins. It was a debt He owed. He could not have become our Great High Priest without becoming one of us and without identifying with us in that way. Through His death Jesus satisfied the just wrath of God against our sins and reconciled us to Him.

He further explains the necessity of the humanity of Jesus in verse 18, “For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.” In His sufferings Jesus was tempted. He was tempted to turn away from the course that the Father had given Him. In the wilderness temptations Jesus was tempted to take the easy way out. Satan said that if He would bow down and worship him, he would give Him all the kingdoms of the earth. (Matthew 4:8-10.) When Jesus told His disciples that it was necessary for Him to suffer and die, Peter took Him aside and said, “God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You!” Jesus replied to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interest, but man’s.” (Matthew 16:22-23.) In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus again was tempted to run from the sufferings He knew were coming, but He said, “Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done.” (Luke 22:42.) The difference between Jesus and us when it comes to being tempted is that He was tempted and did not sin (Hebrews 4:15). When we are tempted we often sin. But having been tempted in His sufferings, Jesus is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted. He knows how powerful temptation is. When we are tempted, we need to call upon our Great High Priest and seek His help. He is ready and able to help us in times of temptation. He provides the way of escape from each temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13). He also has shown us how to use the word of God to resist temptation successfully.

Hebrews 3

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. 2 He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house. 3 For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house. 4 For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. 5 Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; 6 but Christ *was faithful* as a Son over His house whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until

the end. 7 Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, 8 DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS, 9 WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED *Me* BY TESTING *Me*, AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS. 10 "THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION, AND SAID, 'THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART; AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS'; 11 AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, 'THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.'" 12 Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end; 15 while it is said, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS, AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME." 16 For who provoked *Him* when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt *led* by Moses? 17 And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? 19 And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

The first two chapters have established the fact that Jesus is greater than the angels and the word spoken through Him is greater than that spoken through the angels. In chapter 3 the author turns to Moses, to compare Jesus with Moses.

Since Jesus is greater than the angels and since He is our Great High Priest who made propitiation for our sins through His own death, we are exhorted in verse 1 to consider Him. The author calls those to whom he is writing "holy brethren" and "partakers of a heavenly calling." They are partners in a call that comes from heaven and calls them to heaven. This call has come to them through the word which has been spoken to them through Jesus and the apostles, to which they must pay close attention (2:1) and must not neglect (2:2). God, through His Son Jesus Christ, has issued a call, an invitation, that we might come join Him in heaven. Jesus told an interesting parable about God's invitation and man's response in Luke 14:16-24:

But He said to him, "A certain man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many; 17 and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.' 18 "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.' 19 "And another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.' 20 "And another one said, 'I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.' 21 "And the slave came back and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' 22 "And the slave said, 'Master, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' 23 "And the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. 24 'For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.'"

God has invited us to His party in His heavenly kingdom, yet so many make these lame excuses for why they cannot come. God's call is a gracious call. It is a privilege to be

called by God into fellowship with Him through His Son. It is something no one should despise or refuse. Yet most people do refuse God's invitation for some reason.

God has called us into fellowship with Him in heaven through His Son and we should therefore consider Jesus. The word "consider" means to fix one's mind on a thing. We should fix our minds on Jesus who is the "Apostle and High Priest of our confession." We should examine Him and think about Him, about who He is and what He has done. We confess Him as the Apostle of God, the one sent by God. An "apostle" is a "sent one," an envoy or representative of the one who sent him. Jesus said many times that the Father had sent Him (John 3:17, 4:34, 5:23-24, 5:30-38, 6:29, 6:38-39, 6:44, etc). His mission was to accomplish the Father's will and carry out His work. His job was to speak the words of His Father and do the works of His Father. Jesus was the perfect representative of the Father, never doing or saying anything but what the Father wanted Him to do or say.

We confess Jesus as our High Priest as well as Apostle. As an Apostle He is the Father's representative to us, but as High Priest He is our representative to the Father. Again, He does this perfectly. He is the perfect man, perfectly obedient, perfectly related to God, who offers a perfect sacrifice for our sin and truly atones for our sin.

As Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus was faithful to the one who appointed Him to these positions (verse 2). He was faithful as Moses was faithful. Jesus became Apostle and High Priest by appointment. He was not elected to these posts, but was appointed to them by the Father. Therefore Jesus cannot be removed as Apostle and High Priest. There is no one else to whom we can go. If we will not deal with Jesus, we will not be able to come to the Father (John 14:6).

Here we begin a comparison of Jesus with Moses. Jesus was faithful as Moses was faithful in His house. This is a reference to what the Lord said of Moses in Numbers 12:6-8, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household; With him I speak mouth to mouth, Even openly, and not in dark sayings, And he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid To speak against My servant, against Moses?" In this context the Lord was rebuking Aaron and Miriam because they had spoken against Moses and had criticized him for marrying a Cushite woman. Moses was uniquely faithful and God spoke to him in a unique way. With an ordinary prophet God would speak in a vision or a dream, and would speak in "dark sayings." But with Moses God spoke "mouth to mouth," face to face. He spoke with Moses openly, and Moses saw the form of the Lord. Moses was no ordinary prophet, but had an extraordinary relationship with the Lord. This is why Moses has held a unique stature among biblical characters. He was the author of the first five books of the Bible. He was the one who led Israel out of Egypt. He was the one through whom God did many powerful miracles. There is no disputing that Moses was a great man, and more than a mere prophet. But the same is true of Jesus. He is the one who fulfills the prophecy God spoke to Moses in Deuteronomy 18:18-19, "I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And it shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him." Jesus, like Moses, has a unique relationship with God. He is no mere prophet or lawgiver, but He

is the unique Son of God.

If Moses is worthy of glory, then Jesus is counted worthy of more glory (verse 3). As the builder of a house is worthy of more honor than the house itself, so Jesus is worthy of more honor than Moses. Frank Lloyd Wright gets more honor than any of his buildings because the greatness of the buildings depends upon the greatness of the designer. They are great only because he was a great architect. The designer is greater than the design. The builder is greater than the building. Moses was a created being, but Jesus is the Creator. He created Moses and is therefore greater than Moses. The deity of Christ comes out again in verse 4, "the builder of all things is God." Hebrews 1:2 told us that Jesus is the one through whom God made the world.

Moses was faithful as a servant, but Christ was faithful as a Son (verses 5-6). Moses was faithful "in all His house," but Christ was faithful "over His house." As God had said of Moses in Numbers 12:7, "He is faithful in all My household." Moses was a servant in God's house, and was faithful in his service. But Jesus is Lord of the house. He rules over the house as the Son of God, He is not a mere servant in the house. In fact, the role of Moses was to testify about "the things which were to be spoken later." In the context I believe that the author is saying that Moses pointed to what would be spoken through Christ. Hebrews begins with a reference to what was spoken in the past contrasted with what was spoken in these last days through the Son of God (Hebrews 1:1-2). Chapter 2 also emphasizes that the word of salvation was "spoken through the Lord" (2:3). This lines up with what Jesus said about the writings of Moses in John 5:39-47:

"You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life. I do not receive glory from men; but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves. I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another shall come in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another, and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God? Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"

The writings of Moses bear witness to Jesus. He wrote of the prophet like him who was to come (Deut. 18:18-19). He wrote of the seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). He wrote of the seed of Abraham who would bless the whole world (Genesis 12:3). The sacrifice of Isaac is a picture of the Father sacrificing His Son (Genesis 22). The Passover lamb is a picture also of the death of Christ (Exodus 12). If we believe the writings of Moses we will believe in Jesus. If we believe the prior revelation we should believe the subsequent and greater revelation in Jesus.

Jesus was faithful as a Son over His house, and we are His house if we hang onto our faith until the end. This is a conditional statement. We are His house if we hold firmly to our "confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end." We can be sure that we are members of His household if we do not let go of these things. The word "confidence" is the Greek term *parrhesia*, and means "freedom in speaking, unreservedness in speech 1a) openly, frankly, i.e without concealment 1b) without

ambiguity or circumlocution 1c) without the use of figures and comparisons 2) free and fearless confidence, cheerful courage, boldness, assurance 3) the deportment by which one becomes conspicuous or secures publicity.”⁴ We are to be confident and outspoken about our faith in Jesus. There is to be no ambiguity about it. We are to be unapologetic believers in Jesus. Jesus said, "Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32-33). And He also said, "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:26). Committed believers are not afraid or hesitant to confess their faith in Jesus. If we continue as confident, outspoken believers we demonstrate that we are members of His house.

We are to hold fast also to "the boast of our hope." Because of Jesus we have a hope that the world does not have. It is the hope of sharing the glory of God, in which we rejoice and which will not disappoint us (Romans 5:1-5). We "boast" of this hope. Part of our witness is to boast of the hope that we have in Christ. It is something to be proud of and to put on display. The thing that people should see in us when we face hard times is this hope. The hope we have in Christ should shine forth as a beacon in hard times. If we continue to confess Jesus and to boast of our hope in Him to the end, we show that we are His house. It is evidence that we really belong to Him.

Our confidence and boast of our hope is to be held firm. We must hold tight to these things and hold to them persistently, "until the end." True Christian faith is persistent faith. It is not something that comes and goes, that waxes and wanes. It is a steady and firm thing. It is not something that we "try" and then abandon if it seems inconvenient or too costly or doesn't yield the results we expect.

Verses 7-11 here quote Psalm 95:7b-11 and exhort us not to harden our hearts if we hear God's voice. The Holy Spirit issued this warning. If we hear His voice, we must not harden our hearts. A hard heart is a heart that will not listen to the Lord and will not comply with His commands. It is dangerous to have a hard heart, because a hard-hearted person is destined for destruction. Pharaoh had a hard heart and refused to listen to God and brought down the wrath of God upon his whole nation. His hard heart led to the death of all the firstborn in Egypt and the eventual destruction of his army.

Israel also hardened their hearts when they heard the Lord. As a result they provoked Him and tested and tried Him in the wilderness. The reference is probably to the incident in Exodus 17:1-7:

Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water that we may drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me." Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I

4 Thayer's Greek Lexicon

will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us, or not?"

Because of their hardness of heart, they quarreled with Moses and questioned whether God was really with them. Even though they had already seen many powerful miracles and had seen many demonstrations of God's care for them, still they hardened their hearts and failed to trust in Him. They questioned Moses and accused him of leading them out to kill them with thirst in the wilderness. This was not just directed against Moses but ultimately against the Lord. By grumbling against him and demanding water they were testing the Lord. The people were on the verge of stoning Moses when he cried out to the Lord. A hard heart is a heart that questions the Lord and His love and care. It is a heart that questions the goodness of the Lord. It is a heart that issues demands and complaints rather than humbly asking for what it needs and trusting God to supply. A hard heart is proud and rebellious. The Lord gave them water, but Moses named the place Massah and Meribah because the people quarreled with the Lord and tested Him there. Massah means "testing" and Meribah means "quarrel." We must not follow their example.

The passage from Psalm 95 tells us of God's reaction to the provocation of Israel in the wilderness. He said that He was angry with that generation. He says of them, "They always go astray in their heart; and they did not know My ways." A hard heart angers the Lord and becomes subject to His wrath. He said that there were two problems. First, they continually went astray in their hearts. They strayed in their hearts from the right way. They took the wrong road in their inner life. The trouble was that their thinking went astray. It diverged from the truth. They believed lies and propagated them. For example, they strayed from believing that God was good and was watching out for them for their good. They believed that He had lured them into the wilderness to kill them with thirst. God says that this was their habitual pattern, they always did this and went astray in their hearts. We must constantly be wary of faulty thought patterns. Satan is a master of deception and lies and continually tries to get us to believe those things that are not true. The truth of God in the word of God will enable us to keep from straying in our hearts.

The second problem, related to the first, was that they did not know the ways of the Lord. This is really, I think, the root of the first problem. The reason people go astray in their hearts is that they do not know the ways of the Lord. These people took the wrong road and strayed into the wrong path because they did not know the Lord's path or road. They did not know the way that He takes. The Greek term for God's "ways" here is *hodos*, road or highway. Knowing the ways of the Lord will keep us from being deceived and taking the wrong path. This is why we must love the word of God and meditate on it constantly. His word reveals His ways and when we know His ways and know Him, we will be less likely to stray in our hearts and in our behavior.

Our hard-hearted unwillingness to listen to Him and submit to Him stirs up God's wrath. It makes Him angry when people will not listen to Him, when they don't know His ways and when they go astray in their hearts. In His wrath He swore that these people would not enter His rest. They were not allowed to enter the land of promise and died

in the wilderness. They also would be barred from His heavenly rest. They would not settle down on earth nor would they find a resting place with God in His kingdom. You cannot defy God and turn a deaf ear to Him and expect to be welcomed into His kingdom. God's rest may be entered by those who will listen to Him and know His ways.

There is a further warning and description of the hard heart in verse 12, "Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God." A hard heart is an evil heart, a heart that has gone bad and has been corrupted. It is a heart that does not believe, that does not trust in God nor put its confidence in God. It is a heart that falls away from the living God. It departs from God and turns to other things. We must take care that we don't have this kind of heart. We must pay attention to the state of our hearts and evaluate them. Are we listening to the Lord? Are we paying attention to His word? Do we believe what He says? Are we committed to obeying His commands? Are we devoted to Him and is it our heart's desire to follow Him? Is there anything in my life that is more important to me than the Lord? We must ask these kinds of questions of ourselves regularly and make sure that our hearts are in tune with the Lord.

He is not just talking to these people as individuals, but as a body of believers. He says we can guard against an evil, unbelieving heart by encouraging "one another day after day" (verse 13). The word for "encourage" is *parakaleo* – to call to one's side. We are to come alongside one another every day and exhort and encourage one another to stay true to the Lord and to our commitment to Him. We need each other in the church in order to avoid a hardened heart. The author explains that the danger is that we might be "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." Sin is the enemy, and it seeks to deceive us and thereby harden our hearts to the Lord. When we fall into sin the temptation is always there to say that it is no big deal, that what we've done isn't really that bad or isn't really sinful. We want to justify ourselves by saying that our sin isn't really sin or that it is of no consequence or even that God doesn't really care about it. We see this today with homosexuals. Many of them deny the sinfulness of their behavior and even say that God made them that way. They maintain that homosexuality is good and normal. They have been hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. They have called evil good and good evil (Isaiah 5:20).

He explains with another conditional statement in verse 14, "For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end." It is just like the conditional statement in verse 6. We are the house of Christ if we hold fast our confidence and boast of hope firmly until the end, and we are partakers of Christ if we hold fast the assurance we started with firmly until the end. We are partners in Christ and with Christ if we firmly hang onto that foundational trust we had in Him at the beginning. We begin with a firm foundation of assurance, but the deceitfulness of sin assaults that assurance and tries to destroy it. Those who really are partakers of Christ will hold the beginning of their assurance fast until the end. They will not give up and will not abandon that confidence they have in Him.

Holding fast to our assurance is the opposite of hardening our hearts when we hear His voice. The one who holds fast to his assurance will not harden his heart and will not provoke the Lord to anger. It pleases the Lord when we remain true to Him and listen to Him.

In verses 16-18 the author strings together five rhetorical questions. Actually there are three questions here with three answers provided as rhetorical questions themselves. The first is, "For who provoked Him when they had heard?" Who was it who hardened their hearts and provoked Him? It was those who came out of Egypt led by Moses. They provoked Him when they complained about the lack of water and accused God of leading them out to kill them with thirst. The second question asks, "And with whom was He angry for forty years?" It was "those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness." It was those who refused to believe the Lord when they were on the threshold of entering the land and wanted to kill Moses, appoint a new leader and turn back to Egypt (Numbers 14). The Lord sentenced them to wander for 40 years in the wilderness until all of that unbelieving generation died except for Joshua and Caleb. The third question is, "And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest?" It was "those who were disobedient." They did not listen to God, provoked Him, sinned and were disobedient. Therefore God would not allow them to enter His rest. There is a progression here. They did not listen to God and hardened their hearts, provoking Him to anger, resulting in being barred from His rest. Things only escalate when we harden our hearts and refuse to listen to God. They go from bad to worse to disastrous.

The conclusion is drawn in verse 19, "And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief." Unbelief brings about rebellion and disobedience. Only those who believe will obey, and only those who are obedient truly believe. A disobedient Christian is a contradiction.

Hebrews 4

Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it. 2 For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. 3 For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. 4 For He has thus said somewhere concerning the seventh *day*, "AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS"; 5 and again in this *passage*, "THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST." 6 Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, 7 He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS." 8 For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. 9 There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. 10 For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. 11 Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall through *following* the same example of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight,

but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

14 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are*, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.

It is still possible to enter into the rest of God, and this chapter tells us how to enter that rest and exhorts us to do so. This chapter continues to develop the ideas from Psalm 95. It begins with a warning of the possibility of coming short of entering God's rest. The promise is there, but we must fear the prospect of falling short of attaining it. We may not reach the goal if we follow the pattern that Israel followed. What was their problem when they heard the good news? The problem was that it didn't profit them because "it was not united by faith in those who heard." They did not mix hearing with faith. That is to say, they refused to believe the good news that they heard. As Paul says in Romans 10:17, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." When they heard they did not believe. They did not trust God to give them the rest that He promised and offered, therefore they could not enter into it. The good news is only profitable for those who believe the message. It does nothing for those who refuse to believe.

The opportunity remains for some to enter into the rest of God. Those who formerly heard the good news failed to enter because of their disobedience, and so God has set a certain day on which people may enter His rest. He quotes Psalm 95 again, pointing to the day that God has fixed, "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." The Jews in Moses' day were not the only ones who would hear God's voice. God would speak again later, supremely and ultimately in His Son. We hear the good news that came to us through Jesus, and if we believe we enter His rest. This is why it is so crucial that we not harden our hearts when we hear. As Jesus showed in the parable of the sower, the hard heart does not respond at all to the seed of the word of God, and the word is plucked away and has no effect in that person's life. (See Matthew 13.)

The fact that God spoke of another day to hear God's voice and enter His rest also shows that Joshua had not given Israel that rest (verse 8). This "rest" did not come when Israel entered into the land of promise. That was not the rest God was talking about in Psalm 95. There is still a "Sabbath rest for the people of God." It is a Sabbath sort of rest. He further explains in verse 10, "For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His." I think the author is talking about the rest we find when we come to Jesus and receive the free gift of forgiveness and salvation. We do not have to work for it, but it is given to us freely as we trust in Christ. We stop trying to work for our salvation and instead we simply receive it as a gift. Jesus talked about this rest in Matthew 11:28-30, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and YOU SHALL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light." What we do is come to Jesus and He gives

the rest for our souls. We are “weary and heavy laden” if we are trusting in our own efforts. If, by faith, we give up our efforts and let Jesus do what only He can do for us, then we truly find rest and rejuvenation for our souls. He lifts the burdens of guilt and sin and carries them away. He bears the weight for us.

The author gives one final exhortation to enter God's rest in verse 11. Entering that rest requires that we work diligently, that we strive to do so. Jesus told us to “enter by the narrow gate” and told us that the narrow gate to life was small and the way was narrow and there were few who would find it (Matthew 7:13-14). We enter God's rest by faith, by believing in Jesus, and we fall short by disobedience. Do not follow the pattern of unbelief and disobedience that Israel established.

The author talks about the word of God in verse 12, and again, I believe he is talking not only about the spoken and written word of God, but also about the Word of God incarnate, Jesus Himself. I think he is speaking of the Word of God as John spoke of Him in John 1:1-18 and in 1 John 1:1-3. He tells us five things in this verse about the word of God. First, the word of God is living, it is alive, it has life. It is not a dead thing with no relevance to us today. The Word of God and life are tied together in John 1 as well, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). In 1 John 1:1 John calls Jesus “the Word of Life” and explains that in Him they had seen and heard the eternal life which they were now proclaiming to others. Because Jesus is alive, the word of God is alive.

Second, he says the word of God is active. The Greek word is *energes* – powerful, at work, effectual. We get our words “energy” and “energetic” from this word. Because the word of God is alive it has power it can accomplish things. The word of God is not a static thing that just sits there and does nothing, but it has the power to transform our lives. Paul said of the gospel, “It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). When we believe the gospel message it saves us.

Third, the word of God is sharp. It is sharper than any two-edged sword. There is no blade sharper than the word of God. It has better cutting ability than anything man can devise. Paul referred to the word of God as “the sword of the Spirit” in Ephesians 6:17, the only offensive weapon in his list. The word of God is the sword, the weapon, wielded by the Spirit of God to do His work.

Fourth, he says because the word of God is sharp it is also piercing. It can pierce into our lives like nothing else can. It can pierce to the division, the partition between soul and spirit, between joints and marrow. Joints are the parts between bones, and marrow is the stuff inside bones. The word of God can get down into the most inner parts of the body. The word of God is like a scalpel that God uses like a surgeon to remove harmful things from our lives. It can get down to the root of our sins and problems in our inner life and deal with them. It uncovers them and exposes them so that they can be healed.

Fifth, the word of God is “able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” The word for “judge” is *kritikos*, from which we get our words “critic” and “critical.” It means to be skilled in judging. The word of God is a skillful judge of our thoughts and intentions. Since the word of God is sharp and piercing, it is able to get right down to the real problem in our lives. To effect real change in us, there must be a change in our thoughts and intentions. Paul said that we needed to be “transformed by the renewing

of our minds” in Romans 12:2. Our thinking needs an overhaul. We must go from believing lies to believing the truth. We must turn from faulty thinking to correct thinking. The word of God judges our thoughts and shows us what is true and what is false. It reveals the flaws in our thinking. The word of God also judges our intentions. What we intend is the outcome or goal we are seeking. Our thoughts and intentions are often evil. This is what God saw when He determined that it was time to judge man in Genesis 6:5, “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” At that time the intentions and thoughts of men were always evil and exclusively evil! After the flood, when Noah built an altar and offered burnt offerings to the Lord, it says, “And the LORD smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to Himself, 'I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.’” (Genesis 8:21.) The judgment that God makes against our thoughts and intentions is that they are evil. This is a fact about every single one of us that we need to acknowledge, because we will not find forgiveness until we confess our evil and turn from it. We all want to deny that we have an evil nature, that we are evil, but this is the judgment of God against us. This is what He observes and says about us. Even Jesus said, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!” (Matthew 7:11.) He also said, “No one is good except God alone” (Mark 10:18). The word of God points out the evil of our thoughts and intentions so we can turn around and find forgiveness in Christ. It enables us to see our need for Him.

Not only does the word of God judge our thoughts and intentions, but everything about all of us is “open and laid bare” to God's eyes. No creature is hidden from God. Not one person escapes His gaze. Each person has to deal with God and cannot escape Him. But God does not keep us in the dark about what He sees in us. His word, if we will pay attention to it, shows us what we are like.

The author returns to the idea that Jesus is our great High Priest in verse 14 and continues to discuss His priesthood through 5:10. He had mentioned how Jesus became a merciful and faithful high priest in 2:17. He has already challenged us to “consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession” in 3:1. Now again here in 4:14 he exhorts us to hold fast our confession of our great high priest. He is the one high priest who has “passed through the heavens.” He has gone into the true holy of holies and into the throne room of God. He has not just passed through the curtain of an earthly temple, but has passed through the heavens. Jesus the Son of God is not just an earthly high priest, but is the heavenly one, the true high priest who has truly atoned for our sins.

Though He is Jesus the Son of God and has passed through the heavens, He is still sympathetic toward us. He is not an unsympathetic high priest, but just the opposite. He has been “tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.” We must not think that Jesus is such a high and exalted being that He has no idea what we go through. We must not think that Jesus has no idea what it is to be weak, to be tempted, to suffer and to struggle. He has experienced these things without sinning. He has gone through the full human experience except for sin. Jesus did not have a sinful nature as we do, but He did experience that pull toward sin. In the garden of

Gethsemane, as He struggled with the temptation to run from the cross, He experienced the conflict between what He wanted and what He knew was the will of His Father. He said, "Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done." (Luke 22:42.) He submitted His will to that of His Father and so did not sin.

Because we have such a great high priest what we must do is "draw near with confidence to the throne of grace" (verse 16). This is a present active verb, which means we are to keep drawing near day by day. Instead of turning away from Jesus, we are to continually draw near to Him to find what we need. As sinners beset with weakness what we need is mercy and grace, and this is what we receive when we draw near to the throne of God with confidence through Jesus Christ. We need help, and He can provide it because He is our high priest. Mercy and grace are available through Him. We find forgiveness and God's favor if we will approach His throne in Christ. God's door is open to us in Jesus Christ, and we are foolish if we do not take advantage of the access we have to Him.

Hebrews 5

For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; 2 he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; 3 and because of it he is obligated to offer *sacrifices* for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. 4 And no one takes the honor to himself, but *receives it* when he is called by God, even as Aaron was. 5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, "THOU ART MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN THEE"; 6 just as He says also in another *passage*, "THOU ART A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK." 7 In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. 8 Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. 9 And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, 10 being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

11 Concerning him we have much to say, and *it is* hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

The author here discusses first the characteristics of priests taken from among men in verses 1-4. He points out that the office of priest is an appointed office. It is not an honor that a man can take to himself (verse 4), but a man must be called by God.

They are appointed “on behalf of men in things pertaining to God.” They are human mediators between men and God, and therefore their job involves offering gifts and sacrifices for sins. When you represent men before God and God before men you must deal with the problem of sin. Unholy men cannot stand in the presence of the holy God. There must be a covering for our sin, and it was a priest's job to handle this.

The human priest can “deal gently” with others because he also is weak. He must deal with those who are “ignorant and misguided.” There are many who err because they are ignorant. They don't know good from bad and right from wrong. They have not been taught the ways of God and so they are ignorant. There are others who know better, but still go astray. The word for “misguided” is *planao* and means “to be out of the way.”⁵ It refers to someone who goes astray, who strays from the right path. When we must deal with someone who is going astray, it calls for gentleness. Paul said in Galatians 6:1, “Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted.” We must recognize that since we are also weak and subject to temptation, we are capable of the same wanderings and sins as those we are trying to help.

Because he is “beset with weakness,” the human priest must offer sacrifices for sins, both for the people and for himself. A blood sacrifice is required to atone for sins and it is the priest's job to offer the sacrifices. This is an obligation and not an option. He must do this, and if he fails or refuses to do so, he is not fulfilling his purpose as a priest. A so-called priest or minister today who will not recognize the reality of sin and the necessity of dealing with sin is missing his whole purpose. Sin is the thing that enslaves people and keeps them on the road to destruction and eternal condemnation, and it is not “compassionate” to ignore it and pretend it doesn't exist. Denying and ignoring sin is like ignoring a cancer that will take your life. A compassionate doctor who cares about you will tell you the truth. He will tell you you have cancer and need surgery to remove it. Yes, it's a hard and grievous message. No one wants to hear that they have cancer. But the doctor will not help you if he denies it and pretends it's not there, but will make the situation worse. The same is true for “ministers” who deny the reality of sin.

Serving as a priest is an honor that you do not seize for yourself. It is an appointment, a calling. A priest had to be called by God like Aaron was. In Israel the priests had to be from the tribe of Levi. God had set them apart as the priestly tribe. If you were from another tribe, you could not be a priest, no matter how badly you might have wanted it. The Levites had been called as priests. God still calls some into full time ministry. We are not priests any longer in the sense of being mediators, because Jesus is our only priest and mediator now. But I think God still calls certain people into special ministries.

This principle even applies to Christ Himself. He was appointed as high priest. He did not “glorify Himself” to become high priest, but the Father said, “Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee.” He again quotes from Psalm 2:7 as he did in Hebrews 1:5. Christ is the Son of God, as the Father had said, and He is also an eternal priest. The Father said, “Thou art a priest forever according to the order of

5 Thayer's Greek Lexicon

Melchizedek.” This is a quote from Psalm 110:4. The Father says to Christ that He is His Son and He is a priest forever. His priesthood is an everlasting priesthood, and His priesthood is in the order of Melchizedek. He has much more to say about this to establish the superiority of Jesus' priesthood, but for now he is simply making the point that Jesus was appointed to this position.

Jesus prayed earnestly when He was on earth. When He was in the form of man He called on His Father with prayers and supplications, with loud crying and tears (verse 7). He called out to the One who could save Him from death. No doubt the author is thinking of the agony Jesus went through in the Garden of Gethsemane. The account is recorded by Luke in Luke 22:39-46:

And He came out and proceeded as was His custom to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed Him. 40 And when He arrived at the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." 41 And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, 42 saying, "Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done." 43 Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. 44 And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground. 45 And when He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping from sorrow, 46 and said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

This illustrates the author's point about Jesus becoming a compassionate high priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses. He felt the same way about suffering and dying on a cross that anyone would feel. It caused Him great agony, and he asked that the “cup” might be removed from Him. He asked the Father to save Him from death. He submitted His will to that of the Father's. This is the one time we see that the will of the Son diverged from the will of the Father. What He wanted had to be reconciled with what the Father wanted. He came to the point, through His agony, of surrender to the will of the Father.

The Father heard the prayers of the Son because of His “piety.” The word is *eulabeia* – godly fear. Jesus had such great respect for His Father that no one else has ever had. He revered His Father like no other son has ever done. The Father was always pleased with the Son. Jesus never let Him down or disappointed Him. Jesus always did the will of His Father, and so the Father always listened to the Son.

Even though Jesus was the perfect and holy Son of God, He still “learned obedience from the things which He suffered” (verse 8). His suffering taught Him obedience. This does not mean that He was disobedient before. The author told us in 2:10 Jesus was perfected through sufferings, not meaning that He was imperfect, but that He was brought to completion. It was through suffering that Jesus learned fully, by experience, what obedience as a human is all about. For Jesus obedience meant suffering. He learned that obedience is not easy and effortless, but that it sometimes results in suffering. He learned that sometimes you go through agony on the way to complete submission and obedience. He learned that sometimes obedience means denying your own strong desires and inclinations. We must learn the same about obedience. Obedience will often be hard, because it will go against what we want. Obedience often means saying “no” to self in order to say “yes” to God. It means doing things we don't really want to do or refusing to do things that we want to do. This is

what makes obedience so hard for us. But this is what the Lord calls us to do. He said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?" (Luke 9:23-25.) Through obedience Jesus learned the meaning of self-denial, and we must learn the same.

Through His suffering Christ was "made perfect." He was completed and brought to full maturity through His sufferings. Through the process He became the source of eternal salvation to those who obey Him. He is the "author" or "cause"⁶ of eternal salvation. His perfect obedience made Him the author of our salvation. We are saved because of the obedience of Christ. His ultimate act of obedience was in giving Himself up to suffering and death on the cross, where He bore our sins. Through His obedience sin and death were defeated once and for all. Therefore through Christ's obedience salvation has been made available to those who obey Him.

The word for "obey" here is *hupakouo* and literally means "to hear under (as a subordinate), i.e. to listen attentively; by implication, to heed or conform to a command or authority:--hearken, be obedient to, obey."⁷ The primary idea is that of hearing and listening. Paul says, "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). When we hear the message and believe we are obeying the Lord and are given the gift of eternal salvation.

God has named Jesus high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. He has been designated the great high priest by God and appointed to this position forever. This is an eternal appointment. His priesthood is not in the line of Aaron and Levi but in the order of Melchizedek. More will be said about this later.

The writer has a lot more to say about Jesus and about His priesthood, but it is difficult for him to do so because his readers "have become dull of hearing" (verse 11). They have become slow and sluggish in their hearing. It was hard to get them to listen to what he had to say. The thing that sometimes makes it hard to teach is the unwillingness of people to listen. This writer had much more to teach them about Christ, but he was afraid that they would not listen.

He explains that by this time his readers should be further down the road than they are. By this time they should be teachers themselves, but instead they still need to be taught. In fact, they need to be taught the "elementary principles of the oracles of God." They need the ABCs of the word of God. An oracle is a brief utterance. They needed to be taught the most basic things about the word of God. They had not progressed because they had become dull of hearing. If we will not hear and listen we will not learn and progress.

The readers were stuck at the baby level and needed milk and not solid food. A small baby can only handle his mother's milk because he has no teeth. He is not equipped for solid food. If he is normal and healthy and grows properly, he will soon move beyond milk to solid food. His teeth will come in and before long he will move on to baby food, and then to solid food. The baby Christian needs to feed for a while on the "elementary principles" of God's word. He needs to know them and understand

6 Thayer's Greek Lexicon

7 Strong's Greek Dictionary

them and digest them. But if he is really growing he will soon move beyond the elementary stuff. He will get to the solid food and will become more mature. Those who only drink milk are “not accustomed to the word of righteousness.” He is inexperienced in regard to the word about God's righteousness. Just like babies who have only had milk have never experienced solid food, so immature baby believers have never experienced the true meat of the word of God. Believers must move beyond the baby stage. They must get to solid food in order to grow to maturity.

Verse 14 gives us an idea of the characteristics of a mature believer. The mature believer is one whose senses have been trained through practice to discern good and evil. It is practice and the vigorous exercise of our senses that makes us mature. The old proverb “practice makes perfect” applies in the spiritual realm as well as the physical. The mature believer is a discerning believer. He knows how to discern good and evil, right and wrong. A child has to be given strict rules and guidelines. He has to be told “don't do this” and “do this.” He needs a list of rules. Adults have to look after him closely so he won't harm himself because of his ignorance. But a mature man knows right and wrong, good and evil. The immature believer is always asking questions about where are the boundaries. They want to know whether they can go to movies, whether dancing is OK, if it is alright to drink wine and so forth. Often they want to know how close they can get to the boundary without crossing it. These are immature sorts of questions and issues. The mature believer has settled these things.

Hebrews 6

Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of instruction about washings, and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3 And this we shall do, if God permits. 4 For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 and *then* have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame. 7 For ground that drinks the rain which often falls upon it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; 8 but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

9 But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. 10 For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. 11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. 13 For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, 14 saying, "I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU, AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU." 15 And thus, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. 16 For men swear by one greater *than themselves*,

and with them an oath *given* as confirmation is an end of every dispute. 17 In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, 18 in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us. 19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a *hope* both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, 20 where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

Again, the chapter break here is unfortunate because verses 1-3 continue the discussion about moving on to maturity and moving away from the elementary things. In these verses he exhorts us to leave the elementary teaching about Christ and press on to maturity. He is not going to feed them milk, but is going to move on to the solid food. He then gives us a list of these “elementary” foundational doctrines in 1b-2. They needed to deliberately leave behind the “elementary teaching about the Christ.” They had heard the basics, and now they needed to move on. Maturity lay ahead and they had to leave elementary school to continue their progress toward maturity. When you leave one thing, you head toward another thing. We are to leave the elementary so that we can head toward maturity.

There are six things that the writer lists in verses 1a and 2 that he considers elementary and foundational. The first thing is “repentance from dead works.” The principle of repentance is essential and foundational. We cannot be forgiven without repentance. Over and over in the scriptures God calls on men to repent and to turn from their evil back to Him. Here are some examples:

"But the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' Are My ways not right, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are not right? 30 "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct," declares the Lord GOD. "Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. 31 "Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? 32 "For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord GOD. "Therefore, repent and live." (Ezekiel 18:29-32)

"When they sin against Thee (for there is no man who does not sin) and Thou art angry with them and dost deliver them to an enemy, so that they take them away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near; 47 if they take thought in the land where they have been taken captive, and repent and make supplication to Thee in the land of those who have taken them captive, saying, 'We have sinned and have committed iniquity, we have acted wickedly'; 48 if they return to Thee with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies who have taken them captive, and pray to Thee toward their land which Thou hast given to their fathers, the city which Thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for Thy name; 49 then hear their prayer and their supplication in heaven Thy dwelling place, and

maintain their cause, 50 and forgive Thy people who have sinned against Thee and all their transgressions which they have transgressed against Thee, and make them *objects of compassion* before those who have taken them captive, that they may have compassion on them. (1 Kings 8:46-50)

For thus the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, has said, "In repentance and rest you shall be saved, In quietness and trust is your strength." (Isaiah 30:15)

Both John the Baptist and Jesus preached the same message of repentance, saying "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2 and Matthew 4:17). In order to be in a right relationship with Him, we are required to admit our sinfulness, ask for forgiveness and turn from it to Him. If we don't understand this most basic requirement, we don't understand the most fundamental truth of our faith. This doctrine includes the understanding that we are sinners who need to repent. Too many today are unwilling to admit that they are sinners. In their pride they feel that they are good enough on their own merits to be acceptable to God. But John tells us in 1 John 1:8-10, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." Forgiveness is only available if we will confess our sins, if we will repent.

The things from which we need to repent are "dead works." Usually in scripture we are called to repent of our sins, and it is sin that leads to death; so he may mean that we are to repent from any work that leads to death. He may also mean that we are to repent of our attempts to be saved by our own good works in trying to observe the law. These kinds of works are dead because they cannot save us. Paul is very clear about that in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast." This meaning makes sense in the context, as he is calling Jews to continue to trust in Jesus and not to slip back into reliance on their own observance of the law.

Faith toward God is the second foundational doctrine. Repentance and faith go hand-in-hand. Jesus said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Paul told the elders from Ephesus that his message was one of "repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). Repentance is the turning from sin and faith is the turning to God. The author will discuss the definition and importance of faith in much greater detail in chapter 11. Repentance and faith is our response to the good news about Jesus and His death and resurrection. It is the response that saves us from our sins.

The third foundational thing is "instructions about washings." The word for "washings" is *baptismon*, which Leon Morris says is "a word usually used of purification ceremonies other than Christian baptism (9:10; Mark 7:4), and it is plural (which would be unusual for baptism)."⁸ He is probably referring to ceremonial washings commonly observed by the Jews. This is one point that the Pharisees and scribes took up with Jesus. They observed that His disciples were eating without first washing their hands.

8 Morris, Leon, The Expositors Bible Commentary, Volume 12, page 53.

Mark explains:

And the Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered together around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, 2 and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. 3 (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; 4 and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.) 5 And the Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" (Mark 7:1-5 NASB)

This question resulted in a scathing denunciation of the Pharisees by Jesus for their hypocrisy in setting aside the commands of God in order to observe the traditions of men. He also laid down the principle in Mark 7:14-23 that a man is defiled not by what goes into him from the outside, but by the evils that come out from within. The author of Hebrews may have these kinds of "washings" in mind. Jews coming to faith in Christ would wonder about such things, and a fundamental part of the teaching they would receive would probably deal with this.

Another possibility when it comes to "washings" is the practice of footwashing that Jesus initiated in John 13, which became part of the practice of the early church. Paul spoke of widows who had "washed the saints feet" in 1 Timothy 5:10. Probably it is the first sort of washings that are in view here.

The fourth foundational doctrine has to do with "laying on of hands." Jesus laid His hands on children when He blessed them (Matthew 19:14-15), and when He healed people (Mark 8:23; Luke 4:40). The Holy Spirit was bestowed upon some through the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17). Timothy received a spiritual gift through the laying on of hands (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). Today in many churches it is associated with ordination and commissioning for ministry. When we send people out as ministers and missionaries we often lay hands on them and pray over them to commission them and ask for God's presence and blessing. It is a symbol of the transfer of spiritual blessing and power.

A fifth foundational doctrine deals with the resurrection of the dead. This is a fundamental and indispensable doctrine of the New Testament and of the church, that Christ was raised from the dead and that all people will be raised from the dead at the end of the age. Paul pointed out in 1 Corinthians 15 how futile our faith in Christ is if He has not been raised from the dead. You don't have Christianity if Christ hasn't been raised. In the Old Testament, Daniel was promised that he would rise at the end of the age (Daniel 12:13). In John 5:25-29 Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live. For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of

judgment.” The doctrine of the resurrection means that physical death is not the end for anyone. Everyone will continue to exist on into eternity. But for those who “committed the evil deeds” it will be a resurrection of judgment. As C.S. Lewis pointed out, you will never meet a “mere mortal.” Every human is an immortal, is an eternal being, and therefore has value in God's sight.

The sixth and last foundational doctrine he mentions is “eternal judgment.” The judgment of God upon sinners is not temporary but is eternal, perpetual. Jesus spoke of this:

(Matthew 18:8) "And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the eternal fire."

(Matthew 25:41) "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.'"

(Matthew 25:46) "And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Paul also spoke of the justice of eternal judgment in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10:

For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed-- for our testimony to you was believed.

This judgment is just repayment for those who don't know God and do not obey the gospel. This eternal destruction means banishment from the presence of God and His glory forever. The judgment that people face if they do not repent and trust in Christ is no laughing matter. It is something from which they will not escape once the day of judgment comes. It is something that should motivate us to warn and exhort those around us to turn to Christ.

The author continues to warn his readers against apostasy in what is probably the most difficult passage in Hebrews in verses 4-12. We must be careful in interpreting this passage not to take bits of it out of context, but to look at it as a whole. Verses 4-6 issue the warning, verses 7-8 illustrate the warning and verses 9-12 express confidence that the readers are not among those who fall away.

He issues the warning in verses 4-6. This is a hypothetical case he is talking about. He is talking about the case of those who have experienced a number of things. They have been enlightened once-for-all time. They have heard the gospel and have been shown the light. As we have seen earlier, Jesus said, “I am the light of the world;

he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). Jesus is “the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man” (John 1:9). Many religions and philosophies talk about “enlightenment,” but true enlightenment comes only in Jesus Christ. He Himself is the light of all men, who gives life to all men. We don't find enlightenment anywhere else.

These people have also “tasted of the heavenly gift.” To “taste” can mean to try or to sample. Wine tasters are not wine drinkers. In fact, true wine tasters spit out the wine that they taste. They don't swallow it. They are just sampling the wine to see if they like it. However, in Hebrews 2:9 we are told, “But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He might **taste** death for everyone.” Clearly Jesus did not simply sample death, but experienced the full thing for us. He went completely through the full experience of death, but was raised from the dead. Perhaps this is why the author uses the word “taste.” Jesus experienced death in its fullness, but rose from the dead because it was impossible for death to hold Him (Acts 2:24). Jesus experienced death but conquered death at the same time because He is life. These hypothetical people have had a taste of God's heavenly gift. It means that they have some experience of it. What is that gift? Romans 6:23 tells us, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Again, the gift of eternal life is embodied in Jesus Himself. These people have some understanding of the gift of eternal life.

Another experience they have had is that they “have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit.” Another way of saying “partake” is “take part.” It means to participate in or to share in something. It implies that there are others involved. We experience the ministry of the Holy Spirit not just as individuals, but as members of the fellowship of believers. The Holy Spirit does not just fill us as individuals, but He also fills us corporately and ministers to us corporately. This is clear from passages like 1 Corinthians 12 where Paul discusses how spiritual gifts are given by the Spirit to each one for the good of the whole body. So when he says here that these who later fall away were “partakers of the Holy Spirit,” I think he means that they were in the fellowship of believers. They experienced the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the fellowship.

They have also “tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come.” Again, they have experienced these things. They have heard the word of God read and preached and taught. They have seen a glimpse of the power of the coming age when the kingdom of God comes in fullness. When Jesus reigns in power over all we will all daily see it in evidence everywhere. These things are also “tasted” in the fellowship of believers in their ministry in the world.

The final experience these hypothetical people have is that they “have fallen away.” After experiencing all these great things, they nevertheless fall away from faith in Christ. This “falling away” is a deliberate thing. It is the person who chooses to leave the right path. It is the person who chooses to reject Jesus as Christ and Lord. It is the person who changes his mind about Jesus and turns back to falsehood. He says that in the case of a person like this “it is impossible to renew them again to repentance.” This is the great danger for those who fall away from faith in Christ. They cannot be turned back to Christ again. Why is this? He says that it is impossible “since they

again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.” They take their place with those who had Jesus crucified. From a human perspective, Jesus was crucified because men rejected Him and wanted Him out of the way. Peter indicted the men of Jerusalem for this, saying, "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered up, and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses" (Acts 3:13-15). They delivered Jesus up to Pilate and had Him put to death because they had disowned Him. When a person professes faith in Christ, but then later deliberately disowns Him and rejects Him, that person takes his place with those who crucified Him and put Him to shame. Such a person, knowing the truth and rejecting it, cannot be brought back to repentance. This is a sobering truth.

The big question when we come to this passage is whether the people described in verses 4 and 5 are truly saved. If they are people who have been saved and forgiven and who have received the gift of eternal life in Christ, then this passage teaches that salvation is revoked from them if they fall away. Many have interpreted the passage this way, that one may lose his salvation if he doesn't remain faithful. I believe the answer to this question is made clear in the explanatory illustration that follows in verses 7-8.

The illustration is agricultural. He is talking about ground and what it “brings forth” or “yields.” He mentions two possibilities with a piece of ground. One possibility is that it drinks up the rain and “brings forth vegetation useful to those whose sake it is also tilled.” It produces a good crop that feeds those who cultivate it. It fulfills its purpose as a fertile field. This type of ground “receives a blessing from God.” Another possibility is that it may “yield thorns and thistles.” In this case it is worthless. It has not provided what was needed by the cultivators or owner. Instead of being blessed it is “close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.”

Jesus used the very same illustration in His parable of the sower, but went into more detail, and perhaps the author of Hebrews was thinking of Jesus' parable when he wrote this passage. The parable of the sower is in Matthew 13:3-9:

And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4 and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. 5 "And others fell upon the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. 6 "But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. 7 "And others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. 8 "And others fell on the good soil, and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. 9 "He who has ears, let him hear."

Jesus gave the interpretation in Matthew 13:18-23:

"Hear then the parable of the sower. 19 "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the

road. 20 "And the one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. 22 "And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 23 "And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit, and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."

Though Jesus spoke of four types of soil and four responses to the "seed" of the word, still it comes down to two ultimate outcomes. The seed sown either bears fruit or bears no fruit. The seed only survives and matures to produce a crop in the good soil. In the other three types of soil the seed dies and produces no crop. Like Jesus, the author of Hebrews mentions the soil that is full of thorns and thistles, but Jesus mentions two other types that are fruitless. There is the case of the hard soil which does not receive the seed at all, but it is snatched away by the birds. This is the person who never believed in the first place, who never responded to the word. He also mentioned the rocky soil that has no depth where the person receives the word enthusiastically but is unwilling to pay the price associated with holding onto the word. His commitment is conditional and he drops his faith when it causes problems and conflicts for him. The parable illuminates for us the situation of those who appear to believe for a while, but then fall away and deny Christ. They turned from faith in Christ when persecution came along because of that faith or because other things were more important. The good soil receives the seed and holds on to it and perseveres. In Luke's version of the parable, Jesus explains, "And the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance" (Luke 8:15). It is the one who bears fruit who is really saved, who really has received the word of Christ. I don't believe that the rocky soil or weedy soil types represent true believers who were ever saved to begin with. They heard the word, but they did not hang onto it, did not persevere and did not produce good fruit.

Further insight comes from John 15:1-8 where Jesus discussed the fact that a man cannot bear fruit unless he "abides," or remains in Jesus, like a branch of a grape vine must stay attached to the vine. He said, "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:6). The one who does not continue to abide in Jesus, but falls away, suffers destruction. The true branches do abide in Christ and they do bear fruit.

Again, in Matthew 7:15-20 Jesus said, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 So then, you will know them by their fruits." We discern true believers from the false by the fruit that is

produced in their lives. As a good tree will produce good fruit, a good person, truly transformed by the Lord, will produce good fruit. People are known by what they produce, not by what they profess.

But, the writer says in verses 9-12, he is convinced that they are not among those who fall away, who are producing thorns and thistles and are close to being cursed. He's convinced of better things about them. He's convinced that there are "things that accompany salvation" in them. To "accompany" something means to go along with it. If I accompany you, it means that I'm going with you wherever you are going. This also helps us interpret this passage. He's saying that good fruit accompanies salvation. Salvation brings it about because salvation has to do with what God does in us when we believe. His Spirit comes in and washes us and regenerates us and renews us (Titus 3:5). When God saves us we are made new creatures in Christ and the old things have passed away (2 Corinthians 5:17). Salvation is the work of God, His gift to us whereby He makes us alive, raises us up and seats us with Christ in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:4-9). It is inevitable that some good fruit must come about from God's salvation.

The author touches on some of the fruit that his readers have exhibited in verse 10. He says, "For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints." They had ministered to the saints in the past and were still ministering to them in the present. They were serving other believers, working for them and taking care of them. In this way, they showed love for God's name. Bearing good fruit has a lot to do with how we treat other people. Caring for others is a fruit of our salvation. Our love for God is seen in our service toward others. Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him, and when Peter affirmed his love, Jesus told him to take care of His sheep (John 21:15-17). The way we treat others, especially other believers, is the way we treat Christ Himself. When Saul was persecuting the church and Christ appeared to Him, Jesus asked, "Saul, Saul why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4.) In Matthew 25:31-46, we read what Jesus had to say about the day of judgment:

"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. 32 "And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; 33 and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. 34 "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; 36 naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink? 38 'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 39 'And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.' 41 "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and

his angels; 42 for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; 43 I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' 44 "Then they themselves also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?' 45 "Then He will answer them, saying, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' 46 "And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

What we do for "one of the least" of the brothers of Jesus, we do for Jesus Himself. When we neglect one of the least of the brothers of Jesus, we neglect Him. Our love for Him is seen in our love for one another. We cannot claim to love Him if we do not love each other. John says, "We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen." (1 John 4:19-20.)

The desire that the author has for his readers is that they display a continued diligence so that they will have full assurance of their hope until the end (verse 11). He means that he wants his readers to continue in their work and love and their ministry to the saints so that they will not waver in their assurance of hope. We will struggle with assurance of salvation if we are not consistent and diligent in our obedience. To be diligent is to keep at something until it is done. You focus on a thing and keep it in focus until the task is completed. Our task will not be completed until we die or until the Lord returns. Our task is loving and caring for people in the power of the Holy Spirit, and we must keep at it for as long as we can.

He wants them to be diligent and continue bearing good fruit, but he does not want them to be sluggish (verse 12). This was a problem for his readers, as he has expressed in 5:11. They had become "dull of hearing" and they needed to break out of their slothfulness. They needed to imitate "those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." He has a great list of these people coming up in chapter 11. God's promises are inherited through faith and patience. We must continue believing and we must continue waiting. It is like a farmer waiting to harvest his crop. He must believe in the process and wait for the crop to mature. If he stops believing in the growth he may give up and leave. If he is impatient, he may try to harvest it too soon and it will be no good. We need a patient, enduring faith in the Lord. His promises will be fulfilled in His time.

The promise that the author is talking about is the promise God made to Abraham (verse 13), and Abraham is the great example of one who inherited the promise by faith and patience. When God made the promise He swore by Himself, since there is no one greater. The promise is summarized in verse 14, "I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply you." This is the core of the promise originally given to Abraham in Genesis 12, repeated in Genesis 15, 17 and 22. He is thinking of the instance in Genesis 22 where God added His oath to the promise. It was right after Abraham had demonstrated that he would give his son Isaac up as a sacrifice. God said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall

possess the gate of their enemies. And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." (Genesis 22:16-18.) This promise he obtained after waiting patiently. He saw the beginning of the fulfillment of the promise while he was alive on this earth. He saw the birth of Isaac and of his sons, Esau and Jacob. Abraham had to wait until he was 100 years old and Sarah was old and past the age of childbearing before God fulfilled the promise and Isaac was born. Through this time, Abraham continued in faith, believing that God would fulfill His promise.

In verses 16-18 the author explains why God swore an oath when He gave the promise. Men swear by someone greater than themselves as a confirmation that they will do what they have promised, and it puts an end to disputes. We question and doubt one another until we swear by something greater than ourselves, then our word is taken seriously and we are believed. God's promise was sure and certain to begin with, but He went on to add an oath to it in order to show the "unchangeableness of His purpose." The purpose that God expressed in His promise to Abraham was and is unchangeable. It has not been revoked or revised to this day, and the promise has been kept and fulfilled in Christ and in the gospel. God has proven Himself faithful to His promise. He gave us two unchangeable things, the promise itself, and the oath confirming the promise. Since it is impossible for God to lie, His promise is doubly certain, and "we may have strong encouragement."

This "strong encouragement" is for those "who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us." Numbers 35 and Joshua 21 talk about the cities of refuge that were designated for those who had accidentally or unintentionally killed someone. They were to flee to one of these cities and would find refuge and protection from the one who pursued them to avenge the blood they had shed. As long as the "manslayer" stayed in the city of refuge, he was safe. We run for refuge by laying hold of "the hope set before us." This hope is in Jesus Himself. We find refuge and safety from God's vengeance only in Him. It is up to us to flee and to lay hold of this hope. Hope is there! It is "set before us." God has put it there in Christ; He has not withheld it. He has not left us hopeless. He has provided a solution to our sin and guilt. He has provided an escape from His wrath. He has provided a "hope that does not disappoint" (Romans 5:5). Why would anyone refuse to grab the hope that God offers? Why would anyone refuse His offer of rescue and the safety He has provided?

It is interesting to note how the author's flow of thought moves from one subject into the next. He has just talked about laying hold of the hope set before us, and in verses 19 and 20 he talks about that hope and its characteristics. Our hope in Christ is an "anchor of the soul" which is "both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil" where Jesus is. It is an interesting picture of an anchor that ties our souls to the most holy place inside the temple, the place where God's presence is. Because Jesus has entered the true holy place as our forerunner to make atonement for our sins with His own blood, we have a sure and steadfast hope. This hope is anchored to what Christ has done inside the holy place. It is a hope that does not fail and that holds firm. It is not a hope in our own goodness or our own performance. If our hope is in ourselves it will fail, but if our hope is in Christ and in what He has done it cannot fail.

Jesus entered the holy place as our forerunner and eternal high priest. He opened the way for us. Because he was a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek He was able to do this. Verse 20 closes this sort-of parenthetical section exhorting the

readers to remain faithful and returns us to the discussion of the Melchizedek priesthood, which he left off in 5:10. He is now going to move on to concepts that are beyond the elementary.

Hebrews 7

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, 2 to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. 3 Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually.

4 Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils. 5 And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham. 6 But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham, and blessed the one who had the promises. 7 But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater. 8 And in this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one *receives them*, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on. 9 And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, 10 for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

11 Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need *was there* for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? 12 For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. 13 For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. 14 For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests. 15 And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, 16 who has become *such* not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. 17 For it is witnessed *of Him*, "THOU ART A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK." 18 For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness 19 (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. 20 And inasmuch as *it was* not without an oath 21 (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him, "THE LORD HAS SWORN AND WILL NOT CHANGE HIS MIND, 'THOU ART A PRIEST FOREVER'"); 22 so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. 23 And the *former* priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers, because they were prevented by death from continuing, 24 but He, on the other hand, because He abides forever, holds His priesthood permanently. 25 Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him,

since He always lives to make intercession for them.

26 For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the *sins* of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. 28 For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, *appoints* a Son, made perfect forever.

The first thing the author does as he begins discussing Melchizedek is to give an overview of who he was. Verses 1 and 2 give us an quick summary of his encounter with Abraham and point out the meaning of his name and title. Melchizedek was the king of Salem and priest of the Most High God who met Abraham when he returned from defeating the kings who had taken Lot captive. Abraham gave him a tenth of all the spoils of war. The encounter is recorded in Genesis 14:17-20:

Then after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). 18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. 19 And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; 20 And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he gave him a tenth of all.

While Abraham snubbed the king of Sodom, he recognized Melchizedek and paid him a tithe. Abraham and Melchizedek both worshipped God Most High. Melchizedek called Abraham "Abram of God Most High." Melchizedek was a true priest of the true God.

The sentence in verses 1 and 2 tells us who Melchizedek was. The author says, "For this Melchizedek...was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace." Righteousness and peace were characteristics of his reign in his kingdom. The two things are often found together in scripture. In the familiar description of the Messiah in Isaiah 9:6-7 it says, "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this." The Messiah's reign would also be marked by righteousness and peace. Isaiah 32:17 says, "And the work of righteousness will be peace, And the service of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever." Peace is a "work of righteousness." Righteousness produces peace because unrest, violence and upheaval are a result of unrighteousness. But when people are righteous, they are peaceful and there is no conflict. This is why so many of our efforts to bring about peace in our world must fail, because we are trying to establish peace apart from righteousness. When people are right with God and one another, there will be peace.

The New Testament also says, “for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17). When God reigns fully there will be righteousness and peace.

Next he says that Melchizedek was “Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life” (verse 3). Are we to take this literally? Melchizedek had no father or mother? Did he just appear as a specially created man? Of course the author does not mean that he literally had no parents and no human lineage. He is arguing from the silence of scripture. Scripture says nothing about these aspects of Melchizedek's life. He is saying that scripture does not record his lineage. We are not told who the parents of Melchizedek were. We are not told from which family he came. The author is establishing here that there was a true, legitimate priest of God before the Jewish priesthood from the tribe of Levi even existed. Melchizedek was not a priest because he had a certain lineage, but because God had established him as such. This priesthood predated the Levitical priesthood and is superior to it. This is the thrust of his argument. He makes the point more clearly in verse 6, “But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them [from Levi] collected a tenth from Abraham, and blessed the one who had the promises.” It was not his genealogy that made him a member of a class of priests.

Further in verse 3 he says, “but made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually.” Melchizedek was not the Son of God, but was like Him. He was no theophany (a prior incarnation of Christ), but was an ordinary man. But in that he abides a priest perpetually, He is like the Son of God. The end of his life is not recorded in scripture. His priesthood still exists.

The author invites his readers to reflect on the greatness of Melchizedek in verses 4-10 and contrasts his priesthood with the Levitical priesthood. His greatness is seen in the fact that Abraham himself gave a tithe of the “choicest spoils” to Melchizedek. The Levites receive tithes from their brethren, the descendants of Abraham, as commanded in the Law, but Melchizedek received a tithe from Abraham Himself, to whom was given the promises. Abraham was God's specially chosen man, the man through whom He was going to bring blessing to the whole world. Abraham was the man through whom the Messiah would come. Yet he paid a tithe to Melchizedek. Abraham recognized the priesthood of Melchizedek and honored him. He saw that the tithe was due to this man as the priest of God.

The greatness of Melchizedek is also seen in the fact that he blessed Abraham. He points out that the lesser is blessed by the greater (verse 7), and so Abraham was blessed by Melchizedek. Melchizedek was in a position to pass on the blessing of God to Abraham.

Another indication of the greatness of Melchizedek is seen in the contrast between the Levitical priests who were “mortal men” and Melchizedek, “of whom it is witnessed that he lives on” (verse 8). His priesthood is a perpetual one, but each Levitical priest had a temporary term of office because of their mortality. Again, this is an argument from silence. Genesis says nothing about the death of Melchizedek. Melchizedek is a type of Christ and His forerunner, and established the priestly order to which Jesus belongs. Jesus is the true eternal, immortal priest, of whom Melchizedek is a picture.

Melchizedek also received tithes, in a sense, from Levi, since Levi was “still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.” When Abraham paid the tithe to

Melchizedek, Levi was paying the tithe as well. All of the descendants of Abraham were represented by him as he paid the tithe to Melchizedek. In Abraham all Israel paid the tithe to Melchizedek.

Having established the greatness of Melchizedek and his priesthood, the author turns to the question of why another priest from his order was necessary. The Levitical priesthood was established, so why was another priesthood necessary? The question in verse 11 tells us that another priest was needed from outside the order of Aaron because perfection did not come through the Levitical priesthood. If the Levitical priests could have truly brought men into a right relationship with God, then we would not need another priest. But the Levitical priesthood and the Law cannot bring us to perfection. It is inadequate and was so from the beginning.

Verses 12-14 point out that when you change the priesthood, you change the law as well. The Law established the Levites as priests, but Jesus came along as a priest in the order of Melchizedek. The Law would have barred Jesus from being a priest because He did not come from the tribe of Levi, but was from the tribe of Judah (verse 14). No one from the tribe of Judah has officiated at the altar as a priest. Moses has said nothing about priests coming from the tribe of Judah. Saul got into trouble for offering a sacrifice and serving as a priest when he was from the tribe of Benjamin (1 Samuel 13:8-14) and Samuel said that his kingdom would be removed from him. It was a serious violation to try to serve as a priest if you weren't from the tribe of Levi. Though he was king, Saul could not be a priest. But God has stepped in and provided His Son as both King and Priest. He is a priest of a different order, of the order of Melchizedek, and not of Levi. Therefore, God has changed the Law to allow for another kind of priest.

It is clear that God has changed the Law, since Jesus has come along in the "likeness of Melchizedek" (verse 15). He has become high priest not because He fulfills the legal requirement of being a descendant of Levi, but because of "the power of an indestructible life" (verse 16). To prove this, the author again quotes Psalm 110:4, "The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, 'Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'" Jesus is indestructible, His life goes on and on forever. He cannot be removed from His priesthood by death and so His priesthood is eternal. God Himself has sworn that He is a priest forever. God has changed the priesthood. Now there is only one Great High Priest for all people for all time. God has set aside the former commandment because it was weak and useless (verse 18) and has brought in a better hope through which we draw near to Him (verse 19). The former law was weak and useless because it could make nothing perfect. No one could truly and finally "draw near to God" through the Law. It was powerless to do for us what we really needed done. The Law served only to condemn us and to point out our sin and how far short we fall. This in fact is its purpose, which Paul discusses in Galatians 3. The Law is our tutor to lead us to Christ (Gal. 3:24) but is powerless to save us. Likewise the priesthood established by the Law is inadequate to bring us to God. But in Jesus we have a "better hope," a hope that will not let us down, a hope that brings us to God.

When Jesus became a priest, God installed Him with an oath. God swore that He would be a priest forever and God will not change His mind. God swore no oath regarding the Levitical priests, but in this case He has, which establishes again the superiority of the priesthood of Jesus. Therefore Jesus is the "guarantee of a better

covenant” (verse 22). It is a covenant sealed with the oath of God Himself. Jesus Himself is the guarantee that God's promises to us will not be broken, but He will keep His agreement with us. The new covenant in Christ is a better covenant. The new hope in Christ is a better hope (verse 19).

The Levitical priests “existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing” (verse 23). This contrasts with Jesus who “holds His priesthood permanently” because “He abides forever” (verse 24). Jesus will not be removed or step down from His priestly function. He is a permanent priest, an eternal priest. There will be no more priests in His order. Since He “abides forever” He is also “able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (verse 25). Our eternal salvation depends on Jesus representing us before the Father. He is able to save us because He is seated at the right hand of the Father for all eternity and is interceding for us. Romans 8:33-34 says, “Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.” When Isaiah spoke of the suffering and death of Christ, he wrote, “Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12). Jesus is before the Father, speaking on our behalf, turning away His wrath from us. We cannot be condemned by anyone because Jesus is our advocate and mediator with the Father.

It is fitting that Jesus should be our high priest (verse 26) because He is the kind of priest we really need. He is holy, completely set apart from the rest of mankind and set apart to God. He is innocent, without an evil nature or any evil behavior. He is undefiled, without stain or blemish or any contamination. He is “separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens.” In this sense He is not “one of us.” He is man as man was meant to be, but He is also our God and high priest. He is the one man without any taint of evil, who truly qualifies to be our priest and advocate. Because of this he does not need to offer up sacrifices for His own sins every day (verse 27). He offered up the one great sacrifice of Himself for our sins once for all people for all time. Unlike the Levitical priests there was no need for Jesus to atone for His own sins because He was not a sinner. He was able to fully and truly carry out the function of a priest and bring us into a relationship with God.

There is one final contrast in chapter 7, “For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.” We have the Law on one hand and the word of the oath on the other. The Law appoints men, the word of the oath appoints a Son. The Law appoints men who are inadequate and weak, the word of the oath appoints a Son who is “made perfect forever.” God said, “Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee” (Psalms 2:7). Through His Son God did for us what we could not do ourselves. He sent His Son to be our priest and our sacrifice, and He is more than adequate.

Now the main point in what has been said *is this*: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, 2 a minister in the sanctuary, and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. 3 For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary that this *high priest* also have something to offer. 4 Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; 5 who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned *by God* when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "SEE," He says, "THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN." 6 But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. 7 For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. 8 For finding fault with them, He says, "BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH; 9 NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS ON THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; FOR THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD. 10 "FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM UPON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. 11 "AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, 'KNOW THE LORD,' FOR ALL SHALL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM. 12 "FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE." 13 When He said, "A new *covenant*," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.

The author says that his main point in what he's been saying is that we have such a high priest, a high priest who is the Son of God, who is holy, innocent, undefiled and separate from sinners, a high priest who is not weak but is perfect, a high priest who offered Himself up once for all as a perfect sacrifice for sins. This high priest is a heavenly priest and not an earthly one. He has taken His seat at the right hand of God's throne and is a minister in the true sanctuary and tabernacle which the Lord has erected. He is the real heavenly high priest in the real heavenly sanctuary who is really in the true presence of God the Father.

The job of a high priest is to "offer both gifts and sacrifices" (verse 3). Therefore Jesus also had to have something to offer. As the earthly high priests had to offer the gifts and sacrifices in the earthly tabernacle, so Jesus had to offer a sacrifice in the heavenly tabernacle. This sacrifice was, of course, the sacrifice of His own life for us.

Verses 4-6 draw a contrast and summarize the superiority of the ministry of Jesus. The contrast is between the earthly priests and the ministry of Jesus. Jesus would not be a priest at all if He were on earth because there are priests already who offer gifts in accordance with the Law. They serve "a copy and a shadow of the heavenly things."

Quoting Exodus 25:40, the author points out that God gave Moses a clear plan for the tabernacle, and warned him to follow it closely because it was an earthly representation of the heavenly truth. God gave him a pattern to follow. It was a model of the tabernacle in heaven. A copy is not the original. A shadow is not the real thing, but is the image cast by the real thing. The tabernacle and the ministry in the tabernacle taught important lessons about our relationship to God and how we approach God, but was inadequate to truly deal with our sins for all time. But Jesus has done it. He has atoned for our sins with His own blood in the true heavenly sanctuary. His ministry is “more excellent” than the ministry of those in the earthly tabernacle. He is the mediator of a better covenant enacted on better promises. The promises are the foundation of the covenant which is the foundation of His ministry.

By the way, this word “better” occurs 13 times in 12 verses in Hebrews and points out the thrust of the whole book, that Jesus is better than whatever came before. The book is saying that Jesus is better than Moses, that the new covenant is better than the old covenant, that the true heavenly tabernacle is better than the earthly tabernacle, that the ministry of Jesus is better than the ministry of the earthly priests, and that the promises of the new covenant are better than those of the old. He is pointing out the folly of forsaking what is “better” to return to what is inferior and inadequate.

Beginning in verse 7 and continuing through verse 13, the author discusses the superiority of the new, second, covenant. First, God found fault with the first covenant. There was a need for a second covenant because the first was faulty. God spoke of establishing a new covenant because the old was inadequate. The problem with the old covenant was that the people could not keep it. They could not keep their part of the covenant, to be completely obedient. As Paul points out in Romans, the weakness of the Law is in our inability to keep it because of our sinful nature. In Romans 7:12-14 he says, “So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful. For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.” And in Romans 8:3-4 he writes, “For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” The weakness of the Law is our flesh. We are incapable of fulfilling the requirements of the Law, so God had to bring in a new covenant.

The promise and nature of the new covenant are contained in the quote from Jeremiah 31:31-34. The new covenant would be made by God. God always takes the initiative in making covenants with mankind, and God determined that He would make a new covenant with Israel and Judah. He says that the new covenant would not be like the old, but would be different. The old covenant was made when He took Israel by the hand to lead them out of Egypt. He gave them the old covenant through Moses as they escaped from slavery in Egypt. When He says He “took them by the hand” it sounds as if He was treating them like children. When you lead a child, you take them by the hand. Israel was a little child when God led them out of Egypt. They needed strict rules and laws to govern their behavior. Little children need clear rules and guidelines

so that they will know how to behave and when they have crossed the line. This is what God gave them. After He led them out of Egypt and met with Moses at Mount Sinai, God said to them, "Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine" (Exodus 19:5). The people said that they would obey the commands of the Lord and agreed to the covenant. Exodus 34:27-28 reveals that the covenant is embodied in the ten commandments, "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.' So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments." The ten commandments reveal our part of the old covenant.

The problem with the old covenant was that Israel "did not continue" in the covenant. They broke the covenant. They did not do what they said they would do and were not obedient to God's commands. This is why a new covenant was needed. They did not continue in the covenant and God did not care for them. When they turned from God, God turned from them and neglected them. You can't expect God to take care of you if you have no commitment to Him, no interest in Him and make no attempt to obey Him.

The new covenant that God would make with them would be different in that it would be an internal rather than external covenant. God said, "I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them upon their hearts." The law would no longer be an external thing, chiseled on stone tablets, but it would be inside them. The law would be internalized in the hearts and minds of God's people. This is something God does and it does not depend on our effort. God puts His laws into our minds. He writes them on our hearts. In psychology they talk about "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" motivation. Intrinsic motivation has to do with someone who is self-motivated to do something because they have internalized the conviction or commitment to do it. They do something because they believe in it. Extrinsic motivation has to do with someone who does something because some outside force has required it of them, and not because they believe in it. God says that the new covenant is an intrinsic rather than extrinsic thing. He has sent His Spirit into our hearts, who cries "Abba! Father!" (Galatians 4:6).

The effect or result of writing His laws on our hearts is that He becomes our God and we become His people. We say, "My Lord and my God!" and He says, "My child!" We own Him and He owns us. This is what God wants. A couple of other passages in Jeremiah express this same idea:

"And I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the LORD; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart."
(Jeremiah 24:7.)

"Behold, I will gather them out of all the lands to which I have driven them in My anger, in My wrath, and in great indignation; and I will bring them back to this place and make them dwell in safety. And they shall be My people, and I will be their God; and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good, and for the good of their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good;

and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me.” (Jeremiah 32:37-40.)

The new covenant would bring with it the true knowledge of the Lord. Those who have His laws written on their hearts know Him. They do not have to be taught or exhorted to know the Lord, but they do know Him in reality. Two Greek words are translated “know” in verse 11. The first “know” is the verb *ginosko*, “to learn to know, come to know, get a knowledge of perceive, feel”⁹ The second word, when he says, “for all shall know Me” is *eido*, which has to do with seeing or perceiving with any of the senses. The knowledge of the Lord is not just an academic thing that can be taught, but it is a thing that those who know Him experience. They perceive Him and His presence with their senses. It is the difference between “knowing” the president by what we read in the news and see on TV and “knowing” him because you are his friend and actually spend time with him in his presence. God promised that under the new covenant all His people would know Him in this way.

God further explains in verse 12, “For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.” This is the key. In order to know the Lord and be one of His people, God must be merciful to us and forgive us. The new covenant is founded upon God's forgiveness. This is what we need, His mercy and forgiveness. He is merciful to our “iniquities.” The word is *adikia* – meaning “not right” or “not just,” in other words, unrighteous or unjust. We lack righteousness, but God is merciful, and forgives us. We are sinners who fall short and “miss the mark” of perfection, but God will not recall our sins under the new covenant. He will not hold them against us because of Christ.

The fact that God announced a new covenant implies that that the old is obsolete (verse 13). It is old and is “ready to disappear.” It is like my old IBM 486 computer. We still have it around the house, but no one uses it. It is old, slow, obsolete and will not run the software that we want to run. It's hardware and operating system are out of date. The hard drive is too small for anything. It is ready to disappear. We are ready to get rid of it. God said that He would make a new covenant with His people because of the weakness of the old, and in doing so He declared the old obsolete. The old covenant needed to be replaced because it was inadequate to redeem us. This does not mean that the Law has been set aside. Jesus said:

“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:17-19.)

9 Thayer's Greek Lexicon

He did not come to abolish the first covenant, but to fulfill it. The Law is still to be taught "until all is accomplished." It is just not to be taught as the way of redemption. The way of redemption now under the new covenant is Jesus Himself. The Law still has a role in leading us to faith in Christ.

Hebrews 9

Now even the first *covenant* had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary. 2 For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which *were* the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. 3 And behind the second veil, there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, 4 having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which *was* a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant. 5 And above it *were* the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail. 6 Now when these things have been thus prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle, performing the divine worship, 7 but into the second only the high priest *enters*, once a year, not without *taking* blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. 8 The Holy Spirit *is* signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed, while the outer tabernacle is still standing, 9 which *is* a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, 10 since they *relate* only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.

11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, *He entered* through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; 12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15 And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that *were committed* under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. 16 For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. 17 For a covenant is valid *only* when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives. 18 Therefore even the first *covenant* was not inaugurated without blood. 19 For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, 20 saying, "THIS IS THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT WHICH GOD COMMANDED YOU." 21 And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood. 22 And according to the Law, *one may* almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

23 Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. 24 For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a *mere* copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; 25 nor was it that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood not his own. 26 Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. 27 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment, 28 so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without *reference to sin*, to those who eagerly await Him.

This chapter contrasts the earthly tabernacle of the first covenant with the true heavenly tabernacle of the new covenant. Verses 1-10 describe the earthly tabernacle. The first covenant had regulations for worship and the sanctuary. Certain things had to be done in a certain way in a certain place. You could not approach God in any way that you chose, but you had to come to the tabernacle and through the priests come to God.

The tabernacle had an outer holy place in front of the inner tabernacle, the holy of holies. In the outer tabernacle he mentions the lampstand and the table holding the showbread. In the inner tabernacle, the holy of holies, the author says, was the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant. This is a problem, because Exodus 30:6 says that this altar of incense was to be located “in front of the veil that is near the ark of the testimony, in front of the mercy seat that is over the ark of the testimony.” The altar of incense could not have been inside the curtain along with the ark of the covenant because the priests were required to keep incense burning on it every day, which they could not do if it were in the holy of holies. Only the high priest could enter that place once a year. I think that the altar of incense was so closely linked with the ark and with the mercy seat, that the author speaks of it as part of the inner tabernacle rather than the outer. It belonged to the holy of holies even though it was outside the veil.

Inside the ark was the golden jar of manna, Aaron's rod and the tables of the covenant. The ark of the covenant containing the tablets on which God had written the ten commandments was in a most holy place, sealed off from the people. They could not just come in and open the box and look at the covenant. Why would God write His Law on tablets of stone and then hide it away in a gold box inside a sealed tent? What was He saying in doing this? We would expect that the tablets would be mounted or posted somewhere so all the people could see them and read them. God is telling us something in this. God is saying that the Law, the covenant, is holy and perfect and we cannot approach it. He's saying that His standards cannot be attained by sinful men. He's saying the same thing that Paul said in Romans 7:12 “So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.” And in Romans 7:14 he says, “For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.” The one who is sinful cannot approach that which is holy.

Above the ark were the “cherubim of glory” with their wings stretched out over the

ark and over the “mercy seat.” The “mercy seat” was the place where the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled on the day of atonement to appease God for the sins of the people. It was the place where they found mercy because of the blood of the sacrifice. This aspect of the ark was described by God in Exodus 25:18-22:

"And you shall make two cherubim of gold, make them of hammered work at the two ends of the mercy seat. 19 And make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim of one piece with the mercy seat at its two ends. 20 And the cherubim shall have their wings spread upward, covering the mercy seat with their wings and facing one another; the faces of the cherubim are to be turned toward the mercy seat. 21 And you shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I shall give to you. 22 And there I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel."

Note that God says that the mercy seat is the place where He would meet with them and speak to them. In order to meet with God we must receive His mercy and forgiveness. Our sins must be covered by the blood of the sacrifice if we want to meet with God.

Having briefly described the tabernacle and the contents of the Holy of Holies, He goes on to describe what goes on there in verses 6-7. Most of the activity is in the outer tabernacle. The priests are continually going in and out of the outer tabernacle, “performing the divine worship.” This is where they offered the sacrifices and offerings. This was the place where the day-to-day service was accomplished. But verse 7 brings in a contrast. Only once a year was anyone allowed into the most holy place. The high priest was allowed to go in on the day of atonement, and was required to take the blood of the sacrifices with him. He was not to enter the holy place without the blood that he would offer for his sins and the sins of the people. The day of atonement is described in Leviticus 16, and the sprinkling of the blood in verses 14-16:

"Moreover, he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side; also in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times. Then he shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood inside the veil, and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. And he shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the impurities of the sons of Israel, and because of their transgressions, in regard to all their sins; and thus he shall do for the tent of meeting which abides with them in the midst of their impurities."

God required this procedure “because of their transgressions, in regard to all their sins.” The tent of meeting was with them “in the midst of their impurities.” There was a continual reminder of their sinfulness and inability to approach the holy God without the shedding of blood. Our sin calls for a sacrifice, for the shedding of blood and for the death of a substitute so that we will not die. This is the clear picture portrayed by the

tabernacle and the service there.

The Holy Spirit, through the tabernacle and its service, is making something clear. He is showing us “that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed.” The outer tabernacle is a symbol of this truth. It is a “parable” (the word for “symbol” here is *parabole*), an earthly picture of a heavenly reality. The tabernacle shows us that the way is barred to us, that we have no means of entering into the presence of God and permanently staying there in fellowship with Him through the old covenant.

Furthermore, the gifts and sacrifices offered in the tabernacle “cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience.” They cannot cleanse and renew a defiled conscience. They cannot purify an impure conscience. They relate to external things, and not internal things. This is the first of four references to the conscience in Hebrews. The conscience is our internal sense of good and bad, of right and wrong. The reason that people do what is wrong is that their conscience is impure. The conscience is the internal guidance system, and if it is not right, our direction will not be right. People do not have moral discernment of right and wrong because the Spirit of God does not live in them. A defiled conscience leads to sin, and sin to further defilement of the conscience, and it becomes a vicious circle. The old covenant can't do anything about this problem. It can point us to right and wrong intellectually, but it can't cleanse a bad conscience.

The old covenant was “imposed until a time of reformation.” The word for “reformation” means to make something straight. When a picture on the wall is crooked, we adjust it to make it straight, to make it right. In Christ we have the reformation. He sets everything straight. The Law gives us the standard of “straightness,” but Christ fulfills it.

Verse 11 turns to the new covenant in Christ. He appeared as a “high priest of the good things to come.” He did not enter the earthly tabernacle, but entered into “the greater and more perfect tabernacle.” Jesus entered into the true heavenly tabernacle, the one after which the earthly tabernacle was patterned. It is greater and more perfect than the earthly tabernacle because it is not just a representation, but is the reality. It is not just a model, but is the real thing. Human hands did not make this tabernacle because it is not of this creation. The false witnesses at Jesus' trial said, “We heard Him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.’” (Mark 14:58.) Jesus told Pilate that His kingdom was “not of this world” (John 18:36). There is a true Most Holy Place where the true presence of God dwells in reality and fullness. It is into this place that Jesus entered.

When Christ entered the greater and more perfect tabernacle, He did not take with Him the blood of goats and calves, but took His own blood. It was through His own blood that He gained entry into the true holy place. He was both the priest who offered the sacrifice and the sacrifice itself! He entered the holy place once for all time, not again and again year after year. Jesus only had to enter with His redeeming blood one time into the holy place to make full atonement for our sins. He did this, “having obtained eternal redemption.” The word for “redemption” is *lutrosis*, a ransoming. It comes from the verb *lutroo*, “to release on receipt of ransom.”¹⁰ Jesus said that He had not come to be served but to serve, “and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew

10 Thayer's Greek Lexicon

20:28). His life was the price He paid to free us from sin and death and from the wrath of God. The blood that He took into the holy place was His life, poured out for us, given freely and willingly for us. God explained in Leviticus that the life of a creature was in its blood and forbade the Israelites from eating blood. He explained in Leviticus 17:11 "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement." Blood makes atonement because the blood of a creature is its life. The blood of Jesus was the life of Jesus. This is the essence of the love of God for us, in the giving of the life of the Son of God to pay our ransom and to redeem us. Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends, if you do what I command you" (John 15:13-14). He said that He gave His life willingly, "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father" (John 10:18). His life was not taken, but was given in obedience to the command of the Father. It was the Father's directive to Him to do so and He willingly obeyed.

A contrast is drawn in verses 13 and 14 between the blood of goats and bulls and the blood of Christ. It is an "if...then" construction. If the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer cleanse the flesh, then how much more will the blood of Christ cleanse the conscience? If there is some external efficacy in the blood of bulls and goats as far as sanctification is concerned, how much more efficacious must the blood of Christ be? The sacrifice of Christ is far better than that of a goat or bull. The blood of Christ was offered "through the eternal Spirit." The redemption in His blood (verse 12) is eternal because He is eternal. This is no temporary offering that only covers us for a short time, but is eternally effective. Again, His blood was offered willingly. He "offered Himself." His offering was "without blemish." There was no sin, no spot, no taint of imperfection in Christ. He was spotless and completely holy. His offering was made "to God." That seems an obvious and unnecessary observation to highlight, but it is important. The sacrifice of Christ was not made to appease the devil, or sin, or death, but to appease the wrath of God. The offering the Son made of Himself He made to God to atone for our sins. It is God who requires the death of a perfect victim to turn aside His wrath.

The blood of Christ does more than cleanse the flesh; it cleanses the conscience. It cleans us up on the inside. From what does the conscience need cleansing? From "dead works." The author has used this phrase earlier, in 6:1, when he mentioned "repentance from dead works" as one of the elementary and foundational teachings that everyone needs to understand. The conscience is tainted by these "dead works," works that lead to death, that is, sins, and the vain attempts we make in the flesh to obey the Law. These "dead works" keep us from serving God. You cannot serve the living God through dead works. Your conscience must be cleansed from dead works so that you may be set free to serve the living God. Paul says much the same thing in Ephesians 2:8-10, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." The cleansing that salvation brings makes us fit for the good works that God has prepared for us to do. We are saved for good

works and not by good works. We are saved to serve the living God not by trying to serve the living God.

Because of His death, Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant. A mediator is one who stands between two estranged parties to bring about a peaceful settlement of their dispute. This is what Jesus did through His death. Through death He reconciled us to God. Romans 5:10-11 says, "For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation." Jesus is the one and only mediator between God and man, as Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:5-6, "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony borne at the proper time." Through His death that ransomed and redeemed us, Jesus brought in the new covenant, the new arrangement whereby "those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." The transgressions committed under the first covenant have been forgiven in the new covenant because of the death of Christ. The first covenant was a covenant of law, the new covenant is a covenant of grace in Jesus Christ.

We should note that it is those who are called who receive the promise of eternal life. This idea of the "call" is consistent in the New Testament. Jesus taught it in the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22:1-14. Peter preached it in Acts 2:39 and taught it in his epistles (1 Peter 1:15, 2:9, 2:21, 3:9, 5:10; 2 Peter 1:3, 1:10). Paul mentions it many times, supremely in Romans 8:28-30 and Romans 9. Jude wrote to those "who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ" in Jude 1. We cannot get away from this doctrine if we are honest about what the Bible teaches; it is too explicit and plain. It is those whom God calls who "receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." Paul explained the process in Romans 8:28-30:

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; 30 and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Paul's emphasis is that it is God who foreknows, who predestines, who calls, who justifies and who glorifies. Salvation, from beginning to end, is something that God does, and His call is part of it.

The first covenant was inaugurated with blood (verses 18-23). Death was necessary even with the first covenant. The author recounts the events of Exodus 24:3-8 in verses 19 and 20. The blood of the first covenant was the blood of calves and goats, which was sprinkled on the people as they promised to be obedient to all that the Lord had commanded. As Moses sprinkled the people with the blood, he said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words" (Exodus 24:8b). The Lord had made and initiated the covenant, and it was sealed by the blood of the sacrifices. Later Moses sprinkled the tabernacle and all

the tools of the ministry with blood. The reason for this is that the Law requires that all things be cleansed with blood, and that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. There may be exceptions (“one may almost say”) to the rule that all things must be cleansed with blood, but it is true that there is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood. Therefore (verse 23) the earthly copy of the “things in the heavens” had to be cleansed with the ritual sacrifices, but the heavenly things require a better sacrifice. The earthly sacrifices won't cleanse the heavenly tabernacle.

What was superior about Christ's sacrifice, then? Why is His sacrifice better? He gives us two reasons in verses 24-28. First, His sacrifice was offered in the true heavenly holy place in the true presence of God. He did not enter into the copy of the holy place but into the true one. He appeared in the presence of God “for us” (verse 24). All of this He did for us, as our representative and substitute. Second, the sacrifice of Christ was the sacrifice that truly “put away sin” and therefore only needed to be offered one time “at the consummation of the ages.” It is not necessary for Him to enter the holy place each year to make atonement for our sins. He does not need to “suffer often” for our sins, but only once. By His one sacrifice He has dealt with all sin of all people for all time.

Men die once and then they are judged (verse 27). This is how God has set it up. There is no concept of reincarnation in the Bible. There is resurrection, there is life after death, but there is no reincarnation. God does not send us back for another round on this earth. We are judged for what we did during this one life on earth that we are given. After death we stand before His judgment seat. This is the warning that we need to give to people. After death there is no opportunity to set right what you've done wrong.

As we die once and then are judged, so Christ died once to bear the sins of many (verse 28). He was judged in our place, taking our sins upon Himself. Having done this, we are assured that He will come again a second time to save those who wait for Him. He will not come again to suffer for our sins, but will come to receive those who are His to Himself. He said, “Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” (John 14:1-3.) This is why we “eagerly await Him.” He has promised to prepare a place just for us and to come back to retrieve us. Therefore Paul can say, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.” (Philippians 3:20-21.) Trouble is, I don't see much eager waiting and looking for Jesus these days. I don't see many Christians behaving as if this were true. Too many of us live as though we will be here on this earth in this life forever. We have become, in this country, too comfortable here. We don't live as citizens of heaven, and we conform too much to the pattern of this world in our values and behavior.

For the Law, since it has *only* a shadow of the good things to come *and* not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near. 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? 3 But in those *sacrifices* there is a reminder of sins year by year. 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. 5 Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, "SACRIFICE AND OFFERING THOU HAST NOT DESIRED, BUT A BODY THOU HAST PREPARED FOR ME; 6 IN WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND *sacrifices* FOR SIN THOU HAST TAKEN NO PLEASURE. 7 "THEN I SAID, 'BEHOLD, I HAVE COME (IN THE ROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME) TO DO THY WILL, O GOD.'" 8 After saying above, "SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS AND WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND *sacrifices* FOR SIN THOU HAST NOT DESIRED, NOR HAST THOU TAKEN PLEASURE *in them*" (which are offered according to the Law), 9 then He said, "BEHOLD, I HAVE COME TO DO THY WILL." He takes away the first in order to establish the second. 10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 11 And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; 12 but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, 13 waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET. 14 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. 15 And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, 16 "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND UPON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM," *He then says*, 17 "AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE." 18 Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer *any* offering for sin.

19 Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and since *we have* a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES. 28 Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on *the testimony of two or three witnesses*. 29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE." 31 It is a terrifying thing to fall into the

hands of the living God.

32 But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, 33 partly, by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. 34 For you showed sympathy to the prisoners, and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and an abiding one. 35 Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. 36 For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. 37 FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY. 38 BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM. 39 But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

The Law can never make anyone perfect, because it is just a shadow and not the substance (verse 1). It is a shadow “of the good things to come.” Jesus is the substance. He said that He had come to fulfill the Law (Matthew 5:17). The Law gave us a picture of the perfection of man, but Jesus was the perfect man. The Law calls for the same sacrifices, continually offered year after year, always depicting the future and final sacrifice of Christ. If the sacrifices of the Law could make people perfect, then they would have ceased to be offered, because they would have done their job. Worshipers would have had their consciences cleansed and their guilt wiped away. They are offered again and again because they are insufficient.

Instead of wiping out the consciousness of sins, the sacrifices of the Law provided “a reminder of sins year by year” (verse 3). What we need is a sacrifice that will cleanse us of our sins, not remind us of them. He explains in verse 4, “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” The blood of bulls and goats does not have the power or ability to take away our sins. The life of an animal cannot be a suitable substitute for the life of a man. What God wants to do is remove our sins. Psalms 103:12 says, “As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.” In Romans 11:26-27 Paul, quoting from Isaiah, says God's promised covenant with Israel involved sending a deliverer to take away their sins, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob. And this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.” This is not done through the blood of bulls and goats, but through the blood of the Deliverer Himself.

The author says in verses 5-7 that when Jesus came into the world, He said, quoting from Psalm 40:6-8, “Sacrifice and offering Thou has not desired, but a body Thou has prepared for Me, in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast taken no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come (in the roll of the book it is written of Me) to do Thy will, O God.'” These prophetic words point both to the inadequacy of the existing sacrifices and God's provision of His Son, who came to fulfill the Law. God did not desire sacrifice and offering. He took no pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices. These things did not satisfy Him. So He did what needed to be done and provided a body for His Son. The author is quoting from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament which was in common use at the time, and which

accounts for variant reading from the Hebrew version of Psalm 40:6. The substance of the passage remains the same. Jesus came to do the will of God. He said it was His “food” to do the will of God and to accomplish His work (John 4:34). He said, “I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 5:30). He repeated in John 6:38, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent me.” Everything Jesus did while on this earth was in accord with the will of His Father. As the perfectly obedient man he qualified to be the perfect sacrifice for our sins, our perfect substitute before the Father.

Verses 8 and 9 interpret the passage from Psalm 40. Jesus took away the sacrifices and offerings which did not please God in order to establish obedience to God's will. Jesus did not do away with the Law, but He did away with the sacrifices because He did the will of God. The sacrifices were required because of disobedience, but Christ's obedience and perfect sacrifice renders them unnecessary. There is now in Him true forgiveness and true cleansing. The impotent sacrifices are no longer needed because the final and sufficient sacrifice has been offered in Christ Himself.

Verse 10 tells us how this applies to us. By the will of God we are sanctified, we are made holy, through the once-for-all offering of the body that was prepared for Jesus Christ. The will of God is our sanctification. He wants us to share His holiness (Hebrews 12:10). The first step in this is that we be sanctified through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We are set apart to God because that is what God wants, and He made it possible through the offering of His Son.

The priests of the old covenant offer the same sacrifices time after time, over and over again, which are always ineffective, which will never take away sins. The priests were still doing this at the time Hebrews was written, before the Romans destroyed the temple in 70 AD. By contrast, Jesus offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, and sat down at the right hand of the Father to wait until His enemies are subjected to Him. This is the main point here. In offering Himself as a sacrifice for sins, He accomplished what the old covenant sacrifices could not. His sacrifice can and does take away sins. His sacrifice is sufficient for all sins for all time. Again he quotes Psalm 110:1 about His enemies being made His footstool. Verse 14 explains that by His one offering He perfects those who are sanctified for all time. This is done, it is accomplished, it is not still in the future. You have been perfected for all time already by the sacrifice of Christ. Our perfection is accomplished in Christ, but our sanctification is an ongoing process.

Note also the contrast between the old covenant priests who “stand” every day while offering their sacrifices, but Christ “sat down” after offering His, because it was finished. After His death and resurrection, Jesus had completed His work and was able to rest.

The author says that the Holy Spirit testifies to us about this same thing, and quotes again from Jeremiah 31:33-34. The Spirit said that God's Law would be put upon our hearts and written upon our minds. The Law and the new covenant would become an internal thing, not an external thing. The Spirit also said that He would no longer remember our sins and lawless deeds. Our sins and lawless deeds are not recalled under the new covenant. Because of Jesus' sacrifice our sins and lawless deeds really are forgiven and forgotten. The conclusion is in verse 18, “Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.” When sin is

removed, there is no need for further offerings for sin. The sacrifice of Jesus has done it! No more sacrifices are necessary. We can add nothing to what Jesus has done, we can only accept what He has done for us.

In verses 19-25 the author has a practical application and exhortation for us. Based on two things that we have in Christ, he exhorts us to do three things. First, he says that we have two things. We have "confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus." The blood of Jesus is the "new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh." Because of the sacrifice of Christ for us we have confidence, or boldness, to enter the most holy place into the presence of God. His blood opens the door for us and is the basis of our confidence. We also have "a great high priest over the house of God." We have the great Mediator who represents us before God, who stands in our place before Him, who has atoned in full for our sins.

Since we have confidence to enter the holy place and since we have a great high priest there, his first exhortation is, "let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith." Jesus died for us to enable us to come to Him, to approach the Father and to enjoy an intimate relationship with Him. Because of Christ we are invited and encouraged to draw near, to come before Him. God wants us to come close to Him. He is not pushing us away, but beckoning us to come closer. This is why He sent His Son, so that we might know Him and so that He might have fellowship with us. John says, "what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). Too many people today have the idea that God is remote and unapproachable, that He is not interested in us and that He doesn't want us. Some think that He is hostile toward us and wants to destroy us. These are all lies from the enemy. God wants us to come near to Him, and He has made it possible through His Son.

As we draw near we are to come with a sincere heart. Our hearts must be sincere, true, truthful. We need true and not false devotion. We need right motives and a true desire to know God and to come close to Him. You wouldn't want to marry someone who in reality just wanted your money, or just wanted to use you in order to have a child. You want a spouse who wants you for you. God wants those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23). He wants those who really want to know Him.

When we draw near we also need the full assurance of faith. This word for "full assurance," *plerophoria*, means "full assurance" or "full confidence" and occurs four times in the New Testament, twice in Hebrews. The author has used the term previously in 6:11, "And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the **full assurance** of hope until the end." He wanted them to have full assurance of the hope they had in Christ. In Colossians 2:2 Paul talks about "the wealth that comes from the **full assurance** of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself." Paul also uses the term in 1 Thessalonians 1:5, "for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with **full conviction**; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake." When we draw near we need a full assurance of what we believe. We need to have a strong, unwavering conviction that what we know of Jesus is true. As James

says in James 1:5-8, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." Faith is the thing that moves us to draw near and to make our requests to the Lord. We draw near because we believe that we have the confidence to enter through the blood of Jesus and because we believe that He has opened the way for us and because we believe that He is our great High priest. If we do not really believe these things, then we are not likely to draw near. God wants us to come to Him, trusting fully that these things are true.

We draw near for cleansing (verse 22b). Cleansing and washing is what we come to receive, and it is what we need. It is cleansing of our hearts from an "evil conscience" and it is the washing of our bodies. That is, it is an internal and external cleansing that we need. The word "sprinkled" is no doubt an allusion to the sprinkling of the blood in the tabernacle to cleanse it. Our hearts are cleansed by the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. The verbs here are passive, that is, we do not cleanse ourselves, but we are cleansed by God when we draw near. John tells us, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:6-9). We come near to confess our sins and to receive the cleansing that is available through the blood of Jesus.

The second exhortation he gives us is in verse 23, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." The hope we confess is based on the promise of the One who is faithful. The author has already touched on the promises of the new covenant. He said that God has promised that we may enter His rest (4:1). He pointed out that the promises of the new covenant are better than those of the old (8:6). The promise is that those who have been called may receive the eternal inheritance (9:15b). Jesus has promised us eternal life and a home in heaven with Him (John 14:1-3). It is the confession of this hope that we are to keep holding onto without wavering. Because of the veracity and faithfulness of the One who made the promise, we can keep hanging on to the confession of the hope we have in His promise. We need not waver or doubt His promise. Because of His faithfulness the promise will certainly be fulfilled. We will one day enjoy His rest in His presence and receive our eternal inheritance.

The third exhortation is in verses 24-25, "and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near." The word translated "stimulate" here is the Greek term *paroxusmos* - to provoke or incite. We get our word "paroxysm" from this term. The first two exhortations have to do with our relationship to God and our perseverance in our faith and hope. This third exhortation has to do with our ministry to others. We must be students of others and of the ways we can provoke them to love and good deeds. If we draw near and are cleansed and if we hold fast to our confession of hope in the

promises of the Lord, then we can minister to others. We will be in a position to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. Good deeds done for others flow out of love for others. God has created us in Christ for good works. He has prepared them for us to walk in them (Ephesians 2:10). We are to incite each other to love and these good deeds. We must not be lazy and neglect these things.

In order to stimulate one another to love and good deeds we must gather together. We must not forsake the assembly (verse 25). To forsake means to abandon, to desert, to leave something behind. Not long ago those who deserted from the military in wartime were shot. It is a shameful thing to abandon your post and forsake those who are counting on you. The author says that some had gotten into the habit of forsaking the assembly of believers. Assembling with other followers of Christ is not an option, but is a mandatory thing. Paul says that we are "members of one another" (Ephesians 4:25). We belong to one another and must gather together regularly to encourage one another.

The more we see the "day drawing near" the more we need to encourage one another. The "day" is doubtless the day of judgment or the "day of the Lord." Peter talks about it in 2 Peter 3:7-12:

But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!

The day of judgment is the day of the Lord, when He returns and will judge and destroy the ungodly. We do not want to be among them when this day comes, so we must encourage each other to remain faithful. Peter tells us to look for and hasten this day. The author of Hebrews tells us that we may see the day drawing near. There will be signs and evidence that that day is getting closer.

Verses 26 and 27 must not be interpreted apart from the context, because the context explains what he means by "sinning willfully." He says "if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries." He is not talking about one act of sin after becoming a Christian that will condemn us for all eternity. He does not mean that once we are saved and forgiven by the death of Christ that we we must be perfect and sinless for the rest of our lives or we are again lost. None of us would have any hope if that were true. If the blood of Christ only covers our sins prior to believing, then the first sin after believing puts us back into condemnation again and we have no more hope. He is

talking about those who "receive the knowledge of the truth" but decide to continue on in willful sin. They are those who trample Jesus under foot, regard His blood as unclean and insult the Spirit of grace (verse 29). He is talking about those who fall away from faith in Christ, who reject Jesus Christ and His sacrifice. He's talking about those who deliberately renounce their trust in Him and His blood.

If someone turns away from trust in the sacrifice of Christ, there is no other sacrifice. There is no other hope. God has not provided another option for the forgiveness of our sins. All they have to look forward to is the "terrifying expectation of judgment." This is what those who reject Christ can expect in their future. God's judgment of those who reject His Son will be terrifying. It involves "the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries." The expression probably means "a fiery fury." AT Robertson says that it means "An anger (zeal, jealousy) marked (genitive) by fire."¹¹ God is furious with His adversaries, and His fury will consume them. It will eat them up.

Under the old covenant, if a man set aside the law of Moses he was to die without mercy. There had to be two or three witnesses to testify of his sin, but if they were in agreement, the man was to die. Moses talked about this in Deuteronomy 17:2-7. Verse 6 says, "On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness." To turn away from the law and refuse to obey it mean death without mercy. The author says that a far more severe punishment is deserved by those who set aside Jesus Christ. Why will they deserve this? Because they have done three things. First, they have "trampled under foot the Son of God." They throw Him down and stomp on Him like a defeated enemy. We stomp on spiders and cockroaches and other nasty things that we want to eliminate. This is how these people treat the Son of God. This is speaking of an aggressive and violent rejection of Christ.

Second, they have "regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant" by which they were sanctified. The blood of Jesus is the blood of the new covenant which cleanses us and sanctifies us. It is the only means of becoming clean in God's sight. These people think of the holy blood of Jesus as a common thing. The word for "unclean" here is *koinos*, common. Peter used the word in Acts 10:14, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything **unholy** and unclean." We must not think that the blood of Jesus is like the blood of any ordinary man, or that Jesus is any ordinary man. He is The Holy One (Luke 4:34, John 6:69). His death on the cross was no ordinary death. His shed blood is the only thing that can make us clean and holy.

Third, they have "insulted the Spirit of grace." The Holy Spirit convicts us and draws us to Christ. He bears witness about Jesus (John 15:26). When people reject Jesus Christ they insult Him, they are saying that His testimony is not true. Jesus said that the only sin that is unforgivable is the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit:

"He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters. Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. And whoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age, or in the age to come." (Matthew

11 Robertson, AT, Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament

12:30-32)

To attribute evil to the Holy Spirit is to insult Him, to blaspheme. The Pharisees did this when they attributed the work of the Holy Spirit to Satan (Matthew 12:24). If we say that the Spirit of truth (John 16:13) has lied, we blaspheme. The Spirit of truth will not tell lies. The Holy Spirit will not do evil. The Spirit of grace will not lead us to falsehood. People who trample on Jesus, regard His blood as unclean and insult the Spirit of grace can only expect God's wrath. He explains in verses 30 and 31, "For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay.' And again, 'The Lord will judge His people.' It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." The quotes are from Deuteronomy 32:35-36 and 41. The Greek word for vengeance is *ekdikesis* - from *ek*, from or out of, and *dike*, justice or righteousness. It means to carry out justice. God is the one who perfectly carries out justice. Our courts, juries and judges may get things wrong, but God never will. He has perfect knowledge of all that we have done and said and thought. There will be no "reasonable doubt" about our guilt before Him. Vengeance belongs to Him, He owns it and will carry it out. He will repay the wicked for their evil deeds. This is a certainty because God does not make idle threats. He will repay as He has promised. He will judge, and His judgment will be more frightening than anything we can imagine in this earth. Jesus said, "And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matthew 10:28.) There is a limit to what men can do to us. The most they can do is kill us, but God can destroy both body and soul in hell. To fall into His hands as one of His adversaries is a terrifying thing. It is proper, even essential, to fear the judgment of God. It is proper to allow that fear to drive us to repentance and reconciliation with God through Christ. God destroys the bodies and souls of men and women in hell because of their sin. He must judge sin. It is the fear of God and His wrath that should drive us to Christ for forgiveness and drive us away from sin.

He tells them to remember what they had endured in the past just after they had been enlightened. In the past they had been enlightened (Hebrews 6:4), which is equivalent to "receiving the knowledge of the truth" (Hebrews 10:26). They had heard about Jesus and had put their faith in Him. They had believed that He was the Messiah. Subsequently they had "endured a great conflict of sufferings" (verse 32). They had suffered greatly for their faith. He reminds them of some of the ways they suffered in verses 33-34. They were made a "public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations." They were made objects of public ridicule and abuse. They also shared with those who were treated this way. They themselves suffered and they identified with those who were suffering. Specifically, they had shown sympathy to the prisoners and had accepted the seizure of their property with joy. Saul of Tarsus was one whose task before encountering Christ was that of rounding up Christians and putting them in prison. Paul, Peter, John and the other apostles suffered imprisonment and most of them were eventually executed for their faith. These Hebrew believers had sympathized with the prisoners and had probably helped them. They had also lost property because of their faith, but they did so joyfully. They were able to endure these things because of what they knew, because of their faith. They knew that they had "a better possession and an abiding one." They knew that their heavenly possessions

were much better than their earthly ones. They knew that their heavenly wealth was durable, was abiding, would not pass away. As Jesus said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matthew 6:19-21) The knowledge that we have a better possession in the future in heaven enables us to endure suffering and persecution here.

Since they have a better possession and an abiding one, the author exhorts them therefore not to throw away their confidence (verse 35) because it has a great reward. We throw away things that are worthless trash, things that we no longer value or have no further use to us or to anyone else. We are not to treat our confidence in Christ as a worthless thing. This is the fourth time he has used this word "confidence" in Hebrews. In Hebrews 3:6 he said that we are the "house" of the Son of God "if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end." If we persevere in our confidence in Christ it shows that we truly belong to His household. In Hebrews 4:16 He exhorted us to "draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need." When we come near to God's throne we come with this boldness, with this confidence in Christ. Similarly, in 10:19 he said that because of the blood of Jesus we have confidence to enter the holy place. This is the confidence, the boldness, that we are not to throw away. Why would we throw away something so valuable, that brings us into the very presence of God to obtain His grace? Why would we trash something that carries with it such a great reward? Paul talked about this confidence and its reward in 2 Corinthians 4 and 5. In 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 he says, "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." The sufferings of the present life prepare a far weightier reward of glory in the life to come. If we endure suffering here for the sake of Christ with confidence and patience, the Lord promises us great rewards in eternity. He said, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matthew 5:10-12)

He explains further in verse 36, "For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised." The "great reward" of verse 35 is the promise that we will receive if we endure and do the will of God. The promise is that we will enter His rest (4:1) and that we will receive our eternal inheritance (9:15). God has promised us these rewards in Christ, but what we need is endurance. The word comes from the Greek term *hupomeno*, to "remain under" some burden or weight. It means patience, steadfastness. It means that when we face suffering because of our confidence in Christ, we "stay under" it. We put up with it rather than dropping our faith and quitting. Again, Jesus talked about this in the parable of the sower. In Luke's version of the parable Jesus mentions that those represented by the good soil are those who bear fruit with perseverance, "And the seed

in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance." (Luke 8:15) When we say something is durable, we mean that it can be put to hard use and will not fail or fall apart. You want a car that is durable, you want appliances that are durable and you want confidence in Christ that is durable.

He continues his explanation, quoting from Habakkuk 2:3-4 in verses 37 and 38. The One who is coming is coming in a "very little while." He will not delay. In God's view of time, it is just "a little while" before Jesus comes back. To us it seems a very long time, but when we see it from God's point of view, it is really just a little while. Jesus will come at the right time. He will not delay when the time comes. In the meantime the righteous must live by faith and not "shrink back." Paul tells us "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). If we withdraw from our faith, God has no pleasure in us, He does not think well of us. Through all the suffering and tribulation we experience before Christ returns, we must persevere and endure and not shrink back from walking in faith. We started by faith and we continue to abide in Christ by faith.

What about those who do "shrink back"? Verse 39 says that they "shrink back to destruction." Jesus said that this is the destination of the wide road. The wide road leads to destruction, and there are many on it, but the narrow road leads to life and there are few who find it (Matthew 7:13-14). Those who shrink back are on the road to destruction and have not found the way to life. But we are not among them. The author says confidently that we are "of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul." We are not among those traveling on the wide road, but among those on the narrow road to life. Our souls will be preserved. We will continue on to enjoy eternal life in the presence of Christ.

Hebrews 11

Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2 For by it the men of old gained approval. 3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. 4 By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. 5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. 6 And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. 7 By faith Noah, being warned *by God* about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. 8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; 10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 11 By faith even Sarah herself received ability to

conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised; 12 therefore, also, there was born of one man, and him as good as dead at that, *as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE.* 13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. 15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that *country* from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better *country*, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them. 17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten *son*; 18 *it was he* to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED." 19 He considered that God is able to raise *men* even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type. 20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come. 21 By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, *leaning* on the top of his staff. 22 By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones. 23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. 24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; 25 choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin; 26 considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. 27 By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen. 28 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the first-born might not touch them. 29 By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though *they were passing* through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned. 30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been encircled for seven days. 31 By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace. 32 And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, 33 who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed *acts of* righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. 35 Women received *back* their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection; 36 and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated 38 (*men* of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. 39 And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40 because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they

should not be made perfect.

Having mentioned that we are among "those who have faith to the preserving of the soul" in 10:39, the author launches into this great chapter about faith and gives us a list of biblical figures and what they accomplished by faith. He begins in verses 1-3 with a definition of faith and a brief explanation of the definition. Since faith is so crucial for the preserving of our souls, we must understand what it is.

He defines faith in verse 1 and says it consists of two things. The first thing about faith is that it is "the assurance of things hoped for." The word for "assurance" is *hupostasis*, a compound word meaning that which "stands under" something. It could be used of a foundation for a building or a tripod for a camera or a contract or a promise. Faith is the thing that stands under and holds up our hope. The hope that we have that the promises of God will be fulfilled to us in the future is supported by faith. Faith is the foundation of hope. A person who has no hope is a person who has no faith. Hope is a positive expectation for the future. In our case, our hope is that we will enjoy the presence of the Lord forever and receive His rest and promised inheritance in His kingdom. We have this hope because we have faith in His promises.

The second thing about faith is that it is "the conviction of things not seen." When we get a conviction of someone in a court of law, it is because they have been proven guilty. The fact of the criminal's guilt has been established for the jury by the evidence and testimony presented. Faith is being fully convinced of the existence of "things not seen" because their existence has been proven beyond doubt to us by the evidence and testimony we have received. Our conviction of things not seen is not based on mere wishful thinking, but on the evidence and testimony that God has given us. These things we don't see are the eternal things that we are told to look at in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18. We are to keep our focus on these unseen eternal things, the existence of God, the reality of heaven, the promise of a home there with Him forever. The Christian life is a life of faith in a God we don't see and a reality we don't yet perceive with our senses.

The author explains his definition of faith in verses 2 and 3. The "men of old" gained approval by faith. This is what they had "hoped for." The word "approval" here is *martureo*, to bear witness, to testify. By faith the men of old received testimony from God, God bore witness that they were righteous. Faith was the foundation of the testimony they received from God. When God promised Abraham that he would have a son and that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens, we are told, "Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness." (Genesis 15:6.) Abraham received God's approval because of his faith.

Faith gives us understanding that all that exists was created by the word of God. Genesis tells us that God spoke and all things came into being. The things that we see are made of things which are not seen, things that do not appear to the eye. We understand these things by faith. We were not there to observe creation, so any belief about how all things came into being is a matter of faith. We must start with a faith assumption. We assume that there is a God who spoke and created all things by His power and authority to do so.

Nineteen times here in chapter 11 the author uses the phrase "by faith." He starts

in verse three and continues on through the chapter. The first individual he mentions is Abel. By faith he offered a better sacrifice to God than did Cain. Offerings made to God are acts of faith. We don't make offerings if we don't believe that God exists and that He has regard for our offerings. Not only that, but a true and proper faith leads us to offer true and proper sacrifices. Cain went wrong and offered an improper sacrifice because there was something wrong with his faith. He believed that God should accept any kind of sacrifice he chose to give, that he could come to God in any way he chose, so he brought an offering of the "fruit of the ground." Abel, on the other hand, knew and understood that God required a sacrifice of blood, that an animal had to die in his place as a substitute, so he brought a sacrifice of "the firstlings of his flock." (See Genesis 4:1-5.) Abel's sacrifice was better because Abel's faith was right. He believed that He had to come to God in the way that God prescribed, and so he did. As he offered his blood sacrifice, he was accepted and gained approval from God, God testified that he was righteous. God also testified about his gifts, that they were acceptable. Abel was right, Cain was wrong. Through faith Abel still speaks, though he is dead. He is one who tells us that we can be accepted and declared righteous by God through faith. He tells us that the one who comes to God through faith and a proper sacrifice will be justified.

By faith Enoch also was "taken up so that he should not see death." God took him up into heaven and he never died. God spared him from having to die. Only two men as far as we know, Enoch and Elijah, have escaped death in this way. Why did God take him up and spare him death? We are told that Enoch, like Abel, also received a witness from God. What God said about Enoch was that he was pleasing to Him. The verse in Genesis 5:24 says, "And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." What did Enoch do that was different from other men? The only thing we are told is that he, by faith, "walked with God." He just hung out with God, followed Him, had fellowship with Him, communicated with Him, obeyed Him. It doesn't say that he did anything fantastic or heroic. We don't know if he saved anyone's life or helped old ladies across the street or gave lots of money to the poor. We're just told that he walked with God. This made him pleasing to God, so pleasing, in fact, that God simply took him up one day right into heaven. God just wants us to know Him and walk with Him. He wants a relationship with us. It's the same as any other relationship. It means that we communicate; we talk to Him and listen to Him. It means that we spend time with Him talking and listening. It also means following His directions. This is what God wants. We tend to make it too complicated, too full of required rituals and carefully laid out procedures. The rituals and sacraments can actually get in the way of a real relationship with God. God does not want us to approach Him in some sort of prescribed, mechanical way, any more than you want your best friend to observe some sort of ritual when they come to spend time with you. God is a person and wants a real relationship with us.

Enoch, because he walked with God, was pleasing to God. The author points out that it is impossible to please God without faith. Faith is the thing that makes us come to God in the first place. We do not come to Him unless we believe first that He exists and second that He rewards those who seek Him. If we do not believe that He exists and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him, we will not come to Him and have fellowship with Him and please Him. Believing that there is a God is not enough. We

must believe something about the character of God, that He is a benevolent God, that He loves us and wants fellowship with us and that He rewards those who seek after Him. God is pleased when we come to Him by faith and seek Him. When we believe that He wants us to seek Him and will reward us if we do, then we will be motivated to seek Him and please Him. Jesus pointed to this in Matthew 6. He said that our Father in heaven rewards those who seek Him in secret, in private. He told us that we should give in secret, pray in secret and fast in secret, and if we do so, our "Father who sees in secret" will repay us. Our motivation in our Christian disciplines is the reward of the Father and not the applause of others. When we do these things "in secret" it shows that we are truly seeking to please God and not men.

Paul talked about this also. In Romans 8:8 Paul says, "those who are in the flesh cannot please God." He says in Galatians 5:16f that we walk either by the flesh or by faith in the Spirit. It is impossible to please God if we walk by the flesh, because then we are not walking by faith. When we walk by the Spirit by faith, we produce the "fruit of the Spirit" which is pleasing to God.

Noah is the next man of faith mentioned in verse 7. By faith Noah built the ark to save his household. God warned him "about things not yet seen." God warned Noah that it was going to rain and that He was going to flood the earth. These things had never been seen before. Rain was unknown up to that point. A flood had never been experienced. But Noah believed God's warning and obeyed His command and built the ark. He did this "in reverence," that is, he was moved with the fear of God as well as with faith. He did not want to be swept away in the flood. His faith in God produced His reverent fear that motivated his obedience. In building the ark to save his family, Noah also condemned the world. The ark was a thing that said to the world, "Destruction is coming! God has condemned the world." Peter tells us that Noah was "a preacher of righteousness" in 2 Peter 2:5. As Noah built the ark, he explained to people why he was doing it and what God was going to do. When Noah and his family completed the ark, the flood came and swept away the ungodly. The righteousness of Noah was the only thing that delayed the flood. Once Noah was safe, the flood came. Because of his faith, Noah "became an heir of...righteousness." Like Abel and Enoch, Noah was considered righteous because of his faith. He received righteousness as an inheritance because of his faith.

The fourth man of faith mentioned here is Abraham, and he and Sarah are in view from verse 8 through verse 19. Abraham is often held up as an example of faith. Paul points to Abraham as the great example of one who was justified by faith in Romans 4 and Galatians 3. James discussed how Abraham's works went hand-in-hand with his faith in James 2. The author of Hebrews says first that by faith Abraham "obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going." When God called Him, Abraham obeyed by faith and left home. By faith He trusted God to lead him to the place He promised him. God called, Abraham listened and "went out." The word here for "obeyed" is *hupakouo*, meaning to listen to and heed a command. He listened to what God said, believed Him, and went out to do what God had told him to do. This is what living by faith is all about. God did not tell him where he was going. He just said, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). Sometimes God calls on us to leave where we are and go out without knowing

where we are going. God leads us step-by-step and may not tell us ahead of time what our ultimate destination will be. We want to know all of it ahead of time so that we can evaluate it and decide if we want to do it. But God often keeps the end destination a secret so we will trust Him along the way. This requires faith and reliance on God's leading each step of the way.

The second thing that Abraham did by faith was to live in the land of promise as an alien and stranger, as a temporary resident, as if he were living in a foreign land (verses 9-10). He lived in tents with Isaac and Jacob. They were wanderers who lived in temporary dwellings in the land that God had promised would belong to them. Abraham's faith impacted his lifestyle, the way he lived his life. Though a wealthy man, he never settled down and built a big estate or established a community. He deliberately continued to live in a tent, as if he were just camping and vacationing in the land. Verse 10 explains how and why he lived that way, "for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God." He was looking for a city built by God. He waited expectantly for God's city. A city is a community, a collection of people who live together. What God builds is a city. He puts it on a solid foundation. He is its architect and builder. He both plans it and builds it, and therefore it is perfect because everything He does is perfect. Jesus promised His disciples that He would go and prepare a place for them and that there were many dwelling places in His Father's house (John 14:1-4). God has prepared His city for many to dwell there with Him. Jesus has promised that God's city is the place we will live with Him forever. This is what Abraham looked for by faith and it is the place we are to look for as well. Though we are in the world we are not of the world if we belong to Jesus. Our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20) and not on this earth.

Faith causes us to live differently from those around us in the world. Abraham did not settle down and buy property and build a great estate for himself in the land of promise because he was looking for God's city. Faith gives us the ability to live as Abraham did in this life, living as aliens and strangers here because we believe that God has a real and better city for us in the future. It enables us to endure hardships and trials here because we know that something better is coming in the future.

Abraham's wife Sarah by faith received the ability to conceive, even when she was past menopause. The word for "ability" is *dunamis*, power. Through faith God gave Sarah the power to conceive. Through faith she received an ability that she did not have, and was enabled to do something that was impossible for her to do on her own. God will do this if we trust Him. He will give us the ability to do what He wants us to do, even things that go far beyond our own abilities. God does not call us to do something without giving us the power to do it. When Mary asked the angel how she could have a child, since she was a virgin, the angel explained how it would come about, pointed to Elizabeth who was pregnant with John the Baptist, and then said, "For nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37). Jesus said, "The things impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27). What is impossible for us is no problem for God.

Sarah's faith was in the faithfulness of the God who had promised that she would have a son. She "considered Him faithful." She considered that God was reliable and trustworthy, that He could be counted on to do what He had promised. Faith is a thing that considers the trustworthiness of God. Faith knows that God does what He says he will do. He will not say one thing and do something else. He will not promise

something and then fail to follow through. We must note however that Sarah's faith was in an objective promise of God and not in wishful thinking. Just because God miraculously enabled this old lady to conceive and have a son does not mean that every old lady can expect this of Him. Sarah's was a special case. When you have a promise from God, you can count on it, but it is presumptuous to "believe" for something He has not promised, and no amount of this sort of "believing" will make a thing come to pass. God has not promised to give me a Rolls Royce, and no matter how much I "believe" Him for one, He is not likely to give me one. He has promised me power to be a witness (Acts 1:8), and so I can trust Him by faith as I go out to provide that power as I tell others about Jesus Christ. This is a promise every Christian can rely on. He has promised to give us wisdom in the midst of our trials if we will ask Him (James 1:5-8) and we can trust Him to give it when we seek it. There are many more promises the Lord has given us that we can receive by faith as did Sarah.

Because of the faith of Abraham and Sarah in the promise of God, their descendants were born and became as innumerable as the stars of the heavens and the grains of sand at the seashore, as God had promised in Genesis 22:17. This happened when Abraham was "as good as dead." Paul points to the fact that Abraham continued to trust God even though he and Sarah were "as good as dead:"

In hope against hope he believed, in order that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE." 19 And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; 20 yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform. 22 Therefore also IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. (Romans 4:18-22.)

Abraham and Sarah did not overlook the fact that they were far beyond childbearing age, but they looked beyond it to the God who keeps His promises, who makes the impossible possible. Faith does not deny facts and human limitations, but rather it looks beyond those obstacles to the God who can do anything.

These people he has mentioned died in faith, "without receiving the promises." In his lifetime Abraham did not see his descendants grow to this huge number. He saw Isaac and Ishmael and their children, but he did not see an innumerable multitude. He died believing that God would yet fulfill that promise. He did not live to see the Messiah come and bless the whole world as God had promised. They saw the promises and welcomed them from a distance. Jesus said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad" (John 8:56). The promises of God are sometimes far off and will not be fulfilled in our lifetimes. Nonetheless we look for their fulfillment, and we still trust in them. The promise of Christ's return will be fulfilled. It may or may not be in our lifetime, but the promise will be fulfilled.

Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob looked for the fulfillment of God's promises "having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth." This is what they said about themselves. Their attitude was that they were just here on earth temporarily. They were strangers and not natives. They did not fit in with the people around them

and were different, like Americans in China. They were exiles, away from their native country. When you are a stranger and an exile in a foreign land, you find that your values, your lifestyle and your beliefs are different from those around you. You find many aspects of your neighbor's lives to be strange to you. You may find that they believe things that are incredible to you and that they eat things that are repugnant. As citizens of heaven on this earth, Christians are to live exemplary lives. We are not to adopt the beliefs and practices of those who are of the earth. We are not to follow the desires that they follow. We have been chosen out of the world and are to live as temporary residents, observing the ethics of the kingdom of God.

Those who confess that they are strangers and exiles on the earth "make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own" (verse 14). They manifest the truth that they are looking for their own country. The word for "a country of their own" is *patris*, from which we get the word "patriotic." It means a father-land, one's own native country. This earth is not the native land for those who belong to the Lord. We seek for the land that God has for us, our native land, His land.

The "country of their own" is not the country that they left. The author is not talking, in Abraham's case, about the country he left behind in Ur of the Chaldeans. That was not the country Abraham was thinking about. If it had been, he could have simply returned to it. Instead, the country they desire is a better one, a heavenly one. Abraham was not looking for an earthly home, but a heavenly one. He was not looking backward, but looking forward, not yearning for the past, but longing for the future. He realized that the heavenly country is far better than the earthly. The city God builds is far better than any he or anyone else could build. Yearning for an idealized past often keeps us from focusing on the better future that God has for us. The "good old days" were not really as good as our memories of them make them. Looking backward can keep us from seeking the future kingdom of God.

God is not ashamed to be called the God of those who seek His heavenly country, who desire it and turn their backs on the old country, who confess that they are strangers and exiles on the earth. Jesus used the same word in Luke 9:26 when He said, "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels." There are those of whom the Father and the Son will be ashamed when Jesus returns. They are those who were ashamed of Jesus and His words, those who valued earthly things above heavenly things. They are those for whom the praise of men was more important than the praise of God. But for those who do seek His country, God prepares a city. He has prepared a place for them.

In verse 17 the author returns to his "by faith" formula, again talking about Abraham, and about how he offered up Isaac by faith. God tested him by telling him to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering. Genesis 22:1-2 says, "Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' And He said, 'Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.'" The next morning Abraham and Isaac left to do as God had said. When the angel stopped him just before he killed his son, God said, "Now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." (Genesis 22:12.) Abraham passed God's test and showed that he trusted and feared Him. Faith yields

unquestioning obedience to the Lord. When you really know the Lord and trust Him implicitly, He can tell you to do anything and you will do it. The one that Abraham was offering up was his "only begotten son," the one of whom it was said, "In Isaac your descendants shall be called." Abraham continued to believe this promise even though God told him to sacrifice Isaac. How could both come to pass? Verse 19 explains that Abraham considered God's ability to raise men from the dead. Abraham said, "Ok, if I sacrifice Isaac in obedience to God's command, God will then raise him from the dead and restore him, because He promised that my descendants would come through Isaac." He obeyed God's command while continuing to believe God's promise. The command did not mean that the promise would not be fulfilled. Abraham received Isaac back as a type, as a "parable." Isaac was a type of Christ. Isaac prefigured what God Himself would do with His own Son.

By faith Isaac passed his blessing on to Jacob and Esau and spoke of things to come (verse 20). He spoke of the future when he blessed them. As we know from the story in Genesis 27, Jacob posed as Esau in order to intercept the blessing that Isaac meant to give to Esau. Isaac blessed him by saying,

"Now may God give you of the dew of heaven,
And of the fatness of the earth,
And an abundance of grain and new wine;
May peoples serve you,
And nations bow down to you;
Be master of your brothers,
And may your mother's sons bow down to you.
Cursed be those who curse you,
And blessed be those who bless you."

(Genesis 27:28-29.)

When Esau came in and learned what happened he was grieved and plead with Isaac to bless him as well, but Isaac replied that it was Jacob who would indeed be blessed. To Esau he said,

"Behold, away from the fertility of the earth shall be your dwelling,
And away from the dew of heaven from above.
And by your sword you shall live,
And your brother you shall serve;
But it shall come about when you become restless,
That you shall break his yoke from your neck."

(Genesis 27:39-40.)

The words of Isaac came to pass as David subjected Edom (the descendants of Esau) to Israel and ruled over them (2 Samuel 8:14). However during the reign of Jehoshaphat Edom revolted and gained independence from Judah (2 Kings 8:16-22). Esau did serve his brother, but did also break his yoke from his neck. The blessing of Isaac was a prophetic word.

By faith Jacob blessed Joseph's sons and worshiped the Lord as he was dying. This is recorded in Genesis 48. Jacob summoned Joseph and his two sons to him

when he knew he was dying and claimed his sons as his own. This is why Ephraim and Manasseh are called "half-tribes." They are the tribe of Joseph, but they are called "half-tribes" because Jacob claimed them as his sons. Manasseh was the first born and Ephraim the second, but Jacob gave Ephraim the blessing of the first born. Ephraim was to become a greater nation than Manasseh. By faith Jacob spoke of their future as he blessed them. He glimpsed what God was going to do through these young men.

By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, spoke of the exodus of Israel from Egypt and ordered them to carry his remains with them up out of Egypt. This is found in Genesis 50:24-26, the last thing mentioned in Genesis. We read, "And Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you, and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob.' Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, 'God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here.' So Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt." How did Joseph know that this would happen? He knew because God had told Abraham that this would happen, and it had been passed down from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob and to Joseph. God had said to Abraham, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions." (Genesis 15:13-14.) Joseph had heard this and believed it. He saw how God had brought this to pass and believed that though Israel would be enslaved by the Egyptians, yet God would bring them up out of there after 400 years and would again establish them as a great nation. He did not want his remains to stay in Egypt, so ordered them to carry him up with them to the land God had promised them.

The author turns to Moses and the exodus in verses 23-29. In the life of Moses faith began with his parents, who hid him by faith, seeing that he was a beautiful child. They were not afraid of the king's edict. The king's edict was that all the male babies of the Hebrews were to be put to death. First, he ordered the midwives to kill the baby boys when they were born, but the midwives feared God and refused to do so. Then Pharaoh commanded them to throw their sons into the Nile (Exodus 1:15-22). Moses' mother did not throw him into the Nile, but hid him for three months (Exodus 2:2). When she couldn't hide him any longer, she put him in a wicker basket covered with tar and pitch and put him in the reeds by the bank of the Nile. His sister Miriam watched to see what would happen, and Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe and found him and adopted him. She realized that he was a Hebrew baby and Miriam suggested that she could find a Hebrew woman to nurse him for her. And so Moses' mother was employed by the daughter of Pharaoh to nurse Moses for her. God worked it out so that Moses would be cared for by his own mother, and she even got paid for doing it!

In the case of Moses' parents we see that their faith overcame their fear of the consequences of disobeying the king's order. Faith is a thing that overcomes fear. Faith looks beyond the threats of men to the faithfulness of God and trusts that if we submit to God rather than to men, God will take care of us. We need this kind of faith when men and the society tell us to stop talking about Christ and their need for Him. When the culture threatens to harm us if we keep talking about the Lord, we must say

as the apostles said, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

By faith Moses made a choice when he had grown up. He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter and chose to identify with the Jews instead. He chose ill-treatment with God's people rather than the passing pleasures of sin. He chose the reproach of Christ rather than the treasures of Egypt. The story in Exodus tells us that Moses "went out to his brethren and looked on their hard labors" (Exodus 2:11f). He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew and killed the Egyptian. He knew that the Hebrews were his brothers and did not identify with the Egyptians. He decided to protect the Hebrews. His impulsive act of murder revealed the choice that he had made. The next day, when he saw two Hebrews fighting, he tried to mediate the dispute. When it became clear that it was known that he had killed the Egyptian, he had to flee the country. Moses could have been an heir of Pharaoh. He could have enjoyed great indulgence and pleasure as part of the royal family. He could have possessed the riches of Egypt. But Moses is a great example of a man of faith who chose to turn his back on the things of this world for the sake of the kingdom of God. Too many who call themselves Christians do just the opposite. The things of this world become more important than the Lord and His kingdom. Too many choose the temporal over the eternal.

Verse 26 reveals why Moses made his choice. He considered "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward." He chose the narrow path that Jesus talked about in Matthew 7:13-14. The narrow path is harder, but we must choose it because it leads to life. The wide path is easier and more people are on it because it is easy, but it leads to destruction. The key is keeping the destination in view. Keep looking to the reward that the Lord promises to those who are loyal to Him. To do this we must consider the fact that we will suffer reproach for the sake of Christ. We will be ridiculed and persecuted by those who are enemies of the truth and who deny Christ. We must also leave behind the treasures of this world. This is the cost of looking to the future reward we have in Christ. Our reward will be deferred until His kingdom comes in fullness. When we receive our reward from Him, however, we will not be disappointed! In Luke 18:29-30, Jesus says to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life." There are great rewards in store for those who will make this choice.

Moses left Egypt by faith, "not fearing the wrath of the king." This of course does not refer to the first time Moses left Egypt when he fled for his life because Pharaoh sought to kill him for murdering the Egyptian, but it refers to the exodus from Egypt with all of the people of Israel. When they left Moses had no fear of the wrath of Pharaoh because he moved forward as if he saw Him who is unseen. He believed that God would protect them as they left. He had seen God's signs and wonders before Pharaoh and had seen the plagues He sent against Egypt to get Pharaoh to let Israel go, and so he had confidence to trust that He would protect them as they departed. When Pharaoh pursued them with his army when they had left Egypt and the people cried out in fear, Moses said, "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent."

(Exodus 14:13-14.)

By faith Moses kept the Passover (verse 28). They observed the first Passover in Egypt and did what God said to do. They slaughtered the lambs and sprinkled the blood over their doorposts so the angel of death would pass over their households and spare the firstborn from death. They did this by faith, believing what God had said. The Passover is described in Exodus 12. It may not seem to make much sense to put the blood of a lamb on your doorway in order to save yourself from death, but that is what God told them to do, and by faith they did it and were spared.

By faith Israel passed through the Red Sea as though on dry land, and the Egyptians were drowned. Exodus 14 records the dividing of the Red Sea and the crossing of Israel. As Moses stretched out his staff toward the Red Sea as God told him to, the waters parted and Israel was able to walk through the sea with a wall of water on each side of them. The Egyptians were engulfed by the waters when they tried to follow Israel into the sea, again as Moses stretched out his hand over the sea in obedience to the Lord. When Israel saw this happen, they feared the Lord and believed in the Lord. Exodus 14:31 says, "And when Israel saw the great power which the LORD had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses." As we see God work, our faith in Him grows and our respect for Him grows as well.

By faith Israel saw the walls of Jericho fall after they circled them for seven days. Again, God had ordered them to do this. He told them what to do, by faith they obeyed and did it, and the walls of the city collapsed. Joshua 6 tells us of this. The Lord ordered Joshua to take all the soldiers and circle the city once each day for six days, with seven priests carrying seven trumpets made of rams' horns before the ark of the covenant. On the seventh day they were to march around the city seven times with the priests blowing the trumpets. After this, the priests were to sound a long blast on the horns, and the people were to shout with a great shout, and the walls would fall down and they would take the city. This seems to be a very strange strategy for taking a walled city, and no doubt there was plenty of debate over the reasons for this strategy. Many of the soldiers probably wondered what it was all about and what good it did to march around the city blowing horns. But when they shouted and saw the walls collapse, then they saw the power of God and saw His forces destroy the city. By faith they followed the orders of the Captain of the host of the Lord (Joshua 5:14), and they had victory. When you follow God's orders and obey by faith, you see what He can do. You see His power at work to accomplish His aims.

By faith Rahab the harlot saved her own life and the life of her household when she welcomed the Israelite spies in peace and hid them. By faith she escaped the judgment of God that fell upon Jericho. Her story is in Joshua 2 and Joshua 6:22-25. When the spies came to her she hid them, lied to the men who came looking for them and sent them away. Joshua 2:9-13 tells us what she said to the spies:

"I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And when we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.

Now therefore, please swear to me by the LORD, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father's household, and give me a pledge of truth, and spare my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters, with all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death."

Clearly, Rahab had become a believer in the Lord. She said that she knew that the Lord had given them the land. They had heard what the Lord had done for Israel and that they had lost all of their courage because of what they heard. Her confession of faith is in verse 11, "for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath." Because of her faith the Lord sent her the spies, she hid them, and saved her household from death. Because of her faith she took the risk of welcoming and hiding the spies. Her faith also prompted her to ask the spies to protect her and her family. Faith is a thing that fears God more than men and pursues from God what we need.

The author could continue on listing more people in Scripture and what they did by faith, but he says in verse 32, "And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets..." The list of people and their faith accomplishments could go on and on. Through faith these people had "conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight" (verses 33-34). Besides those he listed, he is also thinking of Daniel, Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego, Elijah and others. These people did great and powerful things through faith. When he mentions in verse 35 that "women received back their dead by resurrection" he is probably thinking of the widow in Zarephath whose son was raised from the dead through the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17) and the son of the Shunammite woman whom Elisha raised from the dead (2 Kings 4).

After mentioning the women who received back their dead through resurrection, there is a dramatic turn away from great things done by faith to great sufferings endured through faith. He says, "others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground." Faith not only enables us to trust God to do things through us that we could never do otherwise, but it also enables us to endure what we otherwise could not. Faith gives us the will to say no to the evils of the world and to stay true to the Lord. These "others" who suffered because of their faith were looking forward to a "better resurrection," that is, a better resurrection than that received by those who were restored to their mothers by Elijah and Elisha. They were raised only to die again later. These "others" sought to obtain a permanent resurrection. This is the key to enduring suffering in this world, to keep your eye on the eternal reward promised to those who continue in faith. A life of faith does not always mean a life full of glory and victory. Sometimes it means a life of suffering, of torture, mocking, scourging, imprisonment and even death. Jesus said we would have tribulation in this world (John 16:33). He

said that the world would hate us (Matthew 10:22). We must not think that walking by faith will mean a life free from trouble and suffering. In fact, our faith is likely to bring suffering our way.

All of these mentioned in Hebrews 11 gained God's approval through their faith, but did not receive what was promised during their lifetimes. God testifies that they are righteous because of their faith, but the ultimate promise, fulfilled in Christ, they did not live to see. The reason for this is in verse 40, "because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect." We have seen the promise fulfilled. We have seen that the Messiah has come. We have the opportunity of knowing Jesus and of having a relationship with Him. They looked forward to His coming and the fulfillment of the promise, we look back upon His coming. By faith we know Him and He lives in us. This is better than what those in the past had. They have not been made perfect (complete) apart from us. We complete their number.

Hebrews 12

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart. ⁴ You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; ⁵ and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; ⁶ FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." ⁷ It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline? ⁸ But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us* for *our* good, that we may share His holiness. ¹¹ All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. ¹² Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, ¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that *the limb* which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. ¹⁴ Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵ See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; ¹⁶ that *there be* no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a *single* meal. ¹⁷ For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

18 For you have not come to a *mountain* that may be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, 19 and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which *sound was such that* those who heard begged that no further word should be spoken to them. 20 For they could not bear the command, "IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED." 21 And so terrible was the sight, *that* Moses said, "I AM FULL OF FEAR AND TREMBLING." 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than *the blood* of Abel. 25 See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned *them* on earth, much less *shall we escape* who turn away from Him who *warns* from heaven. 26 And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "YET ONCE MORE I WILL SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN." 27 And this *expression*, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, in order that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; 29 for our God is a consuming fire.

Here again we have another "therefore...let us" passage in Hebrews. This is based on the great chapter about people of faith that he has just completed. These witnesses surround us like a cloud. They have competed in the games before us and now it is our turn. Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us who walked by faith, we are exhorted to do two things. First, we are to "lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us" (verse 1a). There are things that must be put aside. The heavy things that weigh us down and slow our progress must be laid aside. A marathon runner will put aside his cowboy boots and jeans because they will weigh him down and hinder him in the race. These things may not be sinful things, but they are unnecessary things. We may have hobbies and diversions and entertainments that take up too much of our time and energy and distract us from things that are more important. The sins that entangle us must be put aside. Sin is a thing that will entangle us and snare us and keep us from moving ahead. It traps us and stops us, and we must get out of its grasp. It is easy for this to happen to us, because we are all prone to sin. These things must be put away and thrown out so that we may make progress.

Having laid aside the hindrances, we are exhorted to "run with endurance the race that is set before us." There is a race that God has set before us that we are to run. It is an endurance race, it is a long-distance race and not a sprint. We cannot run this race if we are weighed down and hindered by sins and distractions. It is a long-term race, so it requires commitment and pacing and endurance. A long distance race is a hard and difficult thing and there are many temptations to quit along the way. This is why we need to do what he tells us to do next.

As we run our race, we must fix our eyes on Jesus. He has run before us and

crossed the finish line. He is our goal. He is the one by whom we are measured. He is "the author and perfecter of faith." He is both the chief leader, the pioneer of faith and the finisher, the completer of faith. When a house is almost finished, the last guys to come in are the finish carpenters. They put in the mouldings and railings and the other fancy little things that finish off the house. Jesus is there at the start of faith and at the end of faith. He designed it, built it, and finished it. If anybody knows about faith, it is Jesus. He is the object of our faith. He demonstrated on earth a perfect life of perfect faith in His Father. He demonstrated endurance as he suffered and died on the cross. He did this in order to obtain "the joy set before Him." He looked beyond the suffering and shame of the cross to the joy that lay beyond it and was enabled to endure the cross. He knew that glory and exaltation was waiting for Him beyond the suffering of the cross, and that is what He fixed his focus on. He has run His race, has endured and has taken His seat at the right hand of the Father. He has been exalted and has found His rest and joy with the Father through enduring the cross. Rest and joy is at the finish line of our race. If we complete the race with endurance, with our eyes on Jesus, we too will experience that joy and rest.

Verse 3 explains further and exhorts us to consider Jesus (as he did previously in Hebrews 3:1). When He endured the cross Jesus was enduring "hostility by sinners against Himself." Sinners were and are hostile toward Jesus Christ, the very one who came to seek and save them. It was this hostility that sent Him to the cross. If we belong to Christ we can expect the same hostility will be aimed at us. If we will consider Jesus and what He endured, we will not grow weary and lose heart. If we consider that He suffered because of the hostility of sinners far more that we will ever suffer, then we will also be able to endure as He endured. We must expect the hostility of the world and be ready for it. We must not allow it to make us weary and cause us to lose heart and give up. As He endured so we must endure.

The author brings up the subject of God's discipline of His children in verses 4-11. He levels two charges against his readers in verses 4-6, saying that they have not resisted to the point of shedding blood in their striving against sin and that they have forgotten God's exhortation to pay attention to and accept His discipline. The word for striving is *antagonizomai*, from which we get our word "antagonize." Our struggle is against sin. The Christian's battle is a battle with sin. As we strive against sin our task is to resist it, even to the point of shedding blood. Sin is the enemy and it may draw blood if we resist it, therefore many Christians would rather surrender to sin than resist it. It can be uncomfortable to resist sin, both in ourselves and in the society. This brings up the question, "Would I rather die than sin?" Jesus is our example. He resisted all temptation to sin and as a result He suffered and died. He resisted the temptation to disobey the Father by avoiding the cross, and so was betrayed and crucified. He resisted sin and shed His blood. Resisting sin requires that we wear the full armor of God, described in Ephesians 6. Ephesians 6:13 says, "Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm." Resisting sin means submitting to God and resisting the devil. James 4:7 says, "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." We are citizens of heaven living in enemy occupied territory. We are like the French resistance in World War 2 and what we are doing is dangerous. The enemy does not like those who oppose him and is ruthless. If we love and fear the Lord, we

will hate sin. Proverbs 8:13 says, "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil." Too many Christians are not serious about resisting sin and striving against it.

The second charge against his readers is that they "have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reproved by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.'" This quote from Proverbs 3:11-12 points out that God's discipline and reproof are aimed at those who are His beloved children. It tells us not to do two things. We are not to "regard lightly" His discipline. It is a heavy thing and we are not to take it lightly. His discipline is serious and if we scoff at it or disregard it we will pay a heavy price. Few things will make a father angrier than a child who laughs and mocks at his discipline. Such a child may find his life in danger! We are also not to "faint" when He reproveth us. This is the opposite of regarding it lightly. We must not take it too heavily. We are not to allow it to overwhelm us and make us give up and quit. His reproof is meant to put us back on our feet and not to lay us flat. His discipline is not meant to strike us down but to pick us up and get us going in the right direction again. God's discipline is a proof of His love for us and of our relationship to Him as His children. God disciplines and scourges every one of His children out of His love for them.

Discipline is one of the things that we must endure as we run our race. He points out in verse 7 that when God disciplines us He is treating us as His sons. If it is inconceivable to the author that a human father would not discipline his son, how much more inconceivable that God would fail to discipline His children! If a man is not being disciplined by God, then he is an illegitimate child and not really His son. God does not discipline those who are not His children. The author is confident though, that his readers have "become partakers" of God's discipline. He doesn't think they are illegitimate.

If we respected our earthly fathers when they disciplined us, how much more should we respect the heavenly Father when He disciplines us? Our earthly fathers disciplined us in the past for a short period of time as seemed best to them. They did what seemed right to them. But God disciplines us perfectly. He knows what we need and He knows us. He has our highest good in mind. His purpose and goal in His discipline is that we may "share His holiness" (verse 10). This is why we must subject ourselves to His discipline, because it is for our good, so that we may live and share His holiness, share His character and the character of Christ. His discipline has a goal in mind and is not capricious or purposeless. He said "You shall be holy for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:45; 1 Peter 1:15-16). Discipline is a necessary part of the process of making us holy. Unholiness and unrighteousness needs to go, and so God will discipline us. We must submit to it and we must not despise it.

Our experience of discipline is, for the moment, not joyful, but sorrowful (verse 11). Being disciplined is no fun, and it is not usually something that we desire or seek. We would like to avoid it. We would like to sin and get away with it, but because He loves us God disciplines us. The conviction of the Holy Spirit and the guilt that we experience are good things. When we stray and err we need to be corrected, though it is not a fun experience. For those who allow God's discipline to train them, it yields fruit, the "peaceful fruit of righteousness." Discipline trains us. The word for "trained" here is *gumnazo*, to exercise vigorously. It is used of athletes in training. The purpose

of God's discipline is to train us in righteousness, but we must allow it to do so. If we reject it or if we "faint" and give up, it does not have its intended effect. We must embrace God's discipline and recognize it as part of His training regime for us. God's primary disciplinary tool is His word, as we are told in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." As we are trained in righteousness, we are equipped for all the good works that God wants us to do. God uses His word for this purpose, to teach us, reprove us, correct us and train us in righteousness.

In light of God's discipline and His good purpose in it, the author has several exhortations for us in verses 12-17. First he says, "Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed." He mentions hands and knees that are weak and feeble and need to be strengthened. The King James translation is probably closer to the Greek text than the NASB in verse 12, and translates it, "Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees." This is something we are responsible to do. We have allowed our hands to hang down, and we need to lift them up. We have allowed our knees to become feeble and we need to strengthen them. He mentions feet that need straight paths. We must not allow ourselves to be weak any longer. We must not allow ourselves to follow crooked paths any longer. We must do this so that our weak limbs may not be put out of joint, but healed. Our healing process demands straight paths for our feet. A crooked path will make you stumble and fall and hurt yourself. You will not heal as long as you are on crooked paths. This is why we must submit to God's discipline, stand up and be strong under it, and choose the straight paths that God lays out for us.

Second, he says, "Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord." He gives us two things to chase after, to hunt: peace with all men and sanctification. Paul also tells us to be at peace with others in Romans 12:18, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." In Romans 14:19 he says, "So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another." Psalms 34:14 says "Depart from evil, and do good; Seek peace, and pursue it" and Peter quotes this verse in 1 Peter 3:11. Clearly, peace with others is a thing that has to be pursued. It is an elusive thing that can easily get away from us. We must look for it and run after it. Peace is the absence of conflict. It does not mean agreeing with everyone about everything, which is impossible, but rather it means not fighting with others. It means that if I've hurt someone else, I need to ask their forgiveness and seek reconciliation. It means I don't hold grudges against those who have hurt me and I grant them forgiveness. It is possible to disagree without being disagreeable.

Another thing that we must pursue is sanctification. The word is *hagiasmos*, "properly, purification, i.e. (the state) purity; concretely (by Hebraism) a purifier:--holiness, sanctification."¹² We are to pursue holiness and purification, because without it we will not see the Lord. Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). But how do we pursue sanctification? What are we supposed to

12 Strong's Greek Bible Dictionary.

do? Other passages help us. In Romans 6:19-22 Paul says:

I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification. 20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. 22 But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.

The context of this passage makes it clear that when Paul talks about our "members" he is talking about the "members of your body" (Romans 6:13). Our pursuit of sanctification requires that we present the members of our bodies to God and to righteousness as slaves of righteousness. Through Christ God has freed us from slavery to sin so that we can be slaves of righteousness (Romans 6:18). We are able now in Christ to avoid sin. In order to be sanctified we must be freed from sin and enslaved to God. When we are servants of God the result is sanctification. Paul points out another crucial aspect of sanctification in 1 Corinthians 1:30-31, "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, that, just as it is written, 'LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.'" We are "in Christ" because of what God has done for us, because of His choice of us (see the context in 1 Corinthians 1) and Christ is our sanctification. One cannot be sanctified if one is not "in Christ," because He is our sanctification. Sanctification requires that the sanctified one live in us. The process of sanctification is a process of becoming more like Jesus Christ, of letting more of His nature and character be manifested and created in us; of thinking more like Him, of speaking more like Him, and of acting more like Him. We can't boast about our sanctification because it is something He does in us as we yield to Him.

Another important passage regarding sanctification is 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8:

Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that, as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you may excel still more. 2 For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. 7 For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. 8 Consequently, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

Three times in this passage Paul uses the word sanctification. He says that abstaining from sexual immorality is our sanctification and is the will of God. He says that we must know how to possess our own "vessels" in sanctification and honor. He says that God has called us in sanctification. You cannot be sexually immoral and be sanctified. You cannot practice an immoral lifestyle and be pure and holy. They are polar opposites. If sanctification means anything it means staying away from sexual immorality of all kinds. The Greek word for immorality here is *porneia*, from which we get our word

pornography. It means illicit sexual relations of all kinds. In Paul's day the pagan gods had priestesses in their temples and sexual immorality was part of the "worship" of these gods, probably a very profitable enterprise as well. But for the Christian things are totally different. We are to run from sexual immorality because it is God's will for us and His purpose for us.

Another thing we must note about sanctification is that it is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth." And Peter says in 1 Peter 1:1-2, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure." When we put our faith in Christ the process of sanctification begins as the Spirit of God invades our lives. Our part is to cooperate with the Spirit in our sanctification. If we really are called and chosen by God and brought by Him into a relationship with Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we cannot help but desire sanctification. A Christian who does not care about living a holy life is a contradiction. True disciples want to be like their Master and are known by their fruit (Matthew 7:15-16).

A third thing the author exhorts them to do is to watch out for three dangers in the church. He says, "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal" (Hebrews 12:15-16). One danger we must be aware of in the church is that it is possible to fall short of God's grace. He mentioned the danger of coming short of entering God's rest in 4:1 and said that the problem is that we may have heard the good news, but it becomes unprofitable if it is not united with faith in the hearer. We come short of the grace of God when we fail to believe and trust and continue in that faith. There may be a problem with our faith. It may be inadequate. Our faith may be conditional faith. It may be fair weather faith. Our faith in Christ must be unconditional and a faith that considers the knowledge of Christ to be the highest value.

Another danger is that a root of bitterness may spring up and cause trouble and result in defilement for many. He is probably thinking of Deuteronomy 29:14-21:

"Now not with you alone am I making this covenant and this oath, 15 but both with those who stand here with us today in the presence of the LORD our God and with those who are not with us here today 16 (for you know how we lived in the land of Egypt, and how we came through the midst of the nations through which you passed. 17 "Moreover, you have seen their abominations and their idols of wood, stone, silver, and gold, which they had with them); 18 lest there shall be among you a man or woman, or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of those nations; lest there shall be among you a root bearing poisonous fruit and wormwood. And it shall be when he hears the words of this curse, that he will boast, saying, 'I have peace though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart in order to destroy the watered land with the dry.' 20 "The LORD shall never be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the LORD and His jealousy will burn against that man, and every curse which is written in this book will rest on him, and the LORD will blot out his name from under heaven. 21 "Then the LORD will single him out for adversity from all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the

covenant which are written in this book of the law."

He is talking about this kind of "bitter" or "poisonous" root. It is the bitter root of one who turns away from the Lord to worship other Gods. It is the bitter root of a proud and stubborn unbelief. The writer of Hebrews has been warning about this kind of "bitter root" throughout the whole book. The whole book is an exhortation to continue in faith in Christ and not to turn away. These kinds of people have a tendency to influence others around them to turn in the same direction, and this is where the trouble comes in.

A third danger is the presence of immoral or godless people in our midst like Esau. The evidence of his immorality and his godlessness was that he sold his birthright for a single meal. We may wonder what was so immoral and godless about selling your birthright. A birthright does not mean much of anything to us today in our society, but back then it was all-important. This was Esau's big sin, that he "despised his birthright" (Genesis 25:34). In Esau's case the birthright carried with it the choice and blessing of God. The first-born of the line of Abraham and Isaac would have the covenant and blessings that God established with them passed down to him. Esau did not value it, but Jacob did. Jacob took advantage of Esau's hunger and apathy to buy the birthright from him for a bowl of soup. In rejecting his birthright, Esau was rejecting a special relationship with God. The blessings of Abraham and Isaac would be passed down to Jacob instead of Esau. Esau later wanted to recover the birthright and inherit the blessing, but he "found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears." He cried and pleaded with his father Isaac to bless him as well as Jacob, but his tears could not win him the blessing that he had sold and forfeited. He had not really repented. He was still godless. We must be careful that there are no people like this in our midst in the fellowship of the church, who do not truly value God and His promises. Without true repentance we will not inherit God's blessings and we will be rejected. Our message is a message of "repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 24:47) proclaimed in the name of Jesus. If people will not repent they will not be forgiven.

In verses 18-24 he talks about that to which we have come. It is another contrast between the old covenant in verses 18-21 and the new covenant in verses 22-24. Moses and the people of Israel came to a place of fear and intimidation. They came to a mountain, to blazing fire, to darkness and gloom and a whirlwind and the blast of a trumpet and a verbal warning that left them trembling. This incident is recorded in Exodus 19 when God told Moses that He Himself would come down on Mount Sinai and speak to the people. He warned Moses, "And you shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain." (Exodus 19:12-13.) God descended on Mount Sinai in a thick cloud and in lightning and smoke and thunder and fire with loud trumpet blasts. The Lord told Moses to warn the people and the priests against trying to come close to see Him. Everyone trembled with fear. When they had all washed and consecrated themselves God appeared to them in this way and then spoke to all the people. The words He spoke are recorded in Exodus 20, and we know them as the ten commandments. The

people were so afraid they stood at a distance and pleaded with Moses that he would speak to them instead of God, because they were afraid that they were going to die (Exodus 20:19). Moses reassured them and said, "Do not be afraid, for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin" (Exodus 20:20). God's personal appearance was meant to implant the fear of the Lord in these people to keep them from sinning against Him and to keep them from idolatry. It wasn't long after this, though, that while Moses was meeting with the Lord on Mount Sinai the people of Israel turned from the Lord and made a golden calf and worshiped it. They were quick to turn away from the Lord even though they had seen the evidence of His presence and had heard His voice. They were still idolaters at heart, and though they had feared Him they did not love Him. The demonstration at Mount Sinai did not do them much good.

We have not come to a smoking mountain and a fearful demonstration of the presence and power of God, but we have come to "Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel" (Hebrews 12:22-24). Instead of Mount Sinai, we have come to Mount Zion, which is called "the city of the living God" and "the heavenly Jerusalem." Jerusalem was called Zion and was built on top of a hill. It is the city where God installed His Son as King (Psalm 2:6-7). We have come to the city that Abraham was looking for (Heb. 11:10), the city that has God Himself as its architect and builder. It is not a literal physical, earthly place like Mount Sinai, but is a spiritual city, a collection of people and beings who live together. What makes a city a city is not the buildings and structures, but the people who live there. We have come to God's real city where there are angels and the assembly of all the redeemed, the first-born of God who live with Him in heaven. We have come to God Himself. We have come into fellowship with all those righteous men who've been made perfect. All of these inhabit the city of God.

Most important, we have come to Jesus, the mediator of this new covenant. It is His blood that cleanses us and reconciles us to God and speaks better than the blood of Abel. Abel's blood cried out from the ground to God for vengeance and justice (Genesis 4:10-11). The blood of Abel brought a curse upon Cain. Jesus' blood "speaks better" than that. The blood of Jesus is blood that satisfies justice and turns aside vengeance. His blood atones for our sins. His blood brings about peace and heals the curse. It is through Jesus and His blood that we come to the heavenly city.

We must not "refuse Him who is speaking" (verse 25). It is Jesus who is speaking, and we must not refuse Him, as the Israelites refused Moses. We must listen to His exhortations and warnings. We must heed Him. Moses warned the Israelites on earth, but Jesus warns from heaven. The Israelites who refused Moses did not escape judgment, and how much less will those who refuse Jesus fail to escape the wrath of God. Verse 25 echoes what he said in chapter 2, "For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who

heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will." (Hebrews 2:1-4.) The word spoken by Jesus and the apostles was a word of salvation from the wrath of God, salvation from His judgment. If we neglect this word and refuse Jesus we will not escape. The gospel carries the only means of escaping the wrath of God. The gospel carries with it a warning, that if we do not receive it, repent and believe in Jesus Christ, we will certainly be subject to God's wrath. We are prisoners held in bondage by sin and death, and the gospel tells us the only means of escape is through Jesus Christ. If we refuse to listen, we will not escape.

When God appeared on Mount Sinai and spoke to Israel, His voice shook the earth and the people trembled with fear. In the future God has promised that He will shake not only the earth, but heaven also. The quote is from Haggai 2:6 and 2:21. One more time there will be a "shaking" of all things. The author comments in verse 27 that the purpose of the shaking is to remove those things which can be shaken so that only the things that can't be shaken will remain. The world is passing away along with the things of the world (1 John 2:17). In his vision, John saw a new heaven and new earth because the first heaven and earth had passed away (Revelation 21:1). Peter tells us that this "shaking" will be a burning, and will take place on the day of the Lord:

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. 11 Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! (2 Peter 3:10-12.)

This is why we don't want to invest our lives in the world and the things of the world. If our treasure is all laid up on earth, it will be completely wiped out. Our goal must be to lay up treasure in heaven, in the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:19-21).

The thing that cannot be shaken which will remain when everything else is destroyed, is the kingdom of our Lord (verse 28). This is the kingdom we receive through faith in Christ. Since we receive this unshakable kingdom, the author exhorts us to show gratitude. We must constantly be thankful and grateful that we have a part in a kingdom that is eternal and can never be shaken or destroyed. It is through gratitude that we offer "an acceptable service" to God "with reverence and awe." The offering that we bring when we come to worship God is an offering of gratitude, of thankfulness. We bring our gratitude with reverence and awe, because our God is a consuming fire. The author is probably thinking of Moses' warning to Israel in Deuteronomy 4:23-26:

"So watch yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which He made with you, and make for yourselves a graven image in the form of anything against which the LORD your God has commanded you. 24 For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. 25 When you become the father of children and children's children and have remained long in the land, and act corruptly, and make an idol in the form of anything, and do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD your God so as to provoke Him to anger, 26 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you shall surely perish quickly from the land where you are going over the Jordan to possess it. You shall not live long on it, but shall be utterly destroyed."

This is a sober warning against turning away from the Lord. He is a jealous God who will destroy those who turn away from Him and His grace. We must always be mindful of how loving and gracious He has been toward us.

Hebrews 13

Let love of the brethren continue. 2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. 3 Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body. 4 Let marriage *be held* in honor among all, and let the *marriage bed be* undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge. 5 Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU," 6 so that we confidently say, "THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT SHALL MAN DO TO ME?" 7 Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. 8 Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday and today, yes and forever. 9 Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were thus occupied were not benefited. 10 We have an altar, from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. 11 For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest *as an offering* for sin, are burned outside the camp. 12 Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. 13 Hence, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. 14 For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking *the city* which is to come. 15 Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. 16 And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased. 17 Obey your leaders, and submit *to them*; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. 18 Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things. 19 And I urge *you* all the more to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner. 20 Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, *even* Jesus our Lord, 21 equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen. 22 But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. 23 Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I shall see you. 24 Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. 25 Grace be with you all.

This concluding chapter is a string of exhortations and reminders. He starts with love and says, "Let love of the brethren continue." The word is *philadelphia*, brotherly love. We are to let it continue. The implication is that brotherly love was there, and the

author wants it to remain. They were to maintain a brotherly love that was already there. One way that this is expressed is in hospitality to strangers (verse 2). We show brotherly love by being hospitable to others. Some, by showing hospitality to strangers, have entertained angels without knowing it. This is something that is easy to neglect, because it can be uncomfortable. It is easy to show hospitality to those you know well, but to show hospitality to strangers is more difficult. Letting strangers into your home to share your food and to spend the night can be a scary thing. Yet this is what we are to do, and there is a special blessing in it.

Another means of allowing brotherly love to continue is to "remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body." In 10:34 he said, "For you showed sympathy to the prisoners, and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and an abiding one." He is talking here about Christians who had been imprisoned for their faith and testimony. They had shown sympathy in the past for these people, and now he urges them to continue. They are to do this because they are also in the body. Probably he is talking about the church as the "body of Christ." Since they are in the church, they must also remember those from the church who are in prison.

He exhorts that marriage be held in honor among all, and that our marital relationships should be undefiled. He warns that God will judge fornicators and adulterers. Marriage is a thing to be honored. The sexual relationship within marriage is pure, is unsoiled, and is in accord with God's design. Sex between a husband and wife is a good thing and is unsullied. But outside of marriage it is out of bounds. Even though men will not judge fornicators and adulterers, God will. Our world sees nothing wrong with immorality, but God will not stand for it. He will not tolerate it. He created sex and has defined its proper use and place.

Another thing is that we are to allow our character to be free from the love of money (verses 5-6). The word for "character" here is *tropos*, and has to do with one's manner or way of life, or even style. Our lifestyle is to be one that is free from the love of money. Instead we are to be content with what we have, not always wanting more and more. The love of money destroys contentment. The man who loves money is never content, but always has to have more. The man who loves money never has enough money and is always concerned with how to make his money grow, and how to make more. Contentment is the opposite of the love of money. The content man demonstrates that he is free from the love of money. The basis for being free from the love of money is that God has promised He will never leave us. The author points out that God said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you." Because of this promise, we can say confidently, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid, what shall man do to me?" The love of money is based on fear; fear that we will not have enough for the future, fear of being victimized by others. We think that if we have more money we will be secure and our fear will dissipate. The truth is that if we trust in the promise of God that He will never desert or forsake us, then we really have security that frees us from fear and the love of money.

Next, the author exhorts his readers to be mindful of those who led them to Christ, who spoke the word of God to them. We lead people in the church by speaking the word of God to them. As people hear and learn and obey the word of God, they

follow the Lord, they do what He wants them to do. This is the kind of leadership we need in the church, leadership that uses the word of God to show people the path the Lord has for them. The word of God leads us to Jesus and the word of God shows us how to follow Jesus. As we consider the outcome of the conduct of our leaders, we are to imitate their faith. Chapter 11 gave us examples of the conduct and fruit that came out of lives of faith. These are the kind of people that we should imitate. Our faith determines our conduct, our "way of life" (NIV). What we believe always impacts how we live. We need to have leaders in the church who live in accordance with their faith who can set the example for the rest of us. Do our lives really reflect our faith? Do we really live out the implications of what we profess to believe? These are crucial questions.

Verse 8 seems out of context, but clearly the author is following a train of thought and we need to understand this statement in context. He says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever." He has just told us to remember those who led us in the past ("yesterday") and spoke the word of God to us. They are those who led us to faith in Christ by sharing the word of the gospel with us. In the present ("today") we are to imitate their faith and continue on believing the word they spoke to us about Jesus. The truth of verse 8 is the reason for the exhortation in verse 7. We are to imitate the faith of those who told us about Christ in the past because Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever. He is immutable; He does not change. The same Jesus we believed in in the past is the same Jesus we believe in today and will be the same for all time. If we trusted Him in the past we can trust Him also now and in the future. There is no reason in Him for dropping our faith in Him. There is no change in Him that would call for us to lose confidence in Him.

There are many "varied and strange teachings" in the world today, and there is a danger of being "carried away" by them (verse 9). Many people are carried away with various odd teachings. It's amazing today the things that people will believe while refusing to believe the truth that God has revealed. He explains, "for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were thus occupied were not benefited." Our hearts are strengthened by the grace of God and not by foods, that is, not by observing some sort of dietary law. Our hearts are established and made stable by the gracious work of God in our lives, and not by what we consume. We are not benefited by eating the meat of animals offered at the tabernacle, but by the grace of God. The grace of God comes to us through Jesus Christ and not through animals offered in the holy place in the tabernacle. We have a different altar, a spiritual altar where Jesus was offered as our sacrifice "outside the gate" and "outside the camp." We must go to him to find the grace that strengthens our hearts. As the bodies of the sacrificial animals were burned outside the camp, so Jesus suffered outside the gate of Jerusalem. In Exodus 29:14 Moses said, "But the flesh of the bull and its hide and its refuse, you shall burn with fire outside the camp; it is a sin offering." The sin offering was to be burned outside the camp, and so Jesus was offered as a sin offering outside the camp.

Verse 12 makes it clear that the death of Jesus was a sacrifice for sin. Jesus "suffered outside the gate" so that He might "sanctify the people through His own blood." Jesus' purpose in offering Himself up was to make us holy, to set us apart for God through the shedding of His blood. His sacrifice is the only means of holiness for

us. Therefore he exhorts us in verse 13 to "go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach." AT Robertson writes, "If a separation has to come between Judaism and Christianity, let us give up Judaism, and go out to Christ 'outside the camp' and take our stand with him there on Golgotha, 'bearing his reproach' (*oneidismōn autou pherontes*) as Jesus himself endured the Cross despising the shame (#12:2|) and as Moses accepted 'the reproach of the Messiah' (#11:26|) in his day. The only decent place for the follower of Christ is beside the Cross of Christ with the reproach and the power (#Ro 8:1f.|) in it. This is the great passionate plea of the whole Epistle."¹³ It is our responsibility to go to Him. He invites us to come to Him (Matthew 11:28), and if the Father draws us we will come to Him (John 6:44). If we come to Him He promises to raise us up on the last day and give us eternal life. We must not be afraid to bear the reproach that comes with going out to follow Jesus. The world will reproach us, but the reward is far greater!

When we go outside the city and the camp to Jesus, we turn our backs on the earthly city. For the Jews to whom he was writing it meant that they turned their backs on Jerusalem. He explains this in verse 14, "For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come." We are in the same place that Abraham was (11:10). We are looking for the city that God will build, the new Jerusalem which is still future. No city here is durable, but the city which is to come is eternal. We go out to Jesus from the world in order to become citizens of that future city.

When we go out to Him, then we can go through Him to communicate with God the Father (verse 15). He is the only way to come to the Father (John 14:6). He exhorts us to continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God through Jesus Christ, which he further defines as "the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." This is the kind of sacrifice we offer to God today, it is the "sacrifice of praise." It involves continually saying "thank you" to God through Jesus Christ. We need to do this because if we are not thankful we will have a tendency to forget God. Moses warned Israel of this in Deuteronomy 8:10-14:

"When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you. Beware lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; lest, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart becomes proud, and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

When we fail to thank God we tend to forget Him, and when we forget Him we become disobedient and turn away from Him. Continual gratefulness is a means of maintaining our faith and obedience.

Another kind of "sacrifice" is mentioned in verse 16. God is pleased with the sacrifices of doing good and sharing. "Sharing" here is *koinonia* - fellowship, and has to do with sharing things in common with others. We are not to neglect or forget these things. It is an offering, a sacrifice to God, when we do good to others and share with them. These simple things are easy to overlook or excuse ourselves from, but they are

¹³ Robertson, AT, Word Pictures in the Greek New Testament

means of pleasing God.

When it comes to our leaders in the church we are exhorted to obey them and submit to them (verse 17). We must yield to their leadership. The reason for this is that they "keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account." The word for keeping watch here means to be sleepless, to stay awake. They are like guards posted on the walls of a city at night. They will be held accountable for guarding the city. If they fall asleep and let the enemy creep in, they will be held responsible. Leaders in the church are charged with guarding our souls, to prevent the enemy from subverting our faith. We must obey our leaders and submit to them in this. We must not resist their work of watching over our souls. It is their business to see how we are doing and to check up on our faith. It is their job to correct error and to confront sin. Paul told Timothy, "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction" (2 Timothy 4:2). Most of us today do not appreciate being reprovved, rebuked and exhorted, and we tend to bristle when someone tries to correct us. Nonetheless we are told to submit to this. Pastors and leaders in the church must realize that this is part of their role. They must be alert to the threats from Satan and the world that would lead believers astray. Too many pastors and church leaders are failing in this task today. Too many pastors are actually inviting error and falsehood and sometimes even sin into the church, or at least tolerating it. Our attitude toward our leaders in the church determines whether their job is a joy or a grief. If we obey and submit, it is a joy. If we resist and disobey, it brings them grief. Not only that, but if we resist them, it will be unprofitable for us. It is for our good that our leaders keep watch over our souls, and if we resist this aspect of their ministry, we will not profit. We gain nothing by rejecting the correction and instruction of leaders.

The author in verses 18 and 19 requests prayer for himself. He does not specify the things for which he would like them to pray, but obviously his readers were aware of his circumstances. Perhaps he was in prison himself, since he says, "that I may be restored to you the sooner." He may be implying that he was being detained. He says they should pray for him because "we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things." The conscience testifies about our conduct, and is either good or bad. The opposite of a good conscience is a guilty conscience. The guilty conscience is one that testifies that our conduct has been wrong. Paul was able to say, "For our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you" (2 Corinthians 1:12). The good conscience says that we have conducted ourselves in holiness and godly sincerity. The good conscience is based on the desire to "conduct ourselves honorably in all things." If we want a good conscience, we must have this underlying desire to be honorable, holy and sincere in our conduct. If our conscience is bad because of our past conduct, it can and must be cleansed through the blood of Christ (Hebrews 9:13-14). Once cleansed, we maintain a good conscience by walking by faith in Christ and by keeping our conduct pure. The author says that he was sure that he had a good conscience. We all need this assurance in serving the Lord. We need to be sure that we are freed from our guilt and there is no ground of accusation against us.

Finally we reach the benediction of the letter in verses 20-21, "Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen." First, he points out here that God is "the God of peace." Paul uses this expression four times in His epistles (Romans 15:33, Romans 16:20, Philippians 4:9 and 1 Thessalonians 5:23). He is the God who gives peace, who is the source of peace. It is through Jesus Christ that we have peace with God (Romans 5:1) and peace with others (Ephesians 2:14-18). God is concerned with establishing peace in His kingdom, and He will establish peace.

Second he says God is the God who "brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant." When Jesus shed His blood on the cross the new covenant was established in His blood. His blood truly covers our sins. His blood, His life poured out for us, was the real sacrifice that satisfies the wrath of God against us. Jesus did this for us as our "good Shepherd." He said, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Having laid down His life, the Father raised Him up from the dead so that He could for all time be our great Shepherd. It is because of His death and resurrection that we belong to Him and must follow Him.

The third thing is the actual blessing itself in this passage. His desire is that the God who is the God of peace, who raised Jesus from the dead, would equip the readers "in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight." The word for "equip" is *katartizo*, to complete thoroughly, i.e. repair.¹⁴ We cannot do God's will unless He equips us. He created us in Christ Jesus for good works He wants us to accomplish (Ephesians 2:10), and He must equip us to do these good works. Someone has said, "God does not call the equipped, He equips the called." In fact, He seems to delight in finding people who have no natural ability for what He calls them to do so that it will be evident that He has equipped them and enabled them to do what they do, so that they do not boast and He gets the glory (see 1 Corinthians 1:26-29). In order to equip someone for a task, there are two things that must be done. First, the proper equipment for the job must be provided. If someone is to be a firefighter, they must be equipped with the proper clothing, the helmet, the trucks, hoses, radios and so forth that they will need to do the job. The second thing they need is training. They must be taught how to use the equipment to do the job. God will give us the gifts and abilities through His Spirit that we need to do the good deeds He's called us to do. He will also open the opportunities to do those things. He will give us on-the-job training to do His will. His will is done "in every good thing." We must not think that we are doing His will if we are not doing what is good. We cannot violate His word and be doing His will. Some people will say that God approves of their adultery or their homosexuality or their immorality because He wants them to be happy or because He gave them those desires and wants them to follow them. But God's will is for good rather than evil. The things that are pleasing in His sight relate to things that are good, not immoral or selfish. God is not pleased when we follow our flesh instead of His Spirit (Galatians 5:16-25).

14 Strong's Greek Dictionary

One last exhortation in verse 22 reveals the purpose of the letter. He says, "But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly." As far as the author is concerned, his letter is a brief one. It is a "word of exhortation," a word imploring them to remain faithful to Jesus Christ. The word "urge" here is *parakaleo*, and the word "exhortation" is *paraklesis*. In essence, he is saying, "I exhort you to bear with this word of exhortation." He is urging them to "put up with," to endure what he has written. No doubt he could have written more, but he restrained himself and wrote to them briefly. He has made his case that the new covenant in Jesus Christ is superior to the old covenant, and now at the end urges them to heed his exhortation.

Evidently Timothy had been one who had been detained or imprisoned, but now he had been released. He wanted them to take note of the news. The writer planned to accompany Timothy to visit his readers.

Greetings are passed along in verse 24 to the leaders and all the saints. Some from Italy also sent their greetings. This could indicate that the author was writing from Italy, although he may mean that some were with him who were from Italy.

The epistle ends with "Grace be with you all." He wants God's favor to rest on each one of his readers. It is by grace that we are saved and it is by grace that we stand. We remain in Christ by the grace of God. The grace of God is essential both to the beginning our our faith and to the maintenance of our faith. We come to faith in Christ through the grace of God and we continue in faith in Christ through the grace of God. The exhortations to faithfulness in Hebrews, then, depend upon the continued blessing of the grace of God in the lives of the readers, and it is this grace that he wishes for them.